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MAPS AND BLUEPRINTS: A FEMINIST LOOK AT PATRIARCHAL LANGUAGE

Editor's Note: The following articles were presented at the 1992 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, Utah. They were part of a panel entitled "Maps and Blueprints: A Feminist Look at Patriarchal Language." The authors, Arta Johnson and her daughter Rebecca, assert that since "patriarchal imperatives" embedded in our language contribute significantly to the subordination of women, an understanding of their use in theory and practice can help women and men construct more equitable cultural patterns.

The Imperative Nature of Language

ARTA JOHNSON

MY HUSBAND KELVIN HAS BEEN a college or high school English teacher for most of his life. The study of English has been both his vocation and his avocation, so he often talks to us about language and literature. Though the study of language theory would not have been high on any of our lists of things to study, it has been high on his. Thus, we have spent much of our time at home discussing language, including the nature of language and the problem of understanding what people mean by the words they use. Kelvin has introduced us to many ideas about language that might never have occurred to us otherwise.

Kelvin and I have a large family, large enough that in order to get a kitchen table that would seat all of us, I had Kelvin take an eight-foot piece of plywood, cover it with arborite and put a set of legs under it. Initially I loved this table because it lacked the traditional split through the middle by which ordinary tