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# OxyMormon: Feminism Ain't Got No Place on the Pulpit... Or Does It?

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*When I walk into the foyer, I stop to notice the artwork. Beautiful pictures of billowy clouds and two white men in flowing robes: God, the Father, and his Son, Jesus Christ. More pictures adorn the walls: angel men jubilantly blowing horns; a prophet man, head bowed, laying his hands on another man's head. Off in the distance there are small offices with men in dark suits counting money, shaking hands, meeting behind closed doors. The organ plays in the distance, and I can smell the pungent aroma of dirty diapers and cheap Aqua Velva. I follow the sound of the organ and walk into the chapel. At the front of the room, an elevated pulpit emerges with three men sitting high in a pew behind it presiding over the congregation. To the left, a section where the young boys busily prepare the sacrament: Wonder bread and water. Where are the women? In the congregation, busily tending to their wiggling children, crying and crawling under their feet.*

Journal entry  
 July 2007

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If somebody had asked me when I was a teenager what it meant to be a Mormon girl in Montana, I would have given a very different answer than today. My answer, no doubt, would have consisted of hand-me-down rhetoric I had worked so diligently to memorize and that I knew would garner my parents' approval: "I know this church is true, I know that Joseph Smith is a true prophet, I know that President Spencer W. Kimball is a true prophet," and so on. I believed what I was told, and I strived diligently to keep up the appearance of the good little bishop's daughter, when inside all I felt was guilt, shame and confusion. Guilt for exploring my sexuality at fifteen against church standards (God would not love me if I had premarital sex) and shame for not being able to talk about such a profound experience with anyone (especially my parents). I then waiting alone, terrified, at a Planned Parenthood clinic as a result of that profundity and confusion because of the double standards that enveloped me when people like my father could say one thing and do another without question.

It has only been in the last few years, upon my return to finish tertiary education, that I finally understand what it meant and means for me to be that confused teenage Mormon girl growing up in Montana. This is due largely to my discoveries in feminist and gender studies and reading those who, like Cherrie Moraga (whom I reference throughout this essay), came before me and so valiantly carved a path for feminist voices to be heard. In *From a Long Line of Vendidas: Chicanas and Feminism*, Moraga presents a self-reflexive examination of identity shaping through race and sex. She explains a sexual legacy passed down to the

Mexicana/Chicana culture as being one of "betrayal," pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure, Malinche, who was blamed for the "bastardization of the indigenous people of Mexico" because she slept with Cortez (the white man who conquered the Indian people of Mexico and destroyed their culture) (Moraga 1986, 174). Moraga makes note of the obvious resemblance between Malinche and the biblical Eve image and discusses how damaging the perpetuation of these myths are to women.

Just as Moraga examines the effects this myth has had on her identity, I will, as a Mormon (although I dis-identify with that label except in the context of my upbringing) and a feminist, explore certain myths perpetuated within the Mormon culture and what effects they have had on my identity as well as my relationship with other Mormon women. Three myths I would like to explore revolve around the concepts of plural marriage (polygamy), priesthood, and the notion of Heavenly Mother. With respect to my relationship with other Mormon women, I am under the strong impression that Mormonism and feminism cannot co-exist within the current patriarchal structure of the Mormon Church, and yet there is a large body of scholarship to tell me otherwise. I wish to take a closer look at some of this scholarship in order to find out what women who call themselves "Mormon feminists" are saying and how—if at all—they maintain agency and autonomy in an institution that systematically devalues them (Ozorak 1996, 17). What are some, if any, feminist strategies being practiced in the Church today to promote gender equality and is this equality being recognized? If so, how and by whom?

It is no secret that polygamy has long-standing ties to the Mormon church. I was about 12 when the first of many myths was handed down to me. I should have known I was a budding feminist when the first thing I asked my mother was, "So you mean women can have more than one husband, too?" When the answer was an unsatisfactory no, I proceeded to ask why. "Well," my mother explained, "that's just not the way it's supposed to be." Again, confusion set in. You mean to tell me that plural marriage (this is the gentler, more palatable naming of polygamy) was reserved for a man but a woman was not afforded the same right? When I asked her why polygamy was practiced in the first place and how it came to be, she relayed the following myth.

