

ABSTRACT

Defining Themselves: Literacy Practices, Rhetoric, and Identity among Mormon, Polygamist Women

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The following study examines the means by which Mormon women in the 19th century either defended or attacked the practice of polygamy within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the 19th century. Specifically, this work examines the literacy practices employed in Ann Eliza Young and T.B.H. Stenhouse's memoirs as they challenged their former religion on the grounds that it was hurtful to women. Likewise, this study pays special attention to those women who rallied in defense of polygamy with the guidance of the *Woman's Exponent*, a bimonthly Mormon women's magazine. Although both groups were diametrically opposed to one another, they employed very similar literacy practices in an attempt to persuade Protestant middle-class Americans that their view of Mormon femininity was correct. Ultimately, this study complicates our understanding of domestic literacy practices and those practices ability to empower women in the 19th century.

Defining Themselves: Literacy Practices, Rhetoric, and Identity
among Mormon, Polygamist Women in the 19th Century

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To Holly
For the love and support during
this long and difficult process.

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

The mothers of our land, secure and happy in the exclusive love of the father of her children, sheds the warm light of true womanhood unperturbed and unpolluted, These are not the cheerless, crushed, and unwomanly mothers of polygamy.”

----- Grover Cleveland's 1885 State of the Union Address

In 1844 Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon Church, was assassinated in his jail cell. His death marked the culmination of two decades of a provocative religious life that put him and his followers into direct conflict with many American communities. In 1827 Smith claimed to receive a series of divine revelations telling him of Christ's arrival in the new world. The religion Smith founded, based on these revelations, was highly controversial from the start. Many Americans believed Smith's teachings were blasphemous and his followers were a threatening cult. As a consequence, the Mormons spent the first few decades of their existence moving from state to state.

Because of Joseph Smith's death and the history of violence against Mormon settlements in Missouri and Illinois, the controversially elected President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), Brigham Young, decided to move an estimated 3,200 families across the American West into Mexico, later to become the Utah territory. The expressed purpose for this sojourn was the establishment of a new Zion. The Mormon pioneers, at this point in their history, were weary of further involvement with the United States and sought to create a government based on Joseph Smith's teachings (Bowman 92-96).

Mormon pioneers deliberately separated themselves from the American mainstream when they moved into the Utah territory in 1848¹. Their attempt to create

Zion in the American West established a dramatically different experience from that of the conventional, American middle-class. Their professed faith, desire to separate themselves, and belief in polygamist marriage put the Mormon Church and its followers at odds with the United States' belief in traditional Christianity and family. In the four decades that followed the Mormon flight into the American West, the debate over polygamy, more than any other Mormon belief, pitted the followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints against a myriad of detractors.

Two important theological developments arose from this period in Mormon history that directly impacted the debate over Mormons, their place in America, and ultimately the characterization of Mormon women. The first development was Joseph Smith's plural marriage revelation, and the second was the integration of education into the Mormon faith. The former, a divinely inspired revelation, drastically changed marital arrangements for Mormon men and women and challenged American sexual mores (Bowman 125). Although the plural marriage revelation, as it was called by the all-male Mormon elders, was slowly revealed to members of the Church and the American society as a whole, its impact greatly exacerbated the tension between Mormons and the rest of the nation. The plight of women in polygamist marriages became a constant source of tension between Mormons and advocates for women's rights. The outside world viewed polygamy as an oppressive institution that exposed women to a dangerous lifestyle and ultimately threaten their womanhood. Those who opposed polygamy believed it destroyed traditional marriage and a woman's domestic sphere. For its critics, polygamy would only alienate husbands and wives and eventually lead to the oppression of women.

While polygamy had its detractors, it also had many women within the Mormon community who challenged through public forums, relief organizations, and their own publications the notion they were oppressed and exploited. The arguments surrounding polygamy, posed by Mormon women on both sides of the debate, took place within a variety of discursive contexts. This debate that was not possible without a substantial educational system to foster writing which helped to reaffirm Mormon identity. Thus, the second theological development during this period was the integration of education into the Mormon spiritual consciousness. In *Literacy in America* Edward and Elaine Gordon discuss the lack of literacy education in Missouri and Illinois². The Gordons argue that only 20% of students in St. Louis were enrolled in public school (148). Similarly, Illinois rural communities failed to provide even the most basic education beyond what students could find at home (146). However, the Mormon communities that left the United States for Mexico operated with a much different attitude towards literacy. In the same study the Gordons assert young women in Utah exemplified the “greater educational opportunities given females in the American West”(185). Their study even goes so far as to claim that education for young people in the American West was “a life essential” (185) for civilizing the western frontier. I would add that for Mormon parents, education was not just a life essential, but essential to a spiritual life as well.

Education and literacy became an important spiritual component of the LDS church. The *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C), a series of prophetic pronouncements by leaders of the Mormon Church, specify behavior and religious practices for LDS members. The *Doctrine and Covenants* section 88 lines 77-80 place a great deal of emphasis on secular knowledge. In addition to theology, Mormons were and are expected

to know about astronomy, politics, geology, and languages (D&C 88:77-80). According to Brigham Young's writings, this intensive knowledge of the secular world is not limited to men. Young's letters stressed that young women should be aware of the household duties and be able to do chores and keep track of laundry (Widtsoe 211). However, he also believed young boys and girls should be "thoroughly instructed in every useful brand of physical and mental education" (Widtsoe 211) Mormonism, according to Young, was a religion of improvement by which:

people ... become philosophers, understanding [their] own existences, its purposes and intimate design, then our days will not become blank through ignorance, but every day will bring with it its useful and profitable employment. God has placed us here, given us the ability [they] possess, and supplied the means upon which we can operate to produce social, national, and eternal happiness. (qtd in Widtsoe 245)

Through education human beings become better able to understand their relationship to God, better able to shape the world around them, and become better Mormons. Thus, a secular education and literacy became intimately tied to a person's spiritual life and intellectual development.

Eventually, this emphasis on secular education and knowledge of the larger world became an important resource for the women who defended their faith and marital practices. Not only did Mormon women advocate for their religious views in intelligent and thoughtful ways, but they were literate and educated enough to articulate an informed view of the politics and cultural debates that threatened their lifestyle. The irony is, of course, that anti-polygamy Mormons used the very same secular literacy skills to claim an enlightened view of women could only occur outside of a polygamist marriage and outside the LDS church.

The strongest criticism levied against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) was by former members and those outside the LDS community. The strongest of these complaints were the ones that considered Mormons suspect, anti-American, and, ultimately, as the quote that began this chapter indicates, harmful to “true womanhood.” In the years following the Civil War, Mormon women set to recast their position in their own terms. By employing literacy practices relegated to their gender like letter writing, memoirs, and relief society reports, Mormon women articulated a view of themselves in keeping with “the cult of true womanhood.” They used the rhetorical modes open to their sex to redefine themselves in their own terms as something unique to American womanhood. Their efforts simultaneously embraced Victorian notions of femininity, while subverting those roles and transforming them to definitions of femininity that they created for themselves.

This thesis, explores the ways in which Mormon women, on both sides of the polygamy debate, employed their literacy practices to define their place within American culture. This work also examines the ways 19th century polygamy critics portrayed Mormonism overly sexualizing women, denying women their true pious nature by depriving them of true Christianity, and leaving women ignorant and uneducated. I contend that both anti-Mormon and pro-polygamy activists employed a similar array of literacy skills to advocate for two distinct sides of the same issue: womanhood and femininity. In addition, this work complicates our understanding of femininity in the 19th century. Both those in favor of polygamy and those who supported polygamy employed the same definitions of femininity to frame their arguments. The ensuing debate calls into

questions their rhetoric's ability to arrive at any real truth about the nature of Mormon women's lives.

Chapter 2 begins by looking at three representative examples of the anti-polygamy debate. The first of these works, *Female Life Among the Mormons* by the pseudonymous Maria Ward was written in the mid-1850's and tells the story of one woman's oppression at the hands of Mormon men. Although this memoir is now regarded as a complete work of fiction with little connection to reality, *Female Life* was a best seller during its publication run and help set the standard for anti-Mormon propaganda over the next few decades. The remaining two works, *Tell It All: The Story Of A Life's Experience In Mormonism* by T.B.H. Stenhouse and *Wife No. 19* by Ann Eliza Young, were published two decades later and written by actual plural wives who left the church and began successful anti-Mormon lecturing careers as a result of their memoirs. The latter of the two works, through its autobiographical accounts, reinforced the popular anti-Mormon views expressed by the anonymous writer of *Female Life Among the Mormons*.

My comparison of the latter two memoirs examines the ways ex-Mormon women incorporated existing anti-Mormon ideological literacy practices into their own arguments against polygamy. Stenhouse and Young's works not only express their views of the Mormon church but demonstrate the degree to which they as former Mormon women were aware of and able to incorporate the anti-polygamy views expressed in earlier memoirs like *Female Life Among the Mormons* into their own arguments as they tried to carve a new life for themselves.

Yet, the anti-polygamy arguments articulated by the women in the second chapter are not wholly representative of a Mormon woman's experience in polygamy. Chapter 3 is an examination of the ways polygamy's supporters employed the same literacy practices to argue their version of femininity. While Stenhouse and Young promoted a view of polygamy that was oppressive and exploitive, other Mormon women believed that a woman could only become a true woman in the Mormon faith. Beginning in 1871 a class of educated Mormon women began a concerted effort to reclaim their identity from those who believed them to be helpless and misguided.

The *Women's Exponent*, edited by the Mormon Church's Relief Society, was at the forefront of this cause. As a publication written and edited by Mormon women, this magazine was uniquely situated to articulate their perspective. Through their publication in the *Exponent*, these women countered the criticism levied against them by arguing that only through their faith could they ever truly become women. Their publication embraced rhetorical arguments about a woman's proper domestic role, but subverted those arguments to redefine what a nineteenth century woman was. Their efforts simultaneously embraced nineteenth century notions of femininity and proper gender roles, while subverting those roles and conforming them to their own definitions of femininity.

Eventually, polygamy's defenders lost their five decade long fight and in October 1890 the Mormon Church no longer officially sanctioned plural marriage. Citing pressure from the United States government and the 1887 Edmund-Tuck Act, then LDS President Wilford Woodruff offered "Official Declaration 1" ending plural marriage in the United States. However, for several years prior to this declaration, the LDS Church established

several colonies throughout Mexico for polygamist families seeking refuge from United States government persecution.

As a consequence of this declaration, The *Woman's Exponent's* role in defending the “rights of women of all nations”³ radically changed. On the front pages of the magazine, the editors shifted their publication's focus away from the now outlawed polygamy to broader debates about women's suffrage. However, the back pages of the *Exponent* published letters from the Mormon colonies in Mexico. Ostensibly, these letters were regular reports from Relief Society chapters in Mexico, but when compared with the *Exponent's* articles prior to the polygamy ban, these letters suggest an attempt by the polygamist women in Mexico to foster a transnational relationship with their spiritual sisters in the United States. Thus, the *Exponent's* employed a type of bifurcated, rhetorical practice that moved across national boundaries during the 1890s. The editors fully embraced the rhetorical practices of the mainstream women's movement while simultaneously providing an encoded space for plural marriage practitioners to maintain ties to Utah.

In order to contextualize the following chapters and ground my analysis of the polygamy debate, the remainder of this introduction will do the following: explain the theoretical means by which a marginalized group such as Mormon women could defend themselves against their detractors, define “true womanhood” as a concept understood by women in the 19th century, briefly review the history of anti-Mormon criticism, and ground this study in literacy and rhetorical practices.

To help guide my analysis of Mormon women's writings, I turn to the anthropological work done by Edwin and Shirley Ardener. The Ardeners' critique of

anthropology and anthropology's handling of marginalized groups like women help them formulate a theoretical concept called muted group theory. This theory argues that dominant groups within any cultural context make it difficult for any subordinate group to develop independent cultural models. In order to express themselves, marginalized groups have to filter their ideas through the models they receive from the dominant group (Ardener, *Perceiving*, xii). Mormon women occupied a doubly marginalized status in the 19th century as both women and non-protestant Christians. In the patriarchal 19th century society, women occupied little to no position in the public, political sphere. Instead, women were generally regulated to the more circumscribed domestic world; thus any attempts to comment on the larger public sphere had to be filtered through a model of domesticity received from dominant group. As will be discussed in both chapters 2 and 3, both anti-polygamy ex-Mormons and the pro-polygamy contributors to the *Woman's Exponent* represent muted, i.e. marginalized, groups. Regardless of their position on polygamy these two groups of women had to contextualize their vision of femininity through the dominant model's accepted view of women.

This view of women is commonly referred to as "true womanhood". Femininity and "true womanhood" were interlocking ideas in the 19th century. One was not considered a fully developed woman if she did not embrace the culture's idea of true womanhood. The American historian Barbara Welter's definition of "true womanhood" gives a clearer understanding of what President Cleveland and other 19th century Americans meant by the phrase, and a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender and social norms. In her book, *Diminution Convictions: The American Woman in the 19th Century*, Welter argues that women were judged on four basic values: "piety, purity,

submissiveness to men, and domesticity” (21). The most important of these values was a woman’s sense of Christian, religious piety. Women were regarded as being inherently religious creatures. Religious sentiment was a woman’s “divine right” (Welter 22) and a direct gift from God. All other virtues stemmed from a woman’s religious sentiment, and any institution that threatened a woman’s religious sentiment ultimately threatened her femininity and womanhood.

