

## THE FAUX JOURNAL

### A CONTRAST OF FEMINIST INFLUENCES AND THE LDS CHURCH

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**F**rom the moment they are born, females are stereotyped in all facets of their lives. Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman in Congress, defends this point: “The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, ‘It’s a girl’” (2). While many people, women in particular, view this labeling as a negative thing, other organizations, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), take a less affronted stance. They believe that women hold a divine role and that their given duties are not to be belittled, but esteemed. As times change, however, and as the world’s philosophies progress, this attitude is becoming less and less common.

Radical feminist writer, Andrea Dworkin, writes, “Women have been taught that, for us, the earth is flat, and that if we venture out, we will fall off the edge” (2). Since the beginning of Earth’s creation, specifically in biblical times, women have had very little authority outside of the home. It is well known that women are expected to be the caretakers of the home, and the ones responsible for the upbringing of children. Centuries ago, this was not an undesirable thing, but rather a necessary and respected role. Men were the hunters, and women were principally the gatherers. Women today feel the necessity to establish a permanent career. More and more frequently, they are leaving the home and shifting their priorities from their families to their jobs. As a result, men are often forced to remain at home to care for their children as their wives pursue careers and other endeavors. Essentially, the God-given appointments for men and women are becoming confused and distorted as time progresses and as an increasing number of radical ideas about gender roles are developed and shared.

In the LDS Church, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states very clearly, “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are *responsible to provide the necessities of life* and protection for their families. Mothers are *primarily*

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*responsible for the nurture of their children.* In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as *equal partners*” (1, emphasis added). The Proclamation’s assertion that fathers are “responsible to provide the necessities of life” and mothers are “primarily responsible for the nurture of their children” does not suggest that women are unable to have successful careers; it simply states that their children should be their priority. A father and husband’s priority should be providing for his family. Together, husband and wife are *equal* companions and should not esteem themselves above the other. And yet, while they are equal, the roles of husband and wife remain unique and distinct by virtue of the specific gifts given to men and women. The majority of the world does not take this view—that men and women are equals. Even those women who attempt to become “equal to” men do not believe that they are ever truly equivalent.

Possibly the most famous quote by early feminist writer Mary Astell comes from her pamphlet “Some Reflections on Marriage,” published in 1700. “If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?” (2285). Astell believes very strongly that men have little to no respect for women. She argues that there are “no great odds between his marrying for the love of money, or for the love of beauty” and goes on to indicate that men are merely “governed by irregular appetites” (2285-2286). Though Astell makes some incisive observations regarding the treatment of women in her day, times have changed for the better. While women were once subjected to arranged marriages—often to the advantage of the man for he received land or a dowry of sorts from her family—they are now able to choose freely whom they marry and it is very uncommon for them to be set up into a prearranged union. They are no longer treated as possessions, subjected to the whims and wishes of their “master” or husband. Since the seventeenth and eighteenth century, women have become increasingly empowered and have employed many methods to convey their feelings and desires for the future of their sex. Though Astell is too radical and, some might say, too *bitter* a feminist for the taste of many, her written voice provided many women of her time with a new perspective on the potential for womanhood.

Following right behind in the footsteps of Mary Astell, was English novelist, Delarivier (or sometimes known as Mary) Manley.

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Upon being abandoned by her husband, Manley wrote *The Wife's Resentment*, which tells of a story very much like her own, where a wife is abandoned by her selfish and lustful husband. Though perhaps not originally so resentful, this unfortunate occurrence altered Manley's views of marriage and of a woman's responsibilities to herself. Pregnant, deserted, and her name ruined, she had every reason to be vehement in her revengeful writing. Certainly a woman's rights were more limited in the 1600-1700 time period. Though most women were given the opportunity to receive a basic education, "most were discouraged to achieve more" (Myers, 1). They also had no voice in politics, and were not permitted to own a business, obtain a divorce, or hold any property. Despite this, there were women that made their opinions heard. Feminist writer Aphra Behn, was a prominent supporter of women publicizing their sexuality. Wikipedia suggests the following about Behn:

Behn's writings unveil the homosocial role of male rivalry in stimulating heterosexual desire for women and explores the ways in which cross dressing and masquerade complicate and destabilize gender relations. Behn also analyzes female friendships and, more rarely, lesbianism.

Aphra Behn's associations made her "a favorite among sexually liberated women, many of bisexual or lesbian orientation, who proclaim her as one of their most positive influences" (Wikipedia, 4). Not only did Behn's views go against the social expectations that existed for women at the time, but they also went against the very nature of women and demoralized their innate virtue.

The LDS Church exclusively defends marriage between a man and a woman. Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman, representatives of the LDS Church, answered questions regarding same-gender attraction in a 2006 interview. Elder Oaks states, "Yes, homosexual feelings are controllable. Perhaps there is an inclination or susceptibility to such feelings that is a reality for some and not a reality for others. But out of such susceptibilities come feelings, and feelings are controllable" (Oaks, 3). The LDS Church maintains that marriage, and furthermore sexual relations of any kind, are only acceptable between one man and one woman within the bonds of matrimony by proper authority. In relation to this, the Church condemns the pervasive and ever-increasing glorification of the sexualization of

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women. Deseret News journalist, Jamshid Ghazi Askar, quotes the words of Professor Stacy Smith in an interview with USA Today. She declares that there is “an overemphasis on beauty, thinness and sexualization of women” (Askar, 1). Women are depicted as sexual objects in all forms of media—movies, television, literature, art—even music. The images and words that are used to describe women these days have become corrupt and injurious to their state of mind and confidence. Additionally, the exploitation of a woman’s image is unquestionably a hindrance to her portrayal of being an individual that is as capable as a man at demonstrating she is an intellectual. It can be, in fact, so damaging, that it has a reverse effect.