### **Myth #1: Polygamy was necessary to save the women and children.**

I was always told that polygamy was only practiced so that all the women involved were sure to be taken care of. My mother would gently say, "In the early days, Mormons were being persecuted so severely and the Mormon men were dying off so rapidly that no one could take care of the women and children. It wasn't that the men wanted to do it, but it was necessary." Deep down, I think she really believed this and, of course, loving my mother, I believed it, too. While it was true that Mormons were persecuted in the early days of the church, this was not the reason for the practice of polygamy. In early Church history, around 1840, Church founder and prophet Joseph Smith claimed to receive a direct revelation from God to institute the practice of polygyny among a group of his closest associates. It was justified because it was practiced in Old Testament times and Mormonism is believed to be the latter day restoration of Christ's church (Smith and Kunz 2010, 466).

This polygamy myth seemingly abdicates men from any responsibility for their sexual desires or need for control and power. Turning the responsibility on women to have to be taken care of and obligating men to do it promotes a damaging discourse that delineates gender roles, presenting women as weaker and establishing an imbalanced power dynamic. This behavior

bears a disturbing resemblance to the type of emotional abuse practiced whenever husbands cheat on their wives, then manipulate them into believing it is their fault. Not only is the man blameless, but also because God revealed it, he is actually more saintly for following the teachings of the Lord.

To provide greater insight as to why polygamy may have played an important role in shaping Mormonism, it is important to note that traditional heterosexual marriage is highly privileged and considered the foundation of the Mormon religion. As Foster (1991) points out in his study on Mormonism, the institution of "family" is central to LDS theology and religious practice and is the basis of social order and development within LDS culture (205). Thomas B. Holman and John R. Harding (1996) point out "for Latter-day Saints, marriage and family are more than a matter of social convention of individual need or fulfillment; they are fundamental to personal salvation". I was taught to believe that, according to Church standards, marriage is necessary for attaining the highest degree of celestial glory and those who do not marry cannot receive it. Simply put, without being married in the temple, it is not possible to get into heaven. No wonder I felt pressure. It is this heteronormative construct of family around which the church completely centers itself, as evidenced by the lyrics from a Sunday school song I grew up singing:

I have a family here on earth; they are so good to me  
I want to share my life with them for all eternity

Families can be together forever, through Heavenly Father's plan  
I always want to be with my own family, and the Lord has shown me how I can,  
The Lord has shown me how I can.

While I am in my early years  
I'll prepare most carefully  
So I can marry in God's temple

Families can be together forever, through Heavenly Father's plan  
I always want to be with my own family, and the Lord has shown me how I can,  
The Lord has shown me how I can. (Gardner and Watkins 1980)

But this family is a certain kind of family, a specific ideal of a perfect family, dare I say, white, heterosexual family. Maybe growing up in Montana had something to do with it, but I do not recall multiracial families, same-sex families or anything remotely related to Nancy Polikoff's (2008) notion of family included in this ideal Mormon family (6). In *Beyond Straight (and Gay) Marriage*, Polikoff provides a thorough analysis of the history, laws, and concepts surrounding marriage and calls for diversification in defining family. She makes an excellent point that both the conservative Christian marriage movement (of which Mormonism is a part) and the marriage equality movement focus on marriage, but that neither of these want to meet the needs of all families. The marriage movement's leading spokespeople argue that the intrinsic purpose of marriage is about uniting a man and a woman to raise their biological children (Polikoff 2008, 6).