For critics of polygamy, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints threatened its female members’ femininity by depriving them of true religious experiences and a happy home because it preached a non-Christian or false religion. Complaints against Mormons and their particular views were nothing new. Challenges to the Mormon lifestyle and defenses of that lifestyle began almost as quickly as the church was founded. Historian J. Spencer Fluhman points to two facets of anti-Mormonism that are immediately applicable to this study and bear explanation before continuing. The first is the wide spread distrust of the faith by the American public then and now. Fluhman argues that many 19th century Americans viewed Mormons as “inherently anti-republican and prone to violence” (91). The LDS’s desire to create a brick and mortar community based on its teachings put it at odds with other religious groups in America. While most believed in a concept of communion in the afterlife, Mormons aspired to create Zion in the present day American landscape. This eventually led to the creation of several Mormon communities throughout New York, Missouri, and Illinois. Each community’s perceived dedication to their religious leaders led many to believe Mormon communities were first loyal to their church leaders before they were loyal to their country.

This political distrust played a crucial role in the debate over statehood for Utah and suffrage for Mormon women. Both issues were openly discussed by anti-polygamy and pro-polygamy groups in the years after the Civil War, and, as chapter 3 demonstrates, statehood and suffrage were intricately connected to Mormon feminine identity and polygamy. Both male and female supporters of polygamy in Utah wanted suffrage so that they could vote for and legally ratify their lifestyle while the detractors opposed to polygamy cast the Mormon religion as an oppressive patriarchy that would never allow women freedom.

In addition to distrusting Mormon political goals, LDS critics believed, at first, the religion was patently false and later asserted that it was inherently un-American. Most important to my discussion is the idea that the *Book of Mormon* was a lie and Joseph Smith was a false prophet bent on corrupting his followers. Since true womanhood was so closely tied to a woman's religious sentiment, it became paramount that women be involved with the right religion – Protestantism (Fluhman 103). Any belief in a non-Protestant faith deprived a woman of her true nature. Polygamy then served as proof that Mormonism was not a Protestant religion and was inherently detrimental to women. The goal, as we shall see in the next two chapters, was to prove or disprove Mormonism's merits by illustrating its value to women. How the women, on both sides of the debate, set out to validate their femininity is directly tied to the larger 19th century cultural debate about the role of women and the ways in which women expressed that role through writing.

Popular depictions of polygamist women portrayed their lifestyle as something between outright barbarism and a new oriental harem. In quoting the 19th century

Mormon critic and Idaho Governor Caleb Lyon, Fluhman argues many Mormon detractors saw polygamy as something foreign, uncivilized, and potentially violent (108). Speculation about polygamist households ranged from encouraging infanticide to the sexual exploitation of women. Mormon opponents believed men married multiple women as a sexual outlet and, as critics like Lyon believed, Mormon men could be induced to murdering their own children if they became a financial burden the same way foreign polygamists in Asia and the Middle East were believed to practice (Fluhman 108). It is important here to note the apparent connection between polygamy and a threat to true womanhood. If polygamist men married purely for sex, then the marriage completely undermined a woman's domestic role. If the home was a place where children were not valued and women were sexual objects, then women could never fully realize their femininity. As I will argue in the following chapters, those who would criticize Mormon polygamy and those who would defend it had to also defend it on its domestic grounds as well as its religious and political foundations.

In order to defend themselves from these attacks, Mormon women employed a variety of gendered rhetorical and literacy practices. In order to focus specifically on Mormon women's literacy practices, I discuss women's writing within the context of two literacy theories, domestic literacy and ideological literacy. Sarah Robbins's book *Managing Literacy, Mothering America* examines the progression of 19th century women's literacy practices⁴ as moving from fostering a republican ideal, to promoting moral education at home, and to finally encouraging political action (12-14). Mormon women's domestic literacy followed a similar progression; yet, they employed their

practices as a means to promote their own version of Zionism, their distinct value set, and a political agenda.

At the center of Robbins's discussion of domestic literacy is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Robbins treats Stowe's novel as an exemplar of a domestic literacy practice being used for social and political change. Stowe and her fiction become an ideal model for women who want to effect social change through domestic literacy. In addition to being an outspoken abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe was ardently against Mormon polygamy. Stowe's preface to *Tell It All: The Story Of A Life's Experience In Mormonism* argues that polygamy is an oppressive institution similar to slavery and thus places *Tell it All* in the same domestic literary tradition as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Therefore, my study will compare *Tell it All* and other anti-polygamy Mormon memoirs to Robbins's treatment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* under the theoretical context of domestic literacy is a tool for social change before looking at the ways pro-polygamy women challenged those assumptions in a more public sphere.

The Mormon woman's vision of democracy and gender roles, as depicted in the *Woman's Exponent*, was distinctly different from that of the rest of the United States and the notion of true womanhood articulated by Stowe and other anti-polygamy activists. Although at times pro-polygamy women exhibited the same ethos as middle class women in the domestic literacy tradition, Mormon women used the *Woman's Exponent* as a way to create for themselves a distinct sense of otherness. Throughout the *Exponent's* publication the editors adapted contemporary gendered arguments and literacy practices to shape their argument and define themselves as something wholly different than the rest of American women.

In addition, my discussion of Mormon women and their literacy practices will draw from Nan Johnson's treatment of women's rhetorical practices in *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life*. Johnson's work argues that when "women strayed from their proper sphere, their moral character became suspect" (Johnson 22). This proper sphere is of course the world of true womanhood and, according to Johnson, 19th century standards for rhetoric relegated feminine discourse to a domestic sphere. According to Johnson, women were encouraged to write, but the forms of writing women could utilize, and the subject matter they could discuss were highly regulated by gender expectations and the cult of true womanhood.

In addition to the shared religion, the anti-polygamy and pro-polygamy writers in this work share a common rhetorical approach. Their memoirs, their letters, and the general subject matter of their arguments were all firmly grounded in a very specific domestic rhetorical space regulated to women as described by Johnson. Both sides argued their position was the only true domestic space where a true woman could exist. In effect, those who opposed polygamy and those who supported it both made their case by employing the rhetoric of domesticity regulated to women. Women on both sides of the polygamy debate argued that only their position led to true womanhood, and their very writing skills were de facto proof of their argument's validity. However, as my analysis suggests,

Finally to understand why these women turned to writing as a means to either attack the Mormon Church or to defend themselves against their detractors, I look to Brian Street's conception ideological literacy. Street defines a literacy practice as an "aspects not only of 'culture' but also of power structures" (434). Acquiring literacy and

the use of that literacy is a means by which individuals can access various power structures especially if they muted and marginalized. As Mormon women employ the language of domestic literacy and try to define themselves, they are trying to access the larger power structures that surround them and use it to challenge the power structures that threaten them. Regardless of where they fall on the polygamy debate, these women are, through their literacy practices, trying to move away from the margins of society and gain a voice for themselves.

This study seeks, in a small way, to resurrect these women's voices and deepen our understanding of a debate about women in the latter half of the 19th century. The women who fought for their polygamist lives lost their struggle, but we still have a record of what they said and how they fought for their beliefs. Chapter two begins to resurrect these debates by addressing the dominant view of Mormon women in the 19th century. Ward, Stenhouse, and Young's memoirs are prime examples of this dominant view. Their life stories, as they report them, reflect a popular belief that polygamy threatened true womanhood. However important their memoirs are, they are not the complete image. Chapter three builds on the second chapter by offering a direct contrast to the dominant opinion of polygamy and its impact on women. This portion of my thesis complicates the lasting impression of polygamy by offering a view of women who supported the institution and the women who remained in polygamist marriages even after the practice officially ended in America in 1890.

CHAPTER TWO

The Anti-Mormon Memoir

Throughout the 19th century more than fifty books were published attacking the tenants of the Mormon faith and its treatment of women. Of particular interest to this study are three works: *Female Life Among the Mormons* published in 1855 by the pseudomonas Maria Ward, *Tell it All* published in 1870 by Fanny Warn Stenhouse, and *Wife Number 19* also published in 1870 by Ann Eliza Young. Of the three, *Female Life Among the Mormons* is included in this study because of its influence on the latter two memoirs. *Female Life* was published first and not written by a Mormon woman. Despite its gross historical inaccuracies⁵, *Female Life* was a widely popular book selling as many as 34,000 copies in the first few years of publication (Altick 239). According to historian Bruce Burgett, *Female Life* was the first in a series of anti-Mormon books published in the 1850s in response to Mormon defenses of polygamy (76). This book along with the series of books it inspired over the next few years helped to cement the belief that the LDS church exploited women, a belief that Stenhouse and Young developed further in their memoirs 20 years after the publication of *Female Life*. (Burgett 76-77).

Tell it All and *Wife Number 19*, were written by prominent Mormon women who left the church and joined the chorus of anti-Mormon critics. Both of these memoirs detail, from the authors' perspectives, Mormonism and polygamy's effects on the domestic lives of wives and mothers. As the wives of prominent members of the Latter Day Saints, these memoirs lent credibility to non-Mormon critics' arguments about polygamy and its oppressive nature; however, their narratives adopt many of the anti-

Mormon tropes espoused in the earlier *Female Life Among the Mormons*. As a result, Stenhouse and Young's memoir tend to recycle existing prejudices and anti-Mormon sentiment. Yet, these works still exhibit a multiplicity of literacies needed by ex-Mormon women to transition out of their previous lives and into the public sphere.

Female Life Among the Mormons was originally published in 1855 under the pseudonym Maria Ward. Traditionally, authorial credit for the work is attributed to Elizabeth Ferris, wife of Benjamin Ferris Utah Territorial Secretary in 1852. Although Ferris and her husband both wrote anti-Mormon books at or around the time of *Female Life*'s publication, her authorship of *Female Life* remains a contested issue. Its plot concerns Maria Ward's seduction into the Mormon Church and her journey westward with her abusive husband into the Utah territory after Joseph Smith's death. Ward's accounts of life in the Mormon community is filled women suffering, exploitation, and Mormon men committing all manner of crimes including murder and fraud. Women within her memoir live in horrible conditions, and are at the complete mercy of abusive husbands. The memoir climaxes when a group of Mormon elders fail to kill a group of pioneers moving through the Utah territory, and Ward escapes to civilization with their help. These tropes, although inaccurate, are repeated again and again by other anti-Mormon memoirs including Stenhouse and Young's works.

Stenhouse and Young's memoirs demonstrate a command of both anti-Mormon ideology promoted in Ward's book, and a command of domestic literacy. In discussing the ideological literacy represented by their work, it is important to remember that marginalized people may adopt the dominant group's models when they share the same definitional problems (Ardener Belief 77). If Stenhouse and Young's memoirs represent

a literacy practice by women trying to define themselves outside their previous role as polygamist wives, then they can do so by adopting the models and expectations of the dominant group they are trying to transition into. Therefore, as Stenhouse and Young challenge the Mormon church's institutions and understanding of marriage they tend to do so in terms of another dominant group's ideology. That second dominant group being Protestant, anti-Mormon critics.

One of the most effective ways Stenhouse and Young can define their femininity is by embracing anti-Mormon ideas and channeling those arguments through their own versions of *Female Life Among the Mormons*. Their arguments reflect a literate knowledge of anti-Mormon criticism; in turn, those ideological attacks are filtered through a domestic experience, and expressed in an established genre – the anti-Mormon memoirs. To be effective, Stenhouse and Young must exhibit a literate knowledge of three separate things: the criticism against Mormons, the perceived impact of polygamy on a woman's domestic sphere, and an established literary genre in which to make their argument.

Stenhouse and Young's memoirs express the anti-Mormon ideals upheld by the dominant group they are transitioning into, but they must do so in terms of domestic literacy. Domestic literacy is a direct outgrowth of the 19th century educational practices that encouraged women to educate their children at home. As the primary educators for the burgeoning democracy, American, middle-class women exercised a great deal of influence in shaping the next generation of American citizens. This domestic duty became a powerful tool for advocating a wider role for women in American life. Women pushed for social change by arguing from a domestic standpoint (Robbins 16). For

example, those in favor of women's education and suffrage often argued from the perspective that whatever advanced a woman's life benefited the home and her role as mother, thus benefiting the next generation of American citizens.

As an example of domestic literacy practices, Stenhouse and Young's memoirs affected social change by encouraging proactive citizenship through a domestic lens. Domestic literacy allows women writers to argue for political or moral reform by pointing to the various issues that threaten the domestic sphere. Women like Stenhouse and Young could write about their experiences in polygamy so long as they contextualized polygamy as a threat to true womanhood and the domestic sphere in accordance with the ideological values of the dominant Protestant power structure. In other words, Stenhouse and Young's memoirs may challenge the Mormon Church and its definition of marriage, but they must do so in accordance with white middle-class values if they ever want to be received by the white middle-class.

Although their memoirs are replete with both biographical information and personal perspectives, Stenhouse and Young's depiction of Mormon life reflect the anti-Mormon criticism that existed for decades before the publication of their texts. Their underlying theses are deeply connected to preexisting notions of Mormonism threat to gender roles and Mormon feminine identity. It is difficult, at times, to separate the facts of these women's lives from the anti-polygamy propaganda that informs their narratives. This chapter then takes these two memoirs more as exemplars of the anti-Mormon rhetoric that shaped the debate surrounding the Mormon question and less as an objective view of the Mormon, feminine experience. Although ostensibly about their lives in polygamy, these books represent a broader confluence of 19th century progressive

arguments. To frame the study of their narratives, I place their memoirs within a cultural, critical context that borrows from 19th century gender roles, abolition rhetoric, religious criticism, and an ideological knowledge of the Protestant middle-class' objections to Mormonism. Furthermore, to demonstrate Stenhouse and Young's knowledge of anti-Mormon / anti-polygamy rhetoric I set their true life experiences in comparison to the fallacious *Female Life Among the Mormons*. Although I only make this comparison in a few places, I intend in doing so to demonstrate Stenhouse and Young's anti-Mormon literacy. Thus their memoirs reflect an awareness of gender politics, patriarchy, religion, and the Protestant middle-class wrapped up in a readymade narrative structure similar to *Female Life*.

Fanny Warn Stenhouse, who published under her married name Mrs. T.B.H. Stenhouse, was deeply immersed in the Latter Day Saints' journalistic and religious communities before Stenhouse and her husband left the religion. As missionaries, the Stenhouses were influential in establishing a Mormon presence in Italy, and when they returned to Utah the Stenhouses often accompanied Brigham Young when he toured the Utah territory. Fanny Stenhouse's husband was the chief editor of Salt Lake City daily newspaper the *Telegraph*, an influential paper supporting the LDS church and its efforts. As a practicing polygamist, T.B.H. Stenhouse married both Belinda Pratt, a relative of Parley Pratt the prominent Mormon theologian, and Zina Young one of Brigham Young's daughters⁶.

As Mr. Stenhouse's biographer Ronald W. Walker points out, both Fanny Stenhouse and her husband began to lose faith in the Mormon Church when they suffered both financial losses, and encounters with the Godbetism,⁷ a Mormon separatist sect,

(Walker 52-60). Eventually, the Stenhouses' frustration with internal Mormon politics, the influence of Godbetism, and Fanny's growing frustration with polygamy led them to become outspoken critics of the LDS Church and their eventual excommunication. Fanny Stenhouse's memoir then was an attempt to capitalize on her time in the Mormon Church and the anti-Mormon sentiment. Although *Tell It All's* publication gave the writer an outlet for her frustrations with the Mormon Church, it also provided Stenhouse with the means to recover her family's wealth and leave her Mormon community. As a literacy practice then, the publication of *Tell It All* provided Stenhouse with the means to challenge the former power structure in the Mormon Church and redefine herself within a new dominant model as a Protestant middle-class woman.

Like Stenhouse, Ann Eliza Young was also a prominent member of the LDS community in Utah. As the wife numbering in her title indicates, she was one of Brigham Young's multiple wives. She claims to have married Brigham Young to save her brother from bankruptcy and excommunication from the church. She never claimed to be in love with Brigham Young and eventually looked for a way out of the marriage. Supported by Methodist ministers and non-Mormon lawyers, Young sued the leader of the LDS church for divorce in federal court in 1873, the year before she published her memoir. Brigham Young's high profile nature and the fact that he "was reviled by Protestants of all theological stripes as a religious deviant" (Turner 386) created a venue for Ann Eliza Young to travel the west recounting her years living in a Mormon, polygamist marriage. Her book *Wife Number 19* is a collection of her life experiences and lectures she gave while waiting for her official divorce and excommunication from the LDS church.

Both Stenhouse and Young's highly visible positions within the Mormon community and their equally visible excommunication from the LDS church meant their opinions about the lives of Mormon women could be viewed with some authority by those who criticized the Mormon Church. For those critics, Stenhouse and Young's memoirs supported the criticism they hurled against the Mormon Church since its inception. Mormon identity and its connection to Mormon women's literacy practices cannot be separated from the criticism hurled against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints because Stenhouse and Young relied on a knowledge of that criticism to frame their narratives.

However, those formative attacks against the LDS church can be divided into two periods, the first beginning with Joseph Smith's initial formation of the LDS church and the second occurring with the LDS church's revelation about polygamy. Of most importance to this chapter are those attacks coming after the 1850 public announcement of plural marriage. Until that moment critics of the Mormon Church focused their attacks on the unreliability of Joseph Smith's spiritual revelations and the potential political power Smith wielded over his followers (Fluhman 21 -24). Once the LDS church made public the doctrine of plural marriage, critics turned their attention towards Mormonism's negative effects on women. Those criticisms were not formed in a vacuum. They are a confluence of American religious beliefs, the abolitionist movement, and 19th century attitudes towards gender and sex.

Those who challenged Mormonism on religious grounds did so with the belief that Mormonism was something very alien and un-American. Initially, critics believed Joseph Smith was nothing more than a huckster, but with the revelation of plural

marriage, critics began to label it as a non-Western religion akin to barbarism. Because it shared superficial characteristics with ancient Near East harems, polygamy became evidence that Mormons were inherently un-American and the source of their religion came more from eastern influences than it did from proper Protestantism (Fulham 103 - 105). Mormon critic and pastor Horace Bushnell even went so far as to express his disbelief that Mormons could “gather in its thousands of disciples in this enlightened age, build a populous city, and erect a temple, rivaling in grandeur, even that of the false prophet at Mecca” (qtd in Fulham 106). Protestantism was the American norm and anything that deviated from that norm was regarded with a suspicious sense of otherness, especially a religious group like the Mormons whose polygamist lifestyles were so visible and so unlike anything else in American, religious life.

Other than its perceived connections to non-American religions, polygamy also carried with it perverse, sexual connotations for Mormon critics. The “Mormon problem”, as many anti-polygamy activists referred to it, presented a sexually promiscuous lifestyle that threatened a sexually constrained Victorian society. Polygamy represented unrestrained sexuality, and unrestrained sexuality “to a people who had come to see a strict Christian monogamy as the foundation of civilization was shocking, and that a man might do so with impunity and with the sanction of his church was an evil too great to be tolerated” (Cannon 65). Although polygamy within the Mormon Church was highly restricted and not open to every male member of the church, outsiders still viewed its existence as a threat to social cohesion because it appeared to exploit women for sexual purposes.

Social reformers and anti-polygamists believed sex appealed to man's baser instincts; marriage, in turn, provided a balance to those animalistic instincts. Marriage suppressed a brutish desire for simple sexual pleasure by offering men the opportunity to create a family. As a characteristic of true womanhood, women were regarded as being above sexual desire, and their influence on a man created a stabilizing effect that encouraged family. In turn, the family functioned as the basic unit of society (Cannon 68). Thus married, monogamist sex was the social norm that controlled immoral behavior. Anti-polygamy critics believed Mormons threatened that social norm and the stability of the family by promoting a system that fed into a man's base sexual desires. Having multiple wives meant a man had multiple sexual outlets and could indulge in his immoral, brutish desires.

Concerns with Mormon sexuality and its potentially damaging effects on society are connected to 19th century debates about the role of patriarchies in American society. Patriarchy, as used to describe Mormon polygamy, shares an affinity with the use of the term in mid-19th-century abolitionist circles. As used by abolitionists, patriarchy was a term synonymous with oppressive plantations systems in the American South. Originally, Southern slave holders justified their position by advocating for a patriarchal system through which they provided for their slaves. Historian Michael Pierson argues that abolitionists turned "the Southern image of the plantation as a happy patriarchal family into a literal description of rapists, their victims, and their children," and, in doing so, they "sought to change how Americans thought about the more physical conditions and realities of slave life" (389). By co-opting the definitions of patriarchy and subverting the Southern slave holder's use of the term, abolitionists were able to remake the idea of

patriarchy into an oppressive system, a system which eventually becomes connected with polygamy.

Key to co-opting patriarchy was the abolitionists' emphasis on the sexual transgressions committed by slave holders. To demonstrate the horrors of slavery to the public, abolitionists labored "to prove that adultery or rape occurred frequently throughout the southern states, or at least more often than in a free society" (Pierson 394). In doing so, abolitionists could convert patriarchy from a moral system into an immoral institution that promoted sexual sin. As a result, the connection between slavery and sexual transgression was employed by the anti-polygamy movement. By the late antebellum period abolitionist attacks on patriarchy became infused with anti-polygamy arguments on the basis of sexual sin. Because both slavery and polygamy were viewed as patriarchal systems prone to promoting sexual transgressions, their respective critics tended to equate them as equals. Even the 1856 Republican Party platform "linked Mormonism and slavery together as 'twin relics of barbarism'" (Pierson 400). As further proof of the interconnectedness of anti-polygamy and abolitionist rhetors, polygamist critics and abolitionists shared some of the same members, Harriet Beecher Stowe being one of the most prominent among them.

At the core of the religious attacks against the Latter Day Saints, the sexual condemnation of polygamy, and the connection to slavery, is a belief that Mormon polygamy threatened true womanhood. By presenting the Mormon religion as a falsehood that simultaneously exploits women for sex and keeps women in bondage, Mormon critics could characterize the religion as a threat to a woman's true nature. Because Stenhouse and Young's memoirs equate Mormon polygamy to slavery, it becomes

important to examine their memoirs with an understanding of the culture of anti-polygamy criticism surrounding them and their publication. As both Stenhouse and Young formulate an argument against Mormon, feminine identity, they do so within the context of already established criticism of the LDS Church. Their attempts to define what it means to be a woman cannot be separated from the attacks that characterized Mormonism as a threat to femininity.

Many of the concerns about the LDS church are succinctly expressed in the introduction to *Female Life Among the Mormons*. In the conclusion to her introduction the pseudonymous Maria Ward contends that “knowing as I know, the evils and horrors and abominations of the Mormon system, the degradation it imposes on females and the consequent vices it extends through all the ramifications of society, a sense of duty to the world has induced me to prepare the following narrative for the public eye” (iii-iv). Throughout the remainder the book, *Female Life* makes it clear that the “evils” and “vices” perpetuated by the Mormon Church are the destruction of the home, female sexual exploitation, patriarchy, and the subversion of Christianity. *Female Life* articulates the arguments against the LDS church and establishes a pattern for attacking the Mormon Church. It demonstrates that women do not choose to be Mormon; Mormon marriages are a sham and threaten the sanctity of the home. Finally it contends that Mormon husbands exploit their wives. This pattern becomes so prevalent that Stenhouse and Young’s memoirs, some twenty years later, adapt and use these same tropes to frame their critique of the Mormon Church.

In effect, *Female Life* establishes a Mormon memoir genre that other female critics of the LDS Church master in order to effectively critique the church. Burgett

argues that the anti-polygamy arguments of the 1870's and the 1880's drew heavily on books like *Female Life Among the Mormons* for their criticism of the Mormon church in (76-78). For example, *Female Life* repeatedly characterizes Mormon religious practices as deceptive and dangerous to women. If books like *Female Life* became the standard for Mormon exposé and memoirs, mastery of its structure and arguments was necessary for marginalized groups like ex-Mormon women if those women wanted to be heard by the dominant Protestant audience. By the mid 1870's, the Mormon memoir became a standard through which women could challenge the LDS church; thus, any woman wanting to be heard and taken seriously had to build on the memoir's structure.

Stenhouse and Young's memoirs are no exception to this phenomena. Both of their introductions conform to an established genre of criticism, as described in *Female Life*. Perhaps the most immediate example of this is Harriet Beecher Stowe's introduction to Stenhouse's *Tell It All*. By the book's 1875 publication, Stowe was already a well-established social reformer. Her preface to Stenhouse's book builds on her ethos as an abolitionist by explicitly connecting the anti-polygamy movement with the abolition movement in the antebellum period. Although brief, her preface implicitly appeals to ideal feminine sensibilities in order to make this connection. In her opening sentence, Stowe characterizes Stenhouse as "a woman, a wife, and a mother [who] speaks the sorrows and oppression of which she has been a witness and a victim" (Stenhouse vi). In doing so, Stowe contextualizes Stenhouse and her life story in terms of her gender and as a victim of polygamy much like Maria Ward.

In addition, Stowe's preface suggests women are Stenhouse's primary audiences, and the enclosed story is a call to action for female activists. Her fourth and fifth

paragraphs remind the readers of the oppressive nature of slavery before directly connecting it to polygamy by describing it as a “slavery which debases and degrades womanhood, motherhood, and the family” (Stenhouse, vi). Only by giving over their “sympathy and payers” can the “happy mothers and wives” (Stenhouse vi) reading this text do anything about polygamy’s oppressive nature. Beyond the obvious connection to slavery, Stowe invoke an implicit appeal to true womanhood. By calling on her audience’s sympathetic and religious sensibilities, Stowe reminds her audience of one of the more important aspects of true womanhood – religiosity. Stowe’s call for social change relies on Stenhouse’s audience believing in the values of true womanhood as they read the memoir of a woman who rejected oppression and comes to accept a definition of femininity that conforms to acceptable middle-class values, values the audience already upholds.

Calling on true womanhood as a value set is intended to empower Stenhouse’s readers to indirectly participate in shaping feminine identity through a domestic literacy practice. In her assessment of Stowe’s authorial role in writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Sara Robbins argues that Stowe is functioning as “woman as motherly teacher” (124). As a mother/teacher, Stowe’s job is to instruct others about slavery’s impact on the family. I argue that Stowe’s connection between slavery and Mormon polygamy is intended to transfer her ethos as a mother/teacher to Stenhouse, who in turn functions as a mother/teacher for the audience reading her memoir, who in turn use domestic literacy to combat Mormon polygamy.

By being cast as a mother and a teacher, Stenhouse’s memoir is firmly planted in the realm of domestic literacy. When in the domestic sphere, a woman can “influence

public affairs indirectly but decisively if she maintains her place in the home and exerts her natural rhetorical force as a wife and mother” (Johnson 57). As her readers become more aware of the domestic lives of polygamist women, they can act within their sphere to change polygamist women’s domestic lives. Stenhouse’s memoir acts as a literate force through which she can challenge the Mormon Church’s power structure by critiquing it and simultaneously give her audience the means through which to criticize it themselves.

Young’s preface follows a similar path as Stowe’s preface and Ward’s preface, as she prays for “deliverance from a fate worse than Egyptian bondage in which you are held” (6). She continues by reminding her readers that life outside of Utah is “the promised land” not the “Babylon” they have been led to believe (6). Mormon women not only live a false religious life, but they do so against their will. The so called false religion has taken women away from the proper life of mainstream American society. Casting Mormonism as a false religion that leads women away from true Christianity and into slavery, plays on perceived threats against true womanhood. In the 19th century, society valued Christianity, in part, because it kept women in their respective domestic spheres (Welter 22). In turn, any threat to a woman’s religious sensibility was ultimately a threat to her domestic sphere and the values of true womanhood. Though implied, Young’s characterization of Mormonism as a false religion argues that it is a threat to true womanhood, at least a threat that women sharing that value system would understand, thus educating the audience about the oppressive nature of polygamy empowers them to resist polygamy and liberate women into true womanhood.

Stenhouse and Young's prefaces represent an awareness of ideological literacy, domestic literacy, and an established anti-Mormon genre. Ideologically, Stenhouse and Young's memoir demonstrate an awareness of those criticisms that are most familiar to their audience – Mormonism's corrupting effects on women and its oppressive nature. In addition, Stenhouse and Young use this ideological literacy to attack the established Mormon hegemony because it is a threat to a happy home. Thus, they can frame their ideological attacks through a domestic literacy lens. However, the structure of their critique and its genre, a memoir, is indebted a different hegemony – the anti-Mormon memoir.

Stenhouse and Young's introductions are so closely aligned with *Female Life Among the Mormons* that all three should be read as the same genre. All three describe Mormonism as oppressive, as a false religion, and invoke the writer's need to speak out against such evils. By adopting the established anti-Mormon memoir genre, Stenhouse and Young trade one power structure, i.e. Protestantism for another. As I will develop later, both Stenhouse and Young believe leaving Mormonism means adopting Protestant middle-class values. Clearly, doing so is symbolized by criticizing the Mormon Church through an established anti-Mormon genre.

There is then a connection between these two memoirs beyond their subject matter. As the remainder of this chapter will endeavor to show, both Stenhouse and Young's memoirs may differ in their details, but their depiction of Mormonism as an assault on true womanhood are fairly similar and conform to accepted criticism of Mormonism. Although their introductions to the faith are different, Stenhouse converting as a young woman and Young being born into a Mormon household, their reflections

about the faith share similarities worth noting. Stenhouse originally encounters the LDS Church when she returned from a governess job in France. Initially, she left England a member of the Baptist church, but when she returned her family had converted to the Mormon faith. Stenhouse's first impression of the religion is a cautious one. After talking with several members of her former church, Stenhouse expresses her concerns:

The more I heard of this strange religion the more I was troubled; yet, as I knew my parents were devoted Christians, I could hardly believe that Mormonism was such a vile delusion and imposture as it had been represented to me, or they would never have accepted it: still it was possible that they had been led astray by the fascination of a new religion.
(41)

Her initial introduction to the faith comes from her family, and her acceptance of the faith seems to be more out of a familial obligation than it does a true conversion. Stenhouse is concerned with what she has heard about the Mormon faith, but her obligations to her family override her suspicions. This is important because it suggests Stenhouse entertained the idea of conversion to the Mormon Church out of a daughterly duty, not a whole hearted conversion. By 19th century standards and expectations, she cannot be faulted for being the dutiful daughter who accepts a new religion because she has faith in her family. Adherence to the values of true womanhood would require Stenhouse to remain dutiful to her family so long as the Mormon religion seemed appropriate.

As the passage above indicates, Stenhouse had her concerns with the new religion, but those concerns did not yet rise to the level of any true threat to her femininity. As she recounts her early days in the church, Stenhouse is careful to qualify her experience by emphasizing that "Mormon Church abroad [was] purely a religious institution, and Mormonism was preached by the elders as the gospel of Christianity restored. The church had no political shaping nor the remotest antagonism to the civil

power” (47). Stenhouse wants to distinguish her initial experience with the LDS Church with what her American audience believes to be the Mormon Church. Her characterization of the church as restored Christianity is well within acceptable norms for a young woman. Her pursuit of a better and reformed Christianity would ultimately allow Stenhouse to become a better woman, as it would provide a place for her to explore her inherent religiosity.

One of the many prejudices against the Mormon Church in the 19th century was the belief that the new religion had political aspirations in the United States. Stenhouse’s careful distinction of European Mormonism as an apolitical institution not only affirms Stenhouse’s desire to stay well within her domestic sphere but also bolsters those American critics who feared Mormon political influence⁸. By emphasizing the apolitical European Mormon Church, Stenhouse avoids discussing political topics deemed inappropriate to the domestic sphere (Johnson 66-68).

Stenhouse’s initial courtship with Mormonism obfuscates any responsibility for willingly converting to the religion. Her description of her initial encounter reads more like a seduction than a conversion narrative. She initially comes to the religion out of family obligation and stays because she is ignorant of its controversial history in the United States. However, her experiences are not unique. Young’s account of growing up in the Mormon Church follows a similar pattern. In her first chapter, Young recounts her mother and father’s first encounter with the Mormon faith, but does so in a way that shields them from those who would criticize a parent for introducing their child to Mormonism.

Her father is described as a man who gave “very little thought to the peculiar beliefs of the different churches” (Young 34) before encountering Joseph Smith and his followers. Without a proper critical understanding of religion, Young’s father does not possess the tools to evaluate Mormonism as a religion in comparison to other faiths. She is careful to point out that her grandparents are the ones who pressured her father into joining the Mormon religion, and that her dad only joined as an “expression of filial regard” (34). In contrast, Young’s mother is characterized as an innately spiritual woman who was “almost a mystic” (35) and who, if born in another time, would have been a Joan of Arc like saint.

Her parents’ characterization highlight their gender roles as a dutiful son and religious mother respectively while deemphasizing their culpability in promoting an “oppressive” religion. Young idealizes her parents and, like Stenhouse, characterizes the early Mormon church as a “spiritual[ly] minded, god fearing, law abiding” (Young 34) people before the evils of polygamy. Both memoirs create an image of the LDS Church as a legitimate religious community where men and women could thrive in their respective gender roles prior to the revelation of plural marriage. Eventually, this characterization changes drastically and the Mormon Church transforms from an idyllic spiritual community into an oppressive institution all because of plural marriage.

More importantly, the memoirs excuse Stenhouse and Young for any responsibility in joining the Mormon Church. After all, both writers can trace their connection to the Church back to some sense of familial duty. Neither Stenhouse nor Young are truly responsible for courting the Latter Day Saints in their early days. The only real sin is being faithful to their parents. Even then the community of Latter Day

Saints that each initially describes is really not all that destructive as both are spiritually minded. In the end, these distinctions create a crucial identity for both Stenhouse and Young. As they are essentially blameless for their conversion to the Latter Day Saints, they never really surrender their virtue or their identity as true women. They can describe their experiences with polygamy not as fallen women who succumbed to sexual debauchery, but as women who were held captive by a faith that changed around them. This distinction is crucial for creating an identity for Mormon women that would resonate with anti-polygamy activists. Without this distinction the women in Stenhouse and Young would read differently; Mormon women would not necessarily seem like captives needing rescuing, but women who fell into sin because of poor choices.

In depicting their introduction to a polygamist marriage and the lives they led while being polygamist wives, both Stenhouse and Young continue to shape themselves into women who are blameless and only trying to maintain a value system despite an oppressive system. Whether or not Stenhouse and Young's depiction of plural marriage is accurate is not the most important aspect of their memoirs. What matters most is the way polygamy and its effects shape Stenhouse and Young's depiction of Mormon feminine identity, specifically a woman's role as wife and mother. Both Stenhouse and Young cast women and children as polygamy's victims, but they will also cast themselves as survivors who never fully embrace the doctrine of plural marriage and struggle to maintain a sense of true womanhood.

It is important for Stenhouse and Young's personae to appear blameless as they recount their early days in the Mormon Church. As women they need to maintain a sense of innocence. In terms of their ideological literacy practices, it is essential that Stenhouse

and Young's attack on the Mormon Church appear as if they were misled by the Church's true nature. Their entire critique is predicated on the belief that women are exploited in Mormonism; however, if Stenhouse and Young appear as willing participants with full knowledge of the Church's culture, then their entire argument is undercut and their ethos suffers.

This pattern of helpless women duped into the Mormon faith is not wholly original to Stenhouse and Young. In *Female Life Among the Mormons*, Ward is literally tricked into the Mormon faith through a combination of hypnotism and abandonment. Her soon to be Mormon husband is described as a "snake charmer" while she is nothing more than a "helpless bird" before his gaze (Ward 12). She is trapped by him, isolated from her family, and preyed upon until she gives into his advances. Ward's initial encounter is certainly more outrageous and sensational than Stenhouse and Young's introduction to the faith, but this obviously fictionalized account establishes a pattern in anti-Mormon memoirs. In this genre good women do not choose to be Mormon; they are misled or tricked by Mormon men, a common element of anti-Mormon memoirs.

Thus, Stenhouse and Young's recollection regarding their introduction to the LDS Church represent two different aspects of their respective literacy practices. By casting themselves as victims, both writers can maintain the ethos they need to challenge Mormon authority, and tap into an accepted narrative about Mormon women and their initial encounters with the faith.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of their argument is polygamy's ability to alienate husbands and wives from one another, and, as a result, destroy a woman's domestic bliss. Young's initial remembrance of her parents describes their marriage as a

happy one, and the thought of embracing a plural marriage was repugnant to both of them. However, Young's mother eventually concedes due to internal religious pressure. Young describes her mother's moral dilemma as one who wants to live up to her Prophet's teaching, but who cannot overcome her natural revulsion to the institution (101). Young's mother believes in a kind and loving God, but, as Young describes it, she eventually learns the "God of Mormon belief was a jealous God, a cruel, avenging spirit that demand[ed] a blood sacrifice to appease his awakened wraith" (101). The longer her mother lives under polygamy the more estranged she becomes from God.

If Young's mother is to serve as an example of a woman's experiences under polygamy, the sacrifice is her innate religiosity and her essence as a true woman. The longer Young's mother stays in her plural marriage the further she apparently drifts away from her husband. Before her father takes a second wife, Young describes her parent's marriage as a blissful one in which shared suffering brought both husband and wife closer together; however, with the arrival of Elizabeth, her father's second wife, Young's mother grows increasingly distant from her husband. At one point, she even contemplates suicide. Her only reason for living is her religious beliefs. Brigham Young himself is credited with eventually winning the couple over to plural marriage, but Ann Young's mother never truly accepts the principle. She "look[s] upon it as a duty, and she was determined to do it uncompromisingly" (102). Her mother is transformed by polygamy. She is no longer the woman who could be called a mystic and whose spiritual nature seemed to flow naturally from her person. Instead she is a woman who acts out of religious obligation and duty. Young's mother may still keep to the tenets of the faith, but

her decision to include another woman in her marriage destroys her innate religious sentiment and ruins her domestic sphere.

Stenhouse's memoir echoes Young's assessment of plural marriage and its effects on women. Just as with Young's mother, Stenhouse claims she grew increasingly estranged from her husband the longer they remained in a polygamist marriage. She, too, is unhappy with a second wife and feels pressured to hide "her secret sorrows" (460) because "it is the will of God" that she "bear [the pressure]" (461) without much protest. Like Young's mother, Stenhouse's marriage takes her role as a happy dutiful wife away from her. Making matters worse, Stenhouse and Young indicate their religious sensibilities and their religious education are exploited in order to make polygamy work. Both swallow their suffering and remain silent in order to support their religion.

Likewise, polygamy strips from Young's mother her place in the domestic sphere.

Her mother:

thought she had counted the cost; she found she had, in her ignorance, been unable to estimate it. Every hour of her life was torn by some new agony. She was compelled to see many of the tender, wifely little offices, trifles in themselves, that she had been accustomed to perform, done by other hands, and she herself always turned off with [an] excuse.
(Young 105)

Not only has the mother's religious sensibility been compromised, but so too has her role within the domestic sphere. Elizabeth, the second wife, has replaced Young's mother as the primary house keeper, and, in doing so, has stripped Young's mother of the duties she most enjoyed. As a result, her place within the home and her identity as a mother is taken away.

Any audience well versed in true womanhood would be appalled at the exploitation of religious sentiment, the estrangement of affection expressed in their life

stories, and woman's displacement in the home. Traditional domestic literacy narratives that encourage or depict woman acting as affirmative forces in their households relied on that same religious sentiment and a healthy domestic space to create social change. Domestic duties are sources of power, but, in these texts, those sources of power are removed. These memoirs illustrate a knowledge of domestic literacy in that they show the results of women stripped of their agency and their sphere of influence. In essence, these memoirs are domestic literacy narratives by writing about women who have no control over their household. They depict woman incapable of exercising any influences over their respective domestic spheres, but in emphasizing that loss of domesticity they illustrate its power and importance.

Perhaps there is no better example of polygamy's disempowering effects than its ability to estrange mothers from their children. Emotionally disconnected from her husband, her religious sentiment quelled, and stripped of many of her domestic duties that made her happy, all that remains for Young's mother's femininity is her role as a mother. Unfortunately, this joy too is taken away from the polygamist wife. As Young recounts it, "[her mother] was consecrated to sorrow by the baptism of my mother's tears" (99). Young is most likely exaggerating when she says "my baby hands wiped away tears, and my babe eyes never saw beyond the mist in [my mother's] eyes" (99); however, her point is quite clear. Mormon, polygamist mothers never fully enjoy motherhood. Polygamy robs them of one of their most crucial gender roles, a mother in a happy family, by sharing their duties with another woman.

Again Stenhouse agrees with Young's assessment, but expands on her argument by explaining why polygamy is detrimental to children. Once she is bonded in a plural

marriage, Stenhouse finds that her children no longer provide her with joy. Her love for her husband has ended and “indifference has taken its place” and her “children feel it” (461). According to Stenhouse and Young, in polygamist marriages women exist without love of children, and without love of children they are no longer capable of being mothers or true women.