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While some women long to be viewed as the epitome of feminine strength, a beacon for their sex, and the embodiment of professionalism, they often produce the opposite impression with imprudent behavior. The lack of “modesty” and “propriety” in today’s world (once so valued during Jane Austen’s time) reduces the honesty or authenticity of the so-called character these women pretend to possess. Though they profess to be equal to men in capability and proficiency, many lack the proper decency to be truly convincing. It is, at times, a challenge to take these women, who exploit themselves by flaunting their bodies, seriously. Elder Richard G. Scott of the LDS Church says the following in his talk entitled *The Sanctity of Womanhood*:

Satan has unleashed a seductive campaign to undermine the sanctity of womanhood, to deceive the daughters of God and divert them from their divine destiny. He well knows women are the compassionate, self-sacrificing, loving power that binds together the human family. He would focus their interests solely on their physical attributes and rob them of their exalting roles as wives and mothers. He has convinced many of the lie that they are third-class citizens in the kingdom of God. That falsehood has led some to trade their divinely given femininity for male coarseness (Scott, 1).

If women were more prone to concentrating on their divine nature and less focused on their physical traits, how much good could be accomplished through their sincere and selfless service. Also, if so many women did not entirely encourage the objectification of their bodies through their immodest dress and conduct, they would likely

have greater success in demonstrating their determined ability to accomplish as much as men do.

That is not to say that women have accomplished nothing important; on the contrary, women have earned the right to vote, the right to hold property, and have been imperative and authoritative opponents of slavery, domestic abuse, and many other significant actions. Women are now a substantial part of the United States government and are more frequently accepting executive positions in business. With all these achievements, one must inquire what harms, if any, are generated by the increase of women becoming an involved portion of the work force, and therefore a less involved component of the home.

Discussed on a site called Debatepedia during a debate regarding whether mothers should stay at home to raise their children, it was proposed that, "In the age of apparent equality women are increasingly encouraged to 'have it all', balancing career, children and marriage to be seen as successful. However many feel this is bad for children who are then cared for by [another]," and studies "point to the years before a child starts school as the most important in its educational and emotional development. Many believe that for this reason the mother should be at home at least until her children start school in order to afford them the best start in life" (Debatepedia, 1). The argument in favor of this notion went on to say that by staying at home, "mothers could ensure that the next generation [has] the best start in life." The opposing claim suggests that "mothers should have as much freedom as anyone else in society...if they would rather work and make alternative arrangements for the care of their child, then that should be considered equally valid. It could cause depression if women are forced to give up work they enjoy to care for their children" (Debatepedia, 2). This rather selfish attitude reveals how the natural sentiments of many women have changed, and how a reduced number of women feel that "within this sphere [in the home] they are respected as of paramount" as many religions advocate (2).

Elder L. Tom Perry of the LDS Church speaks on this subject in his talk called "Mothers Teaching Children in the Home." He tells of his mother who knew well the "value of teaching her children about standards, values, and doctrine while they were young...She recognized that parents are entrusted with the education of their children and,

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ultimately, parents must ensure that their children are being taught what their Heavenly Father would have them learn” (Perry, 2). An important comment Elder Perry makes is that “Times are very different today, but while times may change, a parent’s teaching must never be devalued” (3). The adversary employs the philosophies of the world to influence women to live freely and unreservedly, making decisions that first and foremost benefit themselves, and giving them vindication to put their children as a lesser priority. Elder Perry adds, “The onslaught of wickedness against our children is at once more subtle and more brazen than it has ever been. [Mothers] teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in the home adds another layer of insulation to protect our children from worldly influences” (5). The LDS Church strongly favors and promotes the role of mothers in the home; not only being responsible for nurturing their children, but accountable for teaching them good principles and values that will help them to succeed and make proper decisions in their life. What loving mother does not want that for her children?

The journey of womankind has been long and difficult. There is no denying that women have tolerated the injustice of being forcibly subservient to their husbands and other men, and that they have had to labor vigorously for every bit of freedom secured. In modern day, there is little distinction between a man’s privileges and a woman’s. In fact, the distinction is so subtle that women, in essence, have become just like men. They have obtained the right to participate in lesbianism, the right to have a career equal to any man’s, the right to sexualize and market their bodies, and have found it desirable to abandon the home, consequently leaving their children, and ignoring every natural capacity within their disposition. Many women have selected to disregard their God-given duty to nurture and educate their children, rearing them in a way that will advance mankind in the future. Their divine nature is being replaced with coarse masculinity that diminishes the matchless sanctity of womanhood.

Despite the fluctuating attitudes of the world in regard to women and their intended role, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has conspicuously maintained a more traditional stance and has expressed how valuable a woman’s position is. A virtuous woman who desires marriage to a man, whose greatest priority is her children, and who avoids becoming a woman of the world, has a price “far above

rubies” (Proverbs 31:10, KJV). In contrast, the world diminishes a woman’s divinity by encouraging her to become an exact equal to man, decreasing her individuality, femininity, and value. The world encourages glorification of a woman’s sexuality rather than her modesty and virtue. Such behavior can only lead to ruin. Though feminist stereotypes will likely exist throughout history, it is important to recognize and evaluate both the perspective of the world, *and* that of God, in order to define one’s own beliefs about women and their intended purpose.

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