In Mormonism, anything different from the traditional heteronormative family setting (for example, a single woman adopting a child without a father) is discouraged (Beaman 2001,

12). The idea of the perfect Mormon family is an eternal family, bound together for all time and eternity by a sacred practice performed in the temple known as sealing. Knowing how important marriage is to the Mormon belief system, it was natural for me, as a good Mormon girl, to feel pressure to subscribe to the marriage ideal and shame when it did not happen for me. I believed that not only would I be rejected from my family for not adhering to the principles of the gospel, but also that God would not love me. I will never forget the day my father told me that my greatest lot in life as a woman was to be a wife and mother and that I would only be truly happy by attaining those things. At his insistence, at the age of 18, I attended Brigham Young University (BYU) because he believed, "it would be a good place to find a husband," and he would not entertain any other options. Looking through the lens of race/sex identity, as Moraga (1986) does, the construct of marriage is a result of the imposition of heterosexuality on women living under Capitalist patriarchy in order to control them:

For without male imposed social and legal control of our reproductive function, reinforced by the Catholic Church, and the social institutionalization of our roles as sexual and domestic servants to men, Chicanas might very freely "choose" to do otherwise, including being sexually independent from and/or with men. In fact, the forced "choice" of the gender of our sexual/love partner seems to precede the forced "choice" of the form (marriage and family) that partnership might take. The control of women begins through the institution of heterosexuality. (Moraga 1986, 182)

My experience parallels that of Moraga in terms of religion. She discusses control of women through the social institutionalization of roles such as wives and mothers and of women as domestic servants. It is not my intention to imply that women cannot gain great satisfaction in fulfilling the roles of wife and mother, or they are not feminist if they serve domestically. Rather, it is to illuminate the point that when a young woman is told that her sole purpose in life and value as a woman is only to be a wife and mother, a damaging belief system of limitation and oppression is created. This repressive belief system manifested itself for me in my feelings of inadequacy for not finding a husband in my twenties (and thirties) as well as the constant pressure to look for a mate instead of develop myself as a person. It meant asking myself if I was pretty enough to get a husband and being defined by whether or not I married a man.

Gender is theologically important in the Mormon religion. It prescribes roles and responsibilities, acts as a map to salvation, and is the basis for distinction and hierarchy (Cornwall 2001, 240). The hierarchy of the Church structure is completely patriarchal and women are not allowed to hold positions of authority. One key position of authority comes as a result of being a member of the Priesthood (which women are excluded from participating in). The Priesthood is the male hierarchal structure of the church that maintains authority over every aspect of the church (including the women's organization, The Relief Society). Only Mormon men can participate in the Priesthood, a calling which brings with it responsibilities such as preparing and blessing the sacrament, performing baptisms, and holding church offices such as Elder or Stake President. While a woman's concerns may be heard, ultimately, all decisions are made by male priesthood holders. Women cannot hold the priesthood and are not given the authority for any church power, such as healing, blessings, revelation, church decisions or other priestly duties.

## **Myth #2: Women should not want to participate in the Priesthood.**

At a very early age, I asked if I could become a member of the Priesthood, and I was told that I could not—that it was only for the boys and men. It was explained to me that women had other important roles, such as motherhood and being a good wife, and that they needed to focus all their energies on doing those well. “Besides,” my mother would ask, “why would you want all the responsibilities of the Priesthood?” Her standard answer (and the one she convincingly continues to tell herself) is that the men in the Priesthood have so much work to do that she could not and would not know how to take care of “all that responsibility.” I remind her that, as the devoted mother of six children, she knows the meaning of hard work and the value of choice. Choosing not to do something is very different from not being given the opportunity at all. It is this myth that perpetuates the notion that women are inferior. Being told that I could not do something just because I am a woman felt unfair and constricting and repressive. I wanted to have the choice; I wanted to be able to say, “No, that doesn’t work for me” or “No, I don’t want that responsibility.” To not even be invited told me that I did not have a voice within that system; that I did not matter.