As with the discussion of their mother’s lives, Stenhouse and Young’s description of children in polygamy demonstrates the complex nature of their literacy practices. Again if their goal is to criticize the Mormon Church and its ideology, Stenhouse and Young have to do so in ways that undercuts the Church’s authority. Demonstrating polygamy’s harmful effects on children does just this. Nineteenth century women used their domestic space as a place to make political arguments and challenge institutions of power on the grounds that they threaten the home, and anything that threatens the home eventually threatens the nation. Placing children at the center of their memoirs and making them victims of polygamy, taps directly into the tradition of domestic literacy.

Polygamy’s impact on children is perhaps one of the more sensational and lurid aspects of these memoirs. Throughout chapter nineteen, Young recounts the various ways young girls are recruited by the “lecherous leaders of Mormonism” (313). Both Young and Stenhouse tell stories of incestuous relationships, young girls pressured into marrying senior members of the church, and mothers who offer their children up to their husbands to advance themselves in the church. However, both Stenhouse and Young admit stories amount to little more than hearsay. Beyond discussing their immediate experiences, Young and Stenhouse do not seem necessarily concerned with representing an accurate view of Mormon women and their homes.

Beyond describing the disintegration of womanhood, and the neglect of children, Stenhouse and Young's accounts, including those based on personal experience and hearsay, harken back to the language abolitionists used twenty-years earlier. Although not an explicit condemnation of polygamy as an oppressive patriarchy, there are parallels between the patriarchal systems described by abolitionists and Mormon polygamy as described by Stenhouse and Young. When describing their husbands' reactions to the new marital relationship, both women point out that their husbands adjust to the system far faster and more comfortably than they do. The result is an unequal system that dehumanizes husbands and wives. Likewise, their characterization of polygamy as patriarchy demonstrates Stenhouse and Young's command of Protestant anti-Mormon rhetoric, their intelligence, and their critical thinking skills.

Stenhouse believes a Mormon husband is "at liberty to do as he thinks best" (465) without the guidance of the Mormon Church⁹. According to Stenhouse, this lack of control gives less pious men the ability to discard wives at will and take on additional wives as they see fit (465). These living conditions are not really homes. Husbands and wives no longer share the sympathetic relationship that Ann Young's parents had before polygamy. The husband's attention is divided among his wives, and if he is able to reject an older spouse for a newer one, "he really has no home in the truest sense of the word; his houses are simply boarding-houses" (Stenhouse 465). Without a true home a husband loses the civilizing effects of a single devoted wife. Mormon men are left open to their baser sexual impulses while women are discarded and never reach their full potential as wives and mothers.

This is similar to the patriarchal system under slavery. Slave holders argued their patriarchal system provided for a slave's every need, but abolitionists argued the deplorable living conditions and the slave holders' unregulated sexual access to his slaves degraded both the slave holder and the slave (Pierson 383 – 384). As Stenhouse and Young try to demonstrate, there is no true love in these marriages, and therefore, no real parity between husband and wife in the domestic sphere. As Young describes it, husbands in polygamist marriages have their "sensibilities blunted; their spiritual nature deadened, [and] their animal natures quickened" (591). In polygamy the husband "becomes the lord and often the despot" (Stenhouse 621). As a result he loses all sense of his humanity. Because they have degraded their humanity polygamist husbands are the slave holders in abolitionist narratives, polygamists are able to exploit those under their care for their own sexual desires.

Contextualizing their marital relationships in terms of abolition rhetoric again provides Stenhouse and Young with the tools to both condemn polygamy in terms their audience recognizes and challenge Mormon power structures. Equating polygamy with patriarchal slavery structures subverts Mormon conceptions of marriage in terms their audience would understand. The Mormon Doctrine and Covenants 132 sections 15-20 describes marriage as an everlasting bond between husband and wife that extends into the afterlife and exalts both people before the eyes of God. Yet, the marriage Stenhouse and Young describe undermines any notion of parity or equality in marriage by equating it with despotism. It is unlikely that their largely Protestant audience would be so familiar with Mormon theology; however, they would be more familiar with patriarchal, abolitionist rhetoric. By co-opting the rhetoric of patriarchy, Stenhouse and Young

challenge Mormon doctrine, but do so in accordance with the new power structure. Thus, Stenhouse and Young demonstrate literate knowledge of both their former religion and the society they are transitioning into.

Stenhouse and Young's reaction to life outside of polygamy is all but predictable given their open hostility to the Mormon Church. Their lives in polygamy were oppressed, and they, as women, were denied even the most fundamental aspects of femininity. Their revelations about life outside plural marriage only highlights their previously oppressed lives by drawing a stark contrast between the promise of a happy household outside of the polygamist world and the oppressive lives they led in plural marriage. What makes the conclusions to the memoirs interesting is the expressed desire each writer has in promoting a post-polygamy view of Mormon identity.

Stenhouse and Young conclude their memoirs with explicit calls-to-action to change polygamy in Utah. By expressing their desires to see an end to polygamy, both authors are expressing a desire to see a new Mormon woman. Obviously, this new identity is in line with mainstream, protestant homes, an identity that abandons the LDS church and adopts less controversial marital arrangements. What are less obvious and more important are the literacy skills necessary to make this change happen. Young concludes her memoir by asking women outside the LDS community to use writing as a form of advocacy: "Women's pens, and women's voices pleaded earnestly and pathetically for the abolition of slavery. Thousands of women, some of them your country-women, and your social and intellectual equals, are held in a more revolting slavery to-day" (604). Throughout their memoirs, Stenhouse and Young have used their own writing to challenge the Mormon conception of marriage and femininity. Now they

extend that challenge to their audience. While drawing one last comparison between polygamy and slavery, Young suggests that traditional literacy practices, writing and public speaking, are crucial tools for women looking to influence social change. Asking women to take employ written word is Young's final approach in defining a new identity for Mormon women. Through writing advocates are expected to affectively change polygamist women's status. Their literacy is expected to affectively change feminine identity outside the Mormon Church.

Stenhouse, too, concludes with a belief that literacy will effectively change Mormon women's condition. It is her hope that her:

humble efforts have aroused the Women of Utah to investigate the foundations of their faith, to calmly and impartially consider the iniquities of the system of Polygamy, to renounce the man-made slavery of the 'Celestial Order.' (623)

Redefining Mormon women's lives in this sense means understanding the cultural conditions that created their oppression. Therefore, Stenhouse is adopting both an ideological literacy and domestic literacy for Mormon women that conforms to the rules of the dominant culture. In doing so, she hopes to redefine these women's lives and the way they understand themselves. Stenhouse and Young want their audience to see that they are ignorant of life outside of Utah and blind to the oppressive nature of their marriages. By illustrating polygamy's harmful effects they educate their audience on the horrors of their lives and open them up to a better understanding of the larger world.

These memoirs represent the collective arguments made by anti-polygamy, anti-Mormon activists. As Mormon women themselves, Stenhouse and Young projected an image of Mormon femininity. The accounts of their lives under polygamy are replete with images of oppression and cruelty; however, Stenhouse and Young make their

arguments from the perspective of an apostate. At times their memoirs rely on hearsay and speculation, and they take on qualities similar to propaganda and, as such, they feed into opinions the general public already had about polygamy.

However, their literacies show an astute understanding of both the lives of Mormon women and the Protestant world that so despises Mormon polygamy. Their memoirs blend the facts of the lives into already accepted rhetorical argument. Stenhouse and Young are skilled at taking anti-Mormon rhetoric filtering it through a domestic lens, and telling it all in a standardized anti-Mormon genre. What remains to be heard are the voices of those women who did not lose their faith in the Mormon Church and still believed that polygamy was the only means by which they could fully develop as a women.

CHAPTER THREE

The Woman's Exponent and the Fight for Legitimacy

Stenhouse and Young's memoirs represent the arguments made against Mormon polygamy in the 19th century and a belief that polygamy was detrimental to a woman's domestic sphere, but because their life stories were so deeply informed by anti-Mormon propaganda they do little to illuminate the ways in which Mormon women argued in favor of polygamy or how Mormon women in support of polygamy tried to define womanhood from themselves. While many writers like Stenhouse, Young and the outsiders that influenced them believed polygamist wives were oppressed women trapped in a religious life that bound them in an unequal marriage, there were many women within the Mormon Church who supported polygamy and argued that it was a valid lifestyle. Just as Stenhouse and Young employed their own literacy and writing practices to attack their former lives, those who defended polygamy as a lifestyle engaged the debate about their femininity and their married lives through the pages of their own publications.

The debate in favor of plural marriage and the attempts to defend the feminine Mormon lifestyle appeared in a variety of printed contexts, but for the purposes of this chapter I intend to focus on the most prominent woman's journal advocating for the cause of Mormon women and plural marriage, the *Woman's Exponent*. This journal began as an extension of a woman's relief society with the expressed purpose of advocating for women. Although its first issue declared the contributors had "no rivalry with any, no war to wage, no contest to provoke" (News and Views), the *Exponent's* two principle editors,

Louise L. Greene and Emmeline B. Wells, did not shy away from advocating for woman's suffrage, plural marriage, and the rights of middle-class white women in the 19th century. First published in 1872, three years before Young and Stenhouse's memoirs, the *Woman's Exponent* entered in the middle of many public debates as to the role of women and their place in society. Within its pages, the *Woman's Exponent* placed itself on the side of suffrage, religious freedom, and the rights of polygamist women, but did so in a way that defined those ideas for Mormon women.

The *Exponent's* arguments reflect a complex web of literacy and rhetorical practices designed to define Mormon feminine identity in response to many critics of polygamy. Understanding those literacy practices in many ways means understanding the culture that created them. If we take from Brian Street the idea that a literacy practice is socially constructed, then any discussion of The Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and its female leaders has to have at least a cursory understanding of that church's history and relationship to 19th century American society. This is especially important when we consider the specific history of the LDS church, a history that through much of the 19th century opened Mormons to critical attacks from the rest of American society. As Fluhman explains in his prologue to *'A Peculiar People' Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in 19th -Century America*, Mormon identity "has been crafted in dynamic tension with its critical appraisals" (1). America's antagonism towards the LDS church contributed to ideological literacy practices through which Mormon women fought to craft an identity on their terms. Keenly aware of what their critics thought of polygamist wives, the *Exponent's* contributing writers adapted the language of the woman's movement, its causes, and anti-polygamy rhetoric to fight back against the

power structures that tried to define them. Like most identities, what these Mormon women built was reflexive and adaptive to the changing social-political climate surrounding them. Literacy and writing practices played a crucial role in that adaptability; yet, as capable as these women were in responding to the criticism levied against them, they never abandoned the idea of true womanhood in their quest to define themselves.

This chapter traces the development of this identity and its relationship to true womanhood by first looking at the ways Mormon women argued for their polygamist practices within 19th century feminism. Later, after the church abandoned its belief in plural marriage in 1890, the chapter examines the way Mormon women moved from the margins of the women's movement to the mainstream by continuing to argue for women's political rights. Lastly, it concludes by looking at the ways Mormon women tried to create a transnational literacy with those women who moved to Mexico to escape religious persecution.

Before addressing the literacy practices in the *Woman's Exponent*, I believe it is important to understand the cultural debates that preceded the magazine's publication in order to properly contextualize what these women were responding to when they began publishing. Prior to the public pronouncement of plural marriage, criticism of the LDS church and its effects on women were largely confined to a belief that the religion was a falsehood. The religiosity that swept across the United States in the early decades of the 19th century spawned a variety of religious and spiritual movements like the Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormonism, but with these movements came sharp criticism of potential religious imposters. LDS critics believed Joseph Smith's prophecy and the religion that followed was nothing more than an attempt by a charlatan

to dupe ignorant people into a false religious belief (Fluhman 21-23). As mentioned in the previous chapter, debunking Mormon beliefs in the years before the civil war can be seen as an attempt to protect a woman's innate religiosity by challenging the validity of Mormon beliefs.

However, when the LDS Church decided to reveal its polygamist principles in 1850, it drew a slew of new anti-Mormon, anti-polygamist material. As discussed in the previous chapter, books such as *Wife No. 19* and *Tell it All* called polygamy anti-democratic and degrading to women. Likewise, the newly-formed Republican party made the abolition of slavery and polygamy the center of its platform in 1856 (Iverson 585). The anti-polygamy movement argued Mormon men were collecting harems for themselves and forcing women into sexual slavery (Iverson 587). Even Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, when visiting Utah in 1871 to congratulate women on the right to vote, called on Mormon women to overturn polygamy (Bowman 133). Yet when given the chance to write for themselves, the *Woman's Exponent* offered a moralist defense of plural marriage in spite of feminist calls to change their society.

In response to almost 20 years of criticism, the first edition of the *Woman's Exponent* published in 1872 the article "Dangerous Excess" as a statement on political revolutions. The unnamed author describes an unnamed current revolution that "affects all classes, colors, and creeds, and both sexes, [whose] progress promises to be directly fraught with grave results to women" (Dangerous). Given the context of the newspaper and the time period, it is easy enough to assume the revolution being discussed is the first wave of feminism. This seems especially likely when considering the writer concludes that "the right to vote, and the right to earn honest money" (Dangerous) should not lead

to the debarment of natural law. Natural law in this article is associated with marriage and the excess of revolution with the State's destruction of "family circle, filial love, parental care, and fraternal affection" (Dangerous). This article appeared only a few months after Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton appeared in Utah and condemned polygamist practices. The article does not condemn the recent acquisition of suffrage, it only cautions against letting the current social revolution corrupt natural law, or by extension God's law. The article "Dangerous Excess" supports women's suffrage but cautions women against letting political action corrupt God's law or a woman's place in the home. In essence they are arguing for a different conception of God's law. However, the *Exponent* is not supporting monogamous marriage or a traditional domestic space. In fact, given the pressure on Utah to abandon polygamy by its critics and the United States government, this argument suggests a rejection of monogamous marriage in favor of polygamy.

In terms of ideological literacy practices, this critique of the suffrage movement is in keeping with the Mormon understanding of marriage and family. Plural marriage was considered a divine right and plural marriage on earth reflected the divine order in heaven¹⁰ (D&C 132:10-19). In a sense "Dangerous Excess" is a warning against becoming too involved in the larger social world as it might distract women from Mormon world. This particular effort at writing is an early attempt by the *Woman's Exponent* to argue for a place apart for Mormon women. Their social order is different from the larger social order in the United States, and this argument is a reminder that the LDS Church is not quite a part of the American mainstream and should caution itself

from being swept up in societal changes. Suffrage under this conception should be used to maintain the Mormon woman's unique place.

Unlike Stenhouse and Young, "Dangerous Excesses" offers a different example of an ideological literacy practice. The *Woman's Exponents* editors are not adopting the dominant power structure's language in order to encourage women to leave the Mormon Church. In fact, the *Exponent's* editors are cautioning against adopting the world view Stenhouse and Young advocated. Unlike Stenhouse and Young, the *Exponent's* vision of the Mormon world is the safe world where women can develop

The overt cultural overtones of the first issue of the *Woman's Exponent* were by no means an exception in its publication. In 1876, the *Exponent* began calling on women to use their literacies as a means to fight for the rights of polygamist women. In August 1876, the editors published "Women Talkers and Women Writers." This article opens with a quote from Byron's "Don Juan" by invoking the written word's power to make people think and demonstrating the Mormon editors' literate understanding of secular literature. The article quickly begins advocating for women to become an increasingly important part of the nation's public dialogues so that they may maintain their unique place in American society. I should note the article's epigram is in keeping with Mormon literacy practices. As I will soon discuss, "Women Talkers and Women Writers" ultimately argues for women to speak in favor of the divine nature of polygamy; yet, it begins with a decidedly, secular allusion. This juxtaposition, I believe, is directly related to Mormon notions of secular education. In keeping with the *Doctrines and Covenants*, men and women were expected to know secular academic disciplines in order to strengthen their religious viewpoints. I do not think it coincidental, then, to see an article

about the ultimate sanctity of plural marriage begin with a reference to an arguably immoral poem by an atheist poet. The epigram simultaneously serves as a skillful allusion to secular, moral decay and a counter argument to those who claim polygamist women are oppressed. The epigram says to the reader and ultimately polygamist detractors that the editor is educated and aware of the secular world, but chooses the life she lives.

Within the text of “Women Talkers and Women Writers” the author challenges the commonly held belief that women should remain silent. Outspoken women should “educate [the silent] class of women upon such essential points, that it becomes more than ever necessary to speak and write” (“Women Talkers”). Like Stenhouse and Young, the leaders of the *Exponent* believe writing has a specific value in a woman’s life, and it is necessary for participation in the world. Both groups stress the importance of women speaking out; however, the *Exponent* wants those women to speak in favor of polygamy.

The article claims:

In this wonderfully enlightened 19th century when there is so much questioning of rights and equality, and supremacy and inferiority, and superiority, and submission, and place and calling and influences and individuality, it is but natural to express some interest on the subjects which bring to their aid such a variety of adjectives to qualify and determine their general and relative interest. (“Women Talkers”)

The *Woman’s Exponent* rightly recognizes the complexity of late 19th century social changes and goes on to challenge assumptions about polygamy. They claim that only polygamy will give women the time necessary to educate themselves and participate in important late 19th century debates.

The world says Polygamy [sic] makes women inferior to men – we think differently. Polygamy gives women more time for thought, for mental culture, more freedom of action, a broader field of labor, inculcates

liberality and generosity, develops more fully the spiritual elements of life; fosters purity of thought and gives wider scope to benevolence, leads women more directly to God the fountain of all truth, knowledge, light, and intelligence. If those who are anxious to promote higher development, [should] consider the true principle ... [they should consider] plural marriage. ("Women Talkers")

Ultimately, the only way for women to advance their education and participate in the world is to submit to polygamy because polygamy gives them more time to think about and interact with the world.

"Women Talkers" is perhaps the clearest example of the *Exponent's* command of an ideological literacy practice couched in domestic literacy terms. The argument presented is a direct challenge to the dominate Protestant power structure and its definition of marriage. The *Exponent's* editors are clearly aware of their detractors' opinions of them and their lifestyle. So aware are they that the editors take the charges that polygamy undermines a woman's identity and corrupts the domestic sphere, subverts those charges, and uses them to argue for polygamy. "Women Talkers" appears one year after Stenhouse and Young published their memoirs and began their national talking tours. There is nothing in "Women Talkers" to suggest the editors are responding directly to Stenhouse and Young; however, the article's argument that polygamy leads to a happier, healthier woman refutes the vision of oppressed and miserable Mormon women promoted by *Tell it All* and *Wife No. 19*.

In many ways "Woman Talkers and Women Writers" is like other women's magazines articles in the late 19th century. In a similar study on women's writing in the Methodist Church, Lisa Shaver concludes, the Methodist magazine *The Ladies' Repository*, published between 1841 and 1876, similarly argues for a secular education beyond the home (109). *The Ladies' Repository* promoted women's education so that

women could participate in the century's great debates (Shaver 109). The *Woman's Exponent's* initial argument in "Women Talkers and Women Writers" is in keeping with Shaver's interpretations of *The Ladies' Repository*, but the *Exponent's* conclusion that polygamy is the only way for women to achieve the desired level of education is in direct contrast to larger middle-class expectations of women's marital roles. However, the underlying goal of both magazines, in this case, is very similar. Just as the *Ladies' Repository* attempted to "redefine women's roles even as it attempted to bolster them" (Shaver 109), the *Woman's Exponent* was trying to promote a broader intellectual role for women while simultaneously advocating for a role Mormons deem traditional. The result is an attempt to use progressive ideas about women's education to justify polygamy and Mormon, feminine identity.

This identity proposed by "Women Talkers" is fundamentally different than the one proposed by Stenhouse and Young. While Stenhouse and Young would lead their audience to believe that Mormon women could only be educated by abandoning their faith and embracing Protestant values, the *Exponent* argues the exact opposite. According to the *Exponent*, women could only ever really develop intellectually and spiritually through polygamy. In a very radical way, the *Exponent* is calling for a completely different domestic space and a completely new domestic literacy. In effect, the *Exponent's* editors are trying to redefine femininity by redefining the domestic sphere. Instead of the traditional monogamous family structure practiced by middle-class Protestant at the center of the domestic sphere, the *Exponent's* believes a new polygamist family structure is key to creating the ideal domestic sphere.

Without any sense of irony, the writer in “Woman Talkers” empowers herself and is able, through her writing, education, and literacy practices, to directly refute those who claim she is ignorant and oppressed. The very fact that she is able to write a coherent response to those who would slander polygamist women indicates that she is none of those things. The writer very deftly contextualizes the argument about Mormon women on her terms. This argument is further strengthened when we see it in comparison to Stenhouse and Young’s depiction of life under polygamy. The Mormon women in “Women Talkers” believe their lifestyle provides them with freedom, a better quality of life, and time for intellectual pursuits. Again, these women are a far cry from the exploited mothers and wives depicted in *Tell it All* and *Wife No. 19* who have little or no recourse to express their suffering.

The rationales for polygamy were not solely based on its potential intellectual benefits for women. Morally, the *Women’s Exponent* advocated for polygamy on the grounds it protected a woman’s virtue and allowed her to fulfill her womanly duties. In September 1877, the *Exponent* published “A Mormon Woman’s View of Marriage” as an impassioned argument for polygamy’s moral superiority. The claim in “A Mormon Woman’s View” takes up three full columns and is divided into two distinct parts. The first section establishes the ethos of the divine revelation that called for plural marriage. The writer invokes David and various Old Testament prophets to establish the history of divine revelations before applying that ethos to the Mormon situation. Skillfully, the writer reminds the audience that plural marriages are not to be judged by human standards, but by divine standards.

In addition, the article adopts the commonly held belief that “women surpass men in innate purity” (Mormon Woman’s View), a belief rooted in the cult of true womanhood. This argument takes the societal notion of a woman’s moral superiority and co-opts it to justify plural marriage. The writer continues by asserting that there are so few men capable of living an upstanding moral life that women in a monogamous world are forced to marry men unsuitable to raise a family. If a woman “desires to bear children who will be able to perpetuate themselves in races that will be honorable and enduring they should choose for their companions and father of their offspring men of correct moral principle”¹¹ (“Mormon Woman’s View”). Lastly, the writer argues that so few upstanding moral men exist that women must resort to polygamy in order to preserve their virtue and ensure their ability to be effective mothers.

In this brief section of the argument, the *Exponent*’s editors demonstrate an important mastery of domestic literacy. The argument that polygamy is the only means through which a woman can build a happy home is directly related to domestic literacy arguments. The editors are essentially saying, Mormon women want to positively shape the future of the country by raising morally responsible children, but only polygamy will allow them to do so. More importantly, the editors continue their practice of adapting the dominant group’s expectations and subverting it to define their lives. Domestic literacy arguments are traditionally a tool of white middle-class Protestants; however, these Mormon women take this literacy practice and use it challenge that very same group, the exact opposite of Stenhouse and Young’s efforts.

The dominant Protestant middle-class conception of Mormon women argued that Mormons were stripped of their innate religious sentiment. Both Stenhouse and Young

promoted that view of polygamy by describing loss of faith and lack of joy. Yet, the view of marriage, as described by “Mormon Women’s View” refutes that dominant view, by taking the dominant group’s conception of femininity and religious sentiment and repurposing it for the polygamist wife.

The argument in “A Mormon Woman’s View” represents a complex convergence of gender and political roles for women within the Mormon community. The feminist historian Julie Dunfey believes Mormon women “were unhappy with the double standard of behavior of which they had no control” (529). Too many men according to Dunfey were believed to be engaged in licentious, degrading sexual behavior outside the confines of marriage and were unequipped for fatherhood (Dunfey 260). In this sense, the polygamist rationale presented in “A Mormon Woman’s View of Marriage” challenges the hypocrisy of mainstream America that would criticize their marital life as licentious and degrading by implying that monogamous marriages are the source of licentious behavior.

By placing polygamy within the context of Biblical revelation and contemporary notions of morality, “A Mormon’s View of Marriage” challenges conventional perceptions of polygamist’s sex lives. Feminist critic Joan Iverson reminds us that most Americans outside Utah believed Mormon men “collected harems” (587), but in fact Mormon polygamy was more akin to puritanical beliefs about sex (Iverson 587). In other words, Mormon men and women in polygamous marriages were having far less sex than any one out side of the Mormon religion supposed. The writer of “A Mormon View” attempts to correct notions of feminine sexuality in polygamy mistakenly held by so many anti-polygamy critics. Women marry into polygamist relationships not to become

part of a harem, but to find men who look for healthy spiritual relationships within the confines of marriage. By arguing from a moral ethos, this essay takes back the sexual definition of Mormon women placed on them by people outside the religion and defines their relationship on their terms and simultaneously educates their readers on the true nature of sex in polygamist marriages. Ultimately, these complex ideas could not be expressed without a complete understanding of anti-polygamy misconceptions and a Mormon culture that fostered the literacy skills necessary to refute those misconceptions.

“A Mormon View of Marriage” also justifies polygamy by saying it is necessary for raising proper children. If the father is “wicked and corrupt [he] stamps his nature and temperament sufficiently upon his offspring” (“A Mormon Woman’s View”) and drastically reduces a mother’s chance of raising her children properly. By arguing that a corrupt marriage has an adverse effect on a child’s upbringing, the *Woman’s Exponent* grounds itself firmly in the realm of domestic literacy practices. Robbins explains that middle-class women believed their greatest educational impact was in the proper upbringing of their children (68-73). However, Mormon women in this essay subvert the traditional notion of marriage and domestic literacy practices by advocating for plural marriage. The twin beliefs that evil fathers will corrupt their children and that there are so few good men to marry is an argument against monogamous marriage because so many women are forced to marry evil men and, as a consequence, are unable to fulfill their domestic role. Ultimately, the *Exponent* redefines the conventional justification of domestic literacy by challenging conventional marital relationships.

Implicit in “A Mormon View of Marriage” is the creation of a new domestic literacy practice, one that tries to redefine the domestic sphere. By 1877, the publication

date for “A Mormon View of Marriage,” anti-polygamy arguments that depicted plural marriage as a soul crushing institution that stripped women of the proper domestic sphere had permeated American culture. However, the women described by this writer are a far cry from the defeated mothers in Stenhouse and Young’s memoirs. They are not detached from their children and estranged from their husbands. These are women very much in control of their domestic sphere and very capable of promoting domestic values. They believe polygamy provides them with the space and the time to educate themselves, their children, and ensure a healthier nation as a consequence.

By 1882, the anti-polygamy movement had gained enough momentum to successfully lobby Congress to pass the Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act of 1882 on the grounds it was detrimental to women’s health (Bowman 145). This law was later followed by the Edmunds-Turk Act of 1886 and several Supreme Court cases that support the laws’ validity. The result of such legislation was a series of raids against polygamist households, Mormon religious leaders, and the repeal of women’s suffrage in Utah. Many polygamist men were imprisoned and polygamist marriages broken apart by federal marshals raiding suspected polygamist homes.

Three months after the Edmunds-Tucker act passed, the *Woman’s Exponent* renewed its efforts to promote women’s suffrage. In an article titled “Women in Politics” the unnamed author believes just laws should be followed, but without full participation by women in the electoral process, the country operates “with half its intellect and morality [lying] fallow” (“Women in Politics”). Though anti-polygamy legislation is not specifically named in the piece, the writer asserts that no law affecting women can be just without a woman’s input, and given the political culture surrounding polygamy, it is hard

not to see anti-polygamy legislation from the conversation within the article. The *Woman's Exponent's* editors believe the Republic will not be safe until it gives "women and Mormons equal and just rights" (Women in Politics). Thus, the *Woman's Exponent* again sees political action and polygamy as intertwined. More importantly, this piece sees educating women, through this article, as an implicit part of women's political involvement.