Although church leaders claim to give women's domestic roles top priority in order to promote the stability of the family, and some attempt has been made to equate the role of mother with the priesthood (Mauss 1995, 527-528), which is derived from the "order of law," there is little convincing evidence that the roles are held in equal esteem by church hierarchy (Cornwall 2001, 245). Lori Beaman (2001), in her article *Molly Mormons, Mormon Feminists and Moderates*, cites Marie Cornwall in her work in *Contemporary Mormonism*, asserting the increased oppression of feminism within the church system:

It is no secret that in recent years church hierarchy has taken numerous steps to squash the feminist impetus amongst some LDS women, which would see greater institutional support for increased roles for women, especially in institutional decision-making. The Relief Society remains the public presentation of women's contribution to Mormonism, and even this has been diminished over time as "the tradition of women leading women became lost in an emphasis on priesthood line and priesthood authority." (Beaman 2001, 80)

Beaman goes on to examine Bushman and Bushman's argument about the reorganization of the Relief Society:

In this retrenchment, the financially autonomous Women's Relief Society, organized by Joseph Smith as a companion to the male priesthood, was placed firmly under the control of the priesthood. As a result, women within the Society have lost leadership positions as well as considerable visibility and power in the church. (Beaman 2001, 80)

This communicated to me a language of power and control based on a sense of threat, that men took power away from women because it posed a threat. Although the power was never equal, the idea of it was still too much for men to consider. The language excludes women and renders

them (us, me) invisible. Mormon theology focuses on three distinctly different male figures of divinity: God, the Father (or Heavenly Father), his son, Jesus Christ (also referred to as God) and the Holy Ghost. Each of these divine figures function in very specific ways in the Mormon Church, and all referred to as figures of authority. There is no reference in any of the Church approved scripture which acknowledges or grants authority to a divine Heavenly Mother or female figure.

**Myth #3: Heavenly Mother is not mentioned because Heavenly Father does not want her to be disrespected.**

My mother instilled in me at a very early age the notion of a Heavenly Mother. Prayers are always supposed to be reverently addressed to Heavenly Father with no mention of Heavenly Mother anywhere. When I inquired about her invisibility, I was told that it was out of respect. My mother would gently say, "So many people took the Lord's name in vain that Heavenly Father did not want this to happen to his beloved wife, so it was out of protection for her that people were forbidden to talk about her." Although mention is made in several church records and accounts of the notion of a Heavenly Mother, she is not recognized as any figure of spiritual power. In *The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven*, Linda Wilcox (1992) discusses a church leader's stance on the topic of Heavenly Mother:

In a meeting for church regional representatives on 5 April 1991, Gordon B. Hinckley, first counselor in the First Presidency, responded to reports that "here and there, prayers have been offered to our Mother in Heaven." He had searched and found "nowhere in the Standard Works an account where Jesus prayed other than to His Father in Heaven...I have looked in vain for any instance...[of] 'a prayer to our Mother in Heaven.'" He said he "consider[s] it inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven" and instructed regional representatives to "counsel priesthood leaders to be on the alert for the use of this expression and to make correction where necessary. Such correction can be handled in a discreet and inoffensive way. But it should be firm and without equivocation." (Wilcox 1992, 10)

The invisibility of a divine feminine figure, as equal to that of the masculine, is incredibly damaging to women because it continues to render them voiceless and unrecognizable, to one another as well as to men. Their point of reference to each other is only through a masculine perspective, and how can they gain approval and affirmation from men who set themselves above women as opposed to providing one another with recognition and validation? It also sets them up to be weak, as if they cannot think or speak for themselves. How can women respect each other when they are not respecting themselves?

There is a rhetoric that hangs over Mormon women that they are special and valued creatures: All are daughters of Heavenly Father with a divine purpose. Yet this rhetoric of value does not match real-world practice. Given that the current patriarchal structure of the Mormon Church still promotes unbalanced gender roles and does not allow women to hold positions of authority, I am inclined to believe that feminism cannot co-exist with Mormonism. My relationship to other Mormon women as a result of this somewhat essentialist assumption has

been a mix of distance, skepticism, empathy and frustration. Until now, I was reluctant to see Mormon women as facing the same tensions, ambivalence, contradictions, complexities, struggle, frustrations, fears, and desires that other feminists do. Somehow, they were removed, disconnected, and living in idyllic oblivion. In my research, however, I find that, although relatively small, there are an increasing number of Mormon women who actually identify themselves as feminists (Ozorak 1996). Those who lay claim to this moniker would argue that feminism is very much alive within, and even belonging to, the Mormon Church, perhaps now more than ever. I would like to know the scope of this feminism and how it is (if it is) surviving within a systematically devaluing institution.

### **Mormon Feminism**

There is a growing body of work by Mormon feminists broaching issues surrounding inequity, authority, women's work as healers, and the concept of God the Mother, as evidenced in works such as Maxine Hanks' anthology *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*. Hanks (1992) illuminates the history and development of Mormon feminism and brings together over 150 voices in this compilation with the aim of showing commonalities among women and to "legitimize feminist voices that reemerge from one decade to the next" (2). She makes clear that the book is not intended to lobby or persuade (possibly because this would jeopardize her membership in the church), but rather is written for and about women to show women's religious equality despite the inevitable struggle for identity within a male-identified religion and society:

Feminism has always existed in Mormonism. It makes sense that Mormon women would be feminists: within a male-centered religion and discourse, feminism and feminist theology are necessary. Feminist theology currently is coming of age in Mormonism. (Hanks 1992, 3)

She goes on to cite "republican motherhood," or the patriotic duty to bear and raise children, as antithetical to feminism. While Polikoff, Moraga, and I would unanimously agree with this line of thinking, I am wondering how women who remain within the church are able to engage in a feminist practice and still adhere to the church's rules, knowing its strict advocacy of confining gender roles. As Polikoff (2008) points out, there is an insistence on the specialized roles of husbands and wives among proponents of the marriage movement, quoting BYU law professor Lynn Wardle: "It is the integration of the universe of gender differences associated with sexual identity that constitutes the core and essence of marriage" (81). Wardle does not elaborate on what this universe of gender differences comprises, but given that BYU strictly enforces Church policies through its staff and faculty, it seems fair to assume Wardle's universe is one which relegates itself to defining sexual identity by male and female genitalia.

One of the key contradictions for Mormon feminists to grapple with is a politics around authority and visibility. While autonomy or personal authority is encouraged by Mormon theology and doctrine, it is generally ignored, and women's revelation and authority are suppressed in the church. As Hanks (1992) articulates, because authority in the church exists as a male discourse, Mormon women have struggled for and lacked authority and are always either conforming to or resisting male perspective, male identity ("Prologue"). Her vision for change

comes in urging women to validate their diversity and that the best strategy for women is to create new discourse:

Many women have found the cost of living in male perspective to be too high. Our task is two-fold: What strategies can women use to resist and alter male discourse? How can women create female discourse? I propose four approaches: Deconstruction, Editing, Authoring, and Mysticism. (Hanks 1992, "Prologue")

In *Why Shouldn't Mormon Women Want This Priesthood?*, Marian Yeates takes aim at how women are structurally excluded and denied authority within Mormonism on the basis of gender. A practicing Mormon, she questions why "this Priesthood" excludes women and why the church enforces this exclusion. She actually claims to not seek priesthood because she resists incorporation into a male system that she believes is already "grossly overextended and badly out of balance" (Yeates 1992, 356). For Yeates, as long as women seek acceptance within a male system, their efforts to make real, female-defined changes will be frustrated. Instead, she calls for a radical overhaul of the system and proposes a "complement theory" where women assert their own authority and work to create a viable counterpart to male priesthood (Yeates 1992, 355). Although she encourages women to avoid being part of the male system and calls for a radical overhaul of that system, she remains within that very system, setting up a contradiction. How can she assert authority and create a viable counterpart within a system that would not hesitate to "expel" her for nonconformity? By definition, would change not have to come from outside a system that does all it can to render her invisible?

With respect to women's visibility (or invisibility rather) within the church, Wilcox further explores the elusive concept of Heavenly Mother and the lack of theology developed to characterize a relationship to her. She brings to light the authoritative backlash emerging since the 1990s against developing such theology and worship. "Increasingly Mormon women are warned by church leaders to avoid such 'beginnings of apostasy'" over which "some few women of the church appear to be greatly exercised" and "evidently are seeking to lead others in the paths which they are following" (Wilcox 1992, 12).