Given the rising national political tensions and the growing social pressure on Mormon women, "Women in Politics" appears to reflect an evolving connection between literacy and political activism. While the writer may call for suffrage and female political participation, her argument is ultimately rooted in traditional beliefs about femininity and the domestic world. "Women in Politics" is directly connected to Robbins's argument about domestic literacy and moral education. In the domestic literacy process, women exercise their influence over a nation by promoting literacy and moral education in the home (Robbins 68-73). "Women in Politics" mirrors this argument when it reminds its readers that a "woman is the early trainer of an infant mind," and if the nation wants better democratic participation then it needs to include women in the democratic process so that they can model it for their children. However, the article's intent is to raise a generation of Mormon voters who would support church teachings including polygamy. If women's suffrage in the territory was restored, Mormon women would not use their political literacy or their domestic literacy to promote values that advocated for the Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act. Instead they would advocate for a polygamist lifestyle within their sphere of influence, a lifestyle outside accepted domestic norms.

This depiction of Mormon femininity is radically different than the vision of Mormon women in Stenhouse and Young's memoirs. In Stenhouse and Young's work, Mormon women can only achieve independence and fully participate in true womanhood if they leave the Mormon faith and abandon plural marriage. Despite the fact that women in Utah had the right to vote five years before Stenhouse and Young published their memoirs and Stenhouse and Young undoubtedly had the right to vote, women's suffrage is conveniently left out of their accounts. If they did include descriptions of women voting and influencing State and local politics, it would undercut their depiction of Mormon women as helpless and unable to influence the world around them. In fact, a description of Mormon women voting and/or voting for polygamy would undercut both the anti-polygamy groups, that believed polygamist women were oppressed, and more traditional Protestant middle-class structures that did not want women to vote at all. Sadly, it seems that Stenhouse and Young memoirs can only speak to a vision of femininity if suffrage is completely left out of that vision.

In contrast to Stenhouse and Young vision of femininity, "Women in Politics" argues suffrage is a key component to becoming a true woman. Both groups of writers argue education is crucial to changing Mormon women's lives, but they do so differently. Stenhouse and Young believe Mormon women should educate themselves about the destructive nature of polygamy and abandon the LDS community, but their vision does not depict the actual world where Mormon women directly engage political issues. In contrast the *Exponent* is promoting literacy as a way to preserve the LDS community and engage in political action.

In September 1890 the LDS Church finally gave into the legal pressures¹² and the failed attempts at statehood¹³ and issued a proclamation that it no longer supported polygamy. The *Woman's Exponent's* October 15 issue ran a copy of the proclamation followed by an article titled "Women's Rights." Although the coverage of the proclamation ending polygamy came with no editorial commentary, "Women's Rights" did. Samuel W. Richards, the article's author, believed in a divinity that "shapes our way" and that men and women are spiritually connected to one another. Without the soul of a woman, Richards believes, man is lost and unable to find spiritual fulfillment. Because mothers are the keepers of the home, they are uniquely suited to "comprehend all that pertains to [man's] nature and wants" ("Women's Rights"). However, democracy is threatened because women are not allowed to participate in the spiritual wholeness of democracy and, as such, the nation's future is in ruin ("Women's Rights").

The juxtaposition of this argument against the proclamation ending plural marriage implies Mormon women were unfairly excluded from the decision making process that led to the government's decision to ban polygamy. Richards directly states that the current democracy is in danger ("Women's Rights"), and it is hard not to see, from a Mormon perspective, a connection between government oppression of religious ideas and the collapse of society. When Richards equates suffrage with spiritual union between man and woman, he is invoking the language of plural marriage. The *Doctrines and Covenants* describe plural marriage as a spiritual marriage between man and women on earth and in heaven (D&C 132:3-6) in which a man and women become a unified whole. When Richards invokes the language of spiritual union in political terms, he

combines the denial of suffrage and the denial of plural marriage into a single experience. In essence he combines spiritual growth and political action into a single issue.

In literacy terms, this particular article is deeply interwoven with Mormon culture and religion. As a reflection of a literate practice, “Women’s Rights” reflects a convergence of Mormon spiritual beliefs and the culmination of 40 years of the women’s movement and the polygamist struggle in America. Richards’s final condemnation of the American political system as “a political machine, run by politicians for political purposes” (“Women’s Rights”) reads as a defiant attempt to define Mormon womanhood in opposition to America norms. Richards’s article conflates women’s suffrage and Mormon religious practices, namely polygamy, into a single issue. Because they are denied their right to vote, Mormon women are denied their spiritual union with man both in the political system and in the home. The American political system that pressured Mormon leaders into abandoning their Thus, Mormon women are not defined by what they have, as anti-polygamist leaders would hope, but by what they have lost. Only a return to

The end of plural marriage did not bring an end to the struggle for a distinct feminine, Mormon identity, but the passing of the Edmund’s-Tucker act and the church’s prohibition on plural marriage divided the *Woman’s Exponent’s* focus between the cause for women’s rights on the national level and maintaining a sense of Mormon identity with those sisters who moved outside the United States’ jurisdiction. Beginning in the mid-1880s, the LDS Church began exploring the possibility of setting up missionary colonies in Canada and Mexico. The legal pressure to end polygamy forced the church to adopt this tactic for dealing with the United States government. After all when Brigham Young

originally moved to the Utah territory, when it was under Mexican control, and there was no reason to believe a similar move would not provide protection again for persecuted Mormons. Historian Martha Sonntag points out that plural marriage was ordained by God and while “stopping the practice was not at that point an option, relocation was” (qtd. in Romney 5).

The LDS Church set up over a dozen colonies throughout northern Mexico, each with the specific purpose of spreading the Mormon gospel and providing “refuge for [a] people, a place to which the eyes of those who are in jeopardy and who are oppressed may turn with some hope of finding some peace” (Romney 53). Although the LDS Church officially ended plural marriage in the United States in 1890, polygamist families were allowed to continue their life style in places like the Mexican colonies. These colonies were places of Mormon refuge where practitioners of the faith could live without fear of retribution from the United States Government.

During the 1890s, the decade after the official end to polygamy, *The Woman's Exponent* began featuring regular dispatches from Mormon colonies in Mexico. These articles provided a link between those Mormons living in Mexico with those still practicing polygamy in Utah. In addition, many of the issues featuring articles about life in Mexico also tried to further the cause of women's suffrage and women's equality, and dedicated to the political issues like suffrage. In this way the *Exponent's* editors were navigating a complex web of discursive communities and literacy skills. On the one hand, they were advancing a political agenda that would move women into the twentieth century, while on the other hand maintaining a close relationship with those women rejected by American society. The key to navigating this dualist identity was the

Exponent's ability to juggle two definitions of true womanhood and apply those definition to both life in Mexico and the need for political equality in the United States. Maintaining this duality demanded that Mormon women in Utah to be both literate in the woman's suffrage movement and in traditional plural marriage.

An early example of this duality appears in the September 1891 edition of the *Woman's Exponent*. Although brief, the article "Woman's Rights" blames a woman's oppression on her "brother man." The author, Sarah Layton, affirms the need to honor men, but asserts they are the cause for her unequal status in society. Considering that Utah women already have the right to vote, this call for political equality should be read as a call for political equality on the national stage. Layton's article demonstrates an important aspect of Mormon women's literacy practices. As I discussed earlier, the LDS Church valued both secular and religious knowledge in young men and women. In "Woman's Rights" we see a Mormon woman demonstrating her knowledge of secular political issues and advocating for change using her literacy skills.

In addition, Layton's choice of the word "brother" speaks directly to Mormon religious identity and highlights her ability to appeal directly to fellow Mormons. To explain the importance of the term 'brother' in Mormon culture and its use in print, I turn to critic Lisa Tait's exploration of Mormon periodicals. In her review of *The Young Woman's Journal*, another Mormon woman's journal, Tait explains "in common Mormon parlance, members referred to each other as 'sister' and 'brother'" (58). The use of fraternal terms like this created an "equal and personal relationship between editor and reader" (Tait 58). Furthermore, historians Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick remind us that Mormon woman were granted state suffrage in part because their religion held

such high regard for women and their position in Mormon society (155). Considering the cultural and religious implications associated with Mormon suffrage and Layton's use of 'brother,' it is not difficult to see her plea for equality as a part of a unique Mormon identity. She criticizes her male readers while reminding them of the special religious connection they share with Mormon women, a connection according to Mormon ideology that should supersede any national identity or national politics and promoted equality among the sexes.

In addition, this awareness of Mormon terminology illustrates Layton's ability to integrate her understanding of women's oppression and marginalization into her understanding of Mormon culture and bridge the two together. Stenhouse and Young employ a similar awareness of Mormon culture when they conclude their memoirs. Both writers invoke their sisterly relationship with potential Mormon women in their audience, but they do so with the intention of separating women from the larger Mormon community. Layton's language, in contrast, is intended to build and strengthen that community as it moves into the American mainstream.

This dual use of language to create a connection between readers in the *Woman's Exponent* extends into the paper's regular updates on the colonies in Mexico. In the same September 1891 edition that featured Layton's "Woman's Rights" there appears a rather lengthy "Letter From Mexico" from the Mormon settlement Colonia Diaz. I should note the very structure of this article, a letter from one woman to other women, is tied specifically to 19th century women's literacy practices. Nan Johnson argues that:

nineteenth -century letter-writing guides stress not only the everyday functions of correspondence in maintaining social relations and a well-run home, but also the inseparable relationship between belletristic manners

and what it meant in nineteenth -century American culture to act like a lady. (79)

In other words, letter writing as a literacy practice was intended to support women's domestic role and expectations of polite behavior. The very fact this article appears as a letter invokes very specific expectations about a woman's literacy practices by highlighting their innate femininity. However, the content of this letter works to support those expectations and works to subvert them as well. The unknown author opens with a salutation to E.B. Wells¹⁴, the well-known suffrage worker, who is quickly addressed as "my dear sister" and closes her letter with "I am your sister." We see then the same language used in "Woman's Rights" being used in a similar way to create a spiritual connection between the writer and her audience. However, this time the bond is meant to cross national boundaries and remind the audience of their shared identity with the writer and the other women in Mexico. Thus the salutation and the closing address are meant to bind writer and audience in a shared identity that transcends any shared national identity.

In effect, the accepted practice of writing letters fosters socially acceptable relationships. On the surface, the letter's content conforms to the social expectation of female letter writers. It largely focuses on local domestic practices and the ways in which Mormon women were adapting to their new environment. Its subjects are the everyday domestic functions that Johnson points to as acceptable subjects in women's letter writing; however, the penultimate paragraph makes the point that Mexico is an ideal place for the domestic sphere. The author reports:

our children are not thrown into temptation on every hand. No saloons are in our midst, no smoking or gambling. I have not seen one drunken person, nor seen one person smoke or speak a profane word since I have been here except by the Mexicans. ("Letter From Mexico")

The conditions she describes are very similar to those conditions polygamist women argued for in “A Mormon View of Marriage” some fourteen years earlier. Early defenders of polygamy believed there were so few men capable of living a righteous life that women risked their children’s moral safety by seeking a monogamous marriage with an unfit partner. With polygamy banned in the United States, according to the argument espoused in “A Mormon Woman’s View” it is no longer possible for Mormon women, who still hold to a belief in plural marriage, to find as many upstanding husbands.

Yet, here in Colonia Diaz, a refuge for plural marriage, there exists the very conditions polygamist women hoped for in Utah. Thomas Cottam Romney’s¹⁵ assertion that “every precaution was taken therefore to guard the chastity of the youth” (79) supports the idea that Colonia Diaz was treated as moral safe haven. It seems likely that Mormon women living in Utah who understood why Colonia Diaz was created would read into this letter an affirmation of the traditional Mormon woman’s life. As a letter, the article upholds the social expectations of a middle class American white woman. However, the letter’s content subverts those expectations by harkening back to an older definition of true womanhood, a definition rooted in plural marriage.

In the years immediately after the official end of polygamy in the United States, it seems *The Woman Exponent* took on the task of redefining what a woman was in this new era. Six weeks after the article “Woman’s Rights” appeared in the 15 October 1891 issue, a three column explanation describes what a woman is. The article “Woman” draws a distinct difference between those women who advance the cause of equality and those who hold back womankind. An ideal woman is one whose natural curiosity is used to “find out something that will be of mutual advantage to others, and the persons

immediately concerned” (Frances). The author, Frances, rejects the idea that women are “the weaker sex” and posits that women are “decidedly in the advance” (Frances) when it comes to moral development. If women show any weakness, the author believes it resides with those women “who [have] very little to do except in helping others to make her pretty” (Frances). Thus the author counters those arguments levied against the suffrage movement by highlighting a woman’s true nature and her potential benefit to the United States government while concurrently reminding her male readers “there would be no need of man losing his supper” (Frances). She manages to uphold an argument for suffrage without defeating the idea of true womanhood.

Frances concludes her appeal for suffrage by reminding her readers “that the men of Mormondom are the only men on the face of the earth who appreciate and estimate woman at her true value” (Frances). This passage explicitly supports Flexner and Fitzpatrick’s argument that the Mormon religion expressed an expectation of equality for women. The article builds on the spiritual connection and foundation implied in the previous month’s article “Women Rights” by overtly reminding Mormon men of their spiritual commitment to women. The article begins by arguing from a universal woman’s perspective, but concludes with a very specific call for Mormon men to act in support of women. No longer is suffrage argued for from an overt Mormon woman’s point-of-view that articulates her unique position among women. Instead the Mormon woman is generalized and recontextualized as a middle-class white woman. Her uniqueness as an individual is not supported by her belief in plural marriage. Instead this new Mormon woman is highly regarded as an equal to men. In essence, Mormon women are able to transition from the fringe of society to the center of the woman’s movement while still

maintaining a sense of uniqueness. Her identity is defined by all the qualities of true womanhood that are identified in the article, her charity, moral superiority, and domesticity, but she enjoys a special status among true women because Mormon men recognize her as such.