In *Healing the Motherless House*, Carol Lynn Pearson (1992) also calls into question the lack of recognition of the divine feminine and goes so far as to name Jesus Christ as a feminist. She eloquently points out that women are "living in a Motherless house" and that separation of maleness and femaleness in deity is damaging (233). Both Dorice Williams Elliott and Lavina Fielding Anderson interrogate the structure of the gender-exclusionary language in scriptures, hymns, meetings, and prayers, pointing out that the arrangement of words both determines, and is determined by, how one arranges reality. Anderson (1992) explores ways to implement a gender-inclusive language and calls for changing the traditions (217). She suggests the need for inclusionary language but backs down and diplomatically makes the disclaimer, "I am not at this point urging that we pray publicly to Mother in Heaven. I propose only a first step toward that solution." It is at this point I question why Anderson makes this disclaimer. It seems futile to expend energy re-shaping and using one's voice if one does not have freedom to exercise it in public. She calls to "never acquiesce in justifying inequities" and yet appears to do precisely that by then saying one should not be public and open about inclusionary language. This contradiction undermines the change she is seemingly trying to create. Elliott suggests all current printed church materials be carefully screened for sexist language and stereotyping and urges

Mormon women not to wait to be asked to be heard (Elliot 1992, 208). She does so, however, by saying her intent is not to criticize but rather suggest. Her politeness and diplomacy appears to be designed more to avoid alienation than to create waves and risk excommunication.

In *Molly Mormons, Mormon Feminists and Moderates*, Beaman (2001) interviews 28 Mormon women in order to examine the “process of boundary negotiation for Mormon women” and the “strategies they use to maintain autonomy within institutionalized patriarchy as well as how they make sense of the church prescriptions on male authority within family and church hierarchy” (65). According to Beaman (2001), the Mormon women she interviewed negotiated their identities in very different ways and fell into three broad categories: Molly Mormons (or good Mormon women who follow church teachings), Moderates, and Feminists (70). It is important to note here that Beaman (2001) repeatedly brings up the tensions that emerge for women who do not fit the ideal for Mormon women, particularly noting single Saints and how they must negotiate the unsettling boundaries of church teachings to find a place for themselves (12).

Among the Mormon feminists I have included here and many more in my research, the struggle for identity within the constraints of the church is evident, and yet they choose to remain. Within each voice are contradictions. While these women express feminist ideas and urge change, they make the disclaimers that their intention is not to criticize but to suggest and not to lobby, but to gently propose. They reject the authoritative doctrine outright and yet stay, operating within it, being careful not to offend. It does not seem possible to outright reject the doctrine and yet stay within the practice of Mormonism, and it seems difficult at best to change a system from within when to speak means to be ostracized and excommunicated. It is tempting to make the assertion that staying within Mormonism is impossible if one is to engage in an honest feminist project; however, I must look at my own situation to examine the complexities of the paradox. My culture and heritage is Mormon and I do not practice it, yet I am still technically a Mormon because I have not been excommunicated. I reject its teachings and its patriarchal structure and do not want to operate within it. Although I do not identify myself as a Mormon now, I feel rooted in Mormon culture and cannot deny my heritage. Does this make me a Mormon feminist?

Although Moraga (1986) briefly mentions religion as a factor in the systematic oppression of women, her focus revolves primarily around examining identity alliances between race and sex (181). It seems limiting not to include religion as a much greater part of that alliance structure since it is my religious culture that has so greatly impacted the shaping of my identity. My struggle for identity includes a triangular alliance among sex, religion, and race. Where race is a crucial component for Moraga in the tensions she expresses as a Chicana lesbian woman, it is difficult for me to claim that race/sex parallel in the same way, having been raised a beneficiary of white privilege. Identity is shaped largely by our relationship to what oppresses us, and being white has not oppressed me in the same way being Mexican or Black would. My experience of racial tension is rooted in white guilt. Being a woman, however, as well as a Mormon (and a Mormon woman), does oppress me.