Like many editions of *The Woman's Exponent* in the early 1890s, the article "Woman" is accompanied by an update from the colonies in Mexico. Like "Letter From Mexico" in the September issue, this epistle begins with an address to Emmeline B. Wells and the salutation "dear sister" and concludes with "your sister in the cause of truth" (Gale). Just as before the intent is to draw a spiritual connection between writer and audience. Likewise, the content of "Reports" focuses on the Relief Society's efforts to build schools, attract members, raise funds for charity events, and generally develop life in Colonia Diaz. What the article demonstrates is an active public life for the Mormon women in Mexico.

As Romney reports, one of Colonia Diaz's first priorities was the creation of a school to educate young men and women (80-81). The Relief Society that submitted "Reports" for the *Woman's Exponent* was the very same group tasked with overseeing the school's creation and daily needs. In effect, the Mormon women in Mexico are living up to the ideals put forth in the article "Women." As one group of Mormon women living in Utah advocate for a more public role and call on Mormon men to support them, their sisters in Mexico, free of an oppressive government, are living that life with the support of their men. The connection created by the letter's salutation and closing must have reminded some of the *Exponent's* readers that a public role for women is possible, and that the identity espoused in "Women" is alive and well with their sisters south of the

border. In this sense the Mexican colonies exists as a place where the Mormon feminine ideal can thrive.

Moving ahead one year the 15 October 1892 edition, the *Exponent* featured among its standard array of fiction, poetry, advertisements the editors chose to reprint the contents of Barton O. Aylesworth's, president of Drake University, speech before a woman's suffrage banquet. In his speech Aylesworth makes an argument for equality between men and women by invoking slavery. He argues the "abjectest wretchedness of slavery is its contentment" (President Aylesworth). According to Aylesworth, those women who are still content not to vote or not to fight for equality are in bondage. Only the "emancipated woman is cleaner, happier, more useful, and far more respected by men and women alike" (President Aylesworth) than any woman unwilling to fight for her rights. In this instance we see Mormon women reprinting an argument for woman's suffrage that adopts the same language of enslavement that was used to describe their situation under polygamy only twenty years earlier. Just as I discussed in chapter two with Harriet Beecher Stowe, polygamy was often equated with slavery. Thus, the women Aylesworth is describing in his speech were very similar to the women living under polygamy; at least their perceived enslavement was what many woman's rights advocates believed about Mormon women.

This article marks a transition for Mormon women in the fight for equality and identity. Gone from the pages of the *Exponent* is any uniquely Mormon argument for suffrage. In its place is a more mainstream, at least within the woman's movement, argument for equality. By reprinting Aylesworth's evocation of the language of emancipation, the *Exponent's* editors are at least tacitly employing of the language of the

larger first wave feminist movement. Furthermore, this shift towards the larger feminist movement is supported by the article “Woman’s Suffrage Convention.” Appearing in the same issue, the column recounts the Utah Woman’s Suffrage Association election of delegates for the Women’s Convention at the 1893 World’s Fair. By appearing at the World’s Fair and discussing women’s issues, the Mormon women of Utah had transitioned from the hapless victims to outright advocates for their cause. This new place within the new larger women’s movement demonstrates the rapid speed at which Mormon women could adopt new ideological standards and become literate in the new groups power dynamics.

Yet even with this move towards the center of the feminist movement, the *Exponent* did not completely abandon its representation of more Mormon families. The very same issue mentioned above also included in its final pages a report from the Relief Society in Colonia Juarez, one of the largest LDS colonies in Mexico. Within Teasdale’s discussions of hymns sung and attendance is an exhortation that Mormon women stay “true to the trust reposed in them in filling all the obligations of true womanhood” (Teasdale). The article continues asserting the expectation that these women will work for the “establishment of righteousness on earth” by acting as examples of and encouraging “the virtues of modesty, purity, and chastity.” In her post script, Teasdale goes on to claim that Mexico “is good country for the latter day saints” (Teasdale). There are three important aspects of this seemingly innocuous status report about the relief society. First the author reaffirms the definition of true womanhood and its relationship to Mormon women. Secondly, Teasdale connects that definition to Mexico itself, thereby transplanting the meaning of true womanhood to a new context and a new nationality.

Lastly, the woman drafting the report offers an important degree of ethos to the argument for true womanhood, as the Teasdale family name was a well-known family surname.

Although I am unable to narrow down the specific member of the Teasdale family associated with the initials ‘M.E’, it is likely the author is related to George Teasdale, who was the head Mormon missionaries in Mexico, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles¹⁶, and a practitioner of plural marriage. The author denotes her position as secretary in the Relief Society in her closing, a position held by important members of the community. This position within this women’s origination combined with the associations of her surname, creates a powerful ethos through which M.E. Teasdale can define true womanhood and stress the importance of Mexico in sustaining that definition. As a relative in such a prominent family, a family associated with plural marriage, some Mormon readers would surely recognize the name Teasdale and the association of true womanhood with plural marriage. For those readers this report about the Relief Society’s work in Mexico must have read as an affirmation of a way of life lost in the United States. Thus, for those Mormon women who still associated plural marriage with true womanhood, this article extends that identity across national boundaries into a country where the practice of plural marriage was still tolerated.

The juxtaposition of President Aylesworth article with the update from Colonia Juarez suggest a complex system of literacy practices for the *Exponent*’s editors. On the front pages, the *Exponent* demonstrates a command of mainstream women’s rights movement, while on the back pages the editors continued the language of traditional Mormon femininity. The *Exponent*’s editors managed to become masters of multiple and conflicting literacies. They adopted the ideological literacy of the women’s movement

and used it to question the dominant American power structure that prevented women's equality. At the same time, the editors maintained a conflicting ideological literacy, the language of polygamy, which would have put them at odds with the mainstream women's movement.

Although the *Woman's Exponent* would continue to publish for an additional quarter century after the end of sanctioned polygamy in Utah, its original purpose of defending the rights of polygamist women came to an end in 1890 and began advocating for all women's rights. While it was in operation the newspaper provided an outlet for Mormon, feminine identity. Within its pages, Mormon women found a place where the combined influences of their religion and education could come to together and express a vision of Mormon, feminine identity as defined by Mormon women. The religious call to educate young women a generation before the *Woman's Exponent* began publication paid off by creating a generation of women capable of articulating, through writing, a vision of themselves.

At the height of the polygamy debate the *Woman's Exponent* represented literacy in its finest application. Mormon women used its pages to advocate for suffrage, define a unique and new domestic sphere in the American landscape, and promote what they believed to be a purer vision of marriage. Although men at times did contribute to the *Woman's Exponent*, it was always under a woman's direct editorial control. Its expressed notions of femininity, morality, and politics were in keeping with other women's periodicals at the time; however, the Exponent differed in that it fostered an identity for women outside the American mainstream. The writers who contributed to the *Woman's*

Exponent did not see themselves as victims of their gender or life style, but as champions of their way of life.

There are limitations to what this study can tell us about Mormon feminine identity. My work here only represents Mormon femininity as expressed by upper middle-class women who were, in one way or another, closely linked to the LDS church's power structure. Both Stenhouse and Young were married to some of the Mormon Church's most powerful male members, while the *Exponent's* editorial board consisted of high ranking Relief Society women. These women's opinions either reflected the idyllic view of Mormon women as articulated by its white middle-class leadership or challenged that view. Yet, the Mormon church was made up of more than white, middle-class women.

More work needs to be done to recover the view of Mormon women outside the middle-class. The LDS community actively recruited converts from native populations and western European countries all throughout the 19th century. Yet, little is known about their interpretations of Mormon femininity. Salt Lake City was, at one point, home to the highest native Hawaiian population in the continental United States, many of whom came as Mormon converts. Nevertheless, the memoirs and the *Exponent* says almost nothing about their presence in the Mormon community and their ideas about polygamy.

What this study can tell us are the ways middle-class women spoke to each other. However, juxtaposing Stenhouse and Young's memoirs against the *Woman's Exponent* complicates our understanding of women's literacy practices. Both anti-polygamy Mormon women and the pro-polygamy Mormon women benefited from a culture that educated women and encouraged them to engage in the secular world. The

women represented in this study showed an adaptive understanding of the larger cultural debates surrounding them. Regardless of their stance on polygamy each of these women understood what the larger, more dominant power structure expected of them and used those expectations to frame their arguments.

But their awareness of the dominant power structure calls into question what we, as a 21st century audience members, can truly understand about the lives of Mormon polygamist women. Irrespective of their position on polygamy, the women in this study represented a marginalized and muted group. Their only means of speaking to the power structures around them was through that power structure's expectations. As a result, the arguments put forth by these women are filtered through other people's definitions of femininity. As an audience, this means we may have no real understanding of how these women saw each other. If there is a truth to be found in their arguments it a truth heavily filtered through cultural expectations. Perhaps all we can know is how well these women talked back to the respective group they deemed oppressive.

In addition, the attempts by Mormon women to either argue for against polygamy complicates our understanding of domestic literacy and its ability to empower marginalized women. Both polygamy's supporters and its detractors employed domestic literacy as a means to challenge various power structures, but their arguments say more about the dominate power structure's expectations than it does about the women who employed it. Women like Stenhouse and Young may have been former Mormons with original insight into the lives of Mormon women and polygamy, an insight that might be best described outside the domestic literacy experience. However, their work is so closely tied to existing definitions of femininity and the domestic sphere that it is difficult to

determine whether or not their descriptions are accurate or an attempt to meet their audience's expectations. The same ambiguity can be applied to the editors of the *Woman's Exponent*. After all, they were just as likely to describe their lifestyle in same terms the dominate group expected from them.

This inherent ambiguity calls into question domestic literacy's ability to empower women and effect social change. If each group must adhere to the dominate group's expectations and definitions, then neither group is ever really empowered to articulate a vision for themselves. Regardless of where they stood on the issue of polygamy, Mormon women debating the cause had to conform their arguments to Protestant middle-class expectations. It is important to note that the original goal of the Mormons exodus to Utah was to create a wholly unique society separate from the American main stream, but the world Mormon women argued for in the latter half of the nineteenth century looked increasing like the very same culture they originally fled.

These women's attempts to master domestic literacy and define true womanhood are, ultimately, symptomatic of their loss of empowerment and their growing conformity. If women like Stenhouse and Young wanted to break free of the Mormon Church and create an independent life for themselves, they had to do so based on dominate group's expectations. In essence, Stenhouse and Young traded one dominate group for another. Even though they challenged a previous dominate group through their literacy practices they had to borrow those literacy practices from a different and already existing power structure. As a result, their use of domestic literacy should not be read as a sign of their self-empowerment but as a failure to be truly independent.

The same failure can be applied to the editors of the *Woman's Exponent*. In their efforts to define polygamy in terms the dominate, Protestant group could understand, they adopted that groups language and expectations. Their resulting failure and their ultimate flight from the United States, suggests the limitation and persuasive capabilities of domestic literacy. What then is a marginalized group to do if co-opting the dominate group's rhetoric only reinforces their marginalized status, or fails to persuade the dominate group of their right to exists?

Notes

Chapter One

¹ In 1847 the Utah territory was still part of Mexico and would remain so until 1849. Likewise, Mormon pioneers originally named their new territory Deseret, but for the purpose of clarity I will use Utah to as the name for this region.

² Both of these states were home to Mormon settlements before the exodus to Utah

³ This quote comes from the *Woman's Exponent's* masthead.

⁴ By literacy practice I am using the term as defined by Brian Street. A literacy practice is “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive process” (Street, *New Literacy*, 438). These practices also reflect the writer’s ideological preconceptions.

⁵ Among the various other facts refute the book’s authenticity, Maria Ward’s memoir account of Joseph Smith’s death is widely inaccurate.

⁶ In addition to being T.B.H. Stenhouse’s third wife, Zina Young was an outspoken defender of polygamy and contributing editor to *The Woman's Exponent*, the newspaper I will discuss prominently in chapter two.

Chapter Two

¹ Founded by William S. Godbe, the Church of Zion or Godbeism was an off shoot the LDS church in the mid-19th-century. This group regarded themselves as mystics and were outspoken critics of Brigham Young’s ecclesiastical and economic policies.

² As Fluhman points out, many critics of the Mormon religion feared the Zionist movement that established Deseret as a threat to democracy. Joseph Smith’s presidential bid in 1844 did assuage peoples’ fears that Mormons were secretly plotting a theocracy in American either.

³ This part of her argument is supported by the historian Jessie L. Embry who argued that polygamy did not last long enough to create traditions and customs to regulate individual households (56).

Chapter Three

¹ Plural marriages were considered to be an extension of the afterlife. The wives and family you created in your earthly life followed you into the afterlife.

² This quote reflects the Mormon practice of spiritually sanctifying a man before he can take a plural wife. Men had to be certified by the LDS Church as morally upstanding before they could take a second wife.

³ The strengthened Edmunds-Turk Act of 1886 increased anti-polygamy laws and threatened to disenfranchise the LDS Church’s legal status

⁴ Although Utah had more than twice as many people to gain statehood in 1890, it failed to do so because of anti-polygamy sentiments.

⁵ This is most likely Emmeline B. Wells, editor of *The Woman's Exponent* and noted woman's suffrage activist.

⁶ Romney's book *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* is a first person account of the founding of the Mormon colonies in northern Mexico.

⁷ As defined by the LDS church's official website the Quorum of Twelve Apostles is the second highest governing body within the church. They are charged with spreading the church's message and advising the LDS president.

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