It is evident that there is an emergence of feminist voices within Mormon culture that articulate the struggle of oppression. Hanks (1992) makes the important point that women have collaborated in their own subordination through their acceptance of the sex-gender system and the destructiveness in preventing someone from “authoring” (creating) or having a voice (“Prologue”). She goes on to point out that women lack credit for their contribution and how

damaging this is. "Whether our cultural discourses and systems reflect anonymous female perspective or no female perspective at all, the effect is the same—they are silenced" (Hanks 1992, "Prologue"). She calls for women to create a new discourse to empower themselves, one which includes authorship and creativity. She envisions a role for feminism within Mormonism:

Because feminist texts emerge and re-emerge without altering male discourse, women either need to alter the male discourses that enfold them or create female/feminine discourse. The church may not be able to grow into Zion without feminism. Neither patriarchy nor feminism are Zion; feminism modifies patriarchy to make Zion possible. Zion is a way of being, a way of living the kingdom of God within. (Hanks 1992, "Prologue")

In light of this call to action, how do contemporary Mormon feminists remain in an institution that they do not deny systematically devalues and oppresses them? They are connecting on a larger scale and building a feminist community. This is evidenced in literature and scholarly work, as well as by the increasing popularity of Mormon feminist blogs. According to Caroline Kline, blogs by Mormon women are a relatively recent phenomenon, having only been in existence for the last few years, and are "creating innovative and creative approaches to living and thinking about the Mormon faith" (Kline 2009, 1). The blogs are controlled, written, and often designed by women, and they get to control the conversation. As Kline points out, because this is a forum outside Church boundaries, they are not constrained:

Women are free to bring up gender issues, which might be taboo in a church setting, and there are no repercussions, social or ecclesiastical, for not embracing Church norms or for being critical of certain doctrines and policies, repercussions they might face if we were to bring up such topics in church. (Kline 2009, 4)

Kline sheds light on the religious ambivalence many Mormon women feel being both insiders and outsiders within the Mormon tradition, but cites the open virtual space of Mormon feminist blogs as a tool for keeping women in the church rather than turning them away from it:

...the blogging world often operates as a ministry to those women who are seeking and questioning and hurting because of the patriarchal doctrines and policies of the Church. While the conversations might seem dangerous and heretical to the average Mormon, it is very probable that these blogs more often keep women in the Church, rather than turn them away from it. (Kline 2009, 17)

What makes blogging different is that it is a free space in which women can exercise unrestricted expression. The expression need not conform to anyone's expectations or strictures: tension, frustration, ambivalence, unsettling, contradiction, paradox. These are all words that embody feminism and Mormon feminism is no exception. Initially, when I began this project, I was adamant that "Mormon Feminist" was an oxymoron. How could a woman engage in creating positive change for gender equality and continue to allow herself to be devalued in a system that refuses to validate her voice? But what if working within that system is the only way that change can come? It is these Mormon Feminist voices working within the system who must continue to

practice innovative, creative ways (i.e., blogging) to educate others and themselves and make their voices heard. What if it is these Mormon feminists working within the system who are the only ones who are able to change it? This position is a reminder that being in a larger system, like capitalist America, which subscribes to the institution of patriarchy to such a high degree, renders it inevitable that we would have to work from within the system to change the system. And so, although the myths may continue to be handed down, it is comforting to know that there are those among us who are working from within to change them.

*I still feel guilt and inadequacy for being a single woman in her late thirties who has never been married or had kids. Some small part of me still feels rejected by God (and society) for "not getting this one right." I feel a glimmer of hope, however, that my cause is not unjust and that things are changing for the better, much to my father's dismay. It's enough to push me through my pangs of feminist discontent when I witness my 78-year-old mother respond to my father's demand for her to fetch him a glass of water. In her mild, angelic voice, she looks up at him from her sewing, smiles, and replies, "I'm sorry honey; you'll have to get it yourself. The days of the king are over."*

*Journal Entry  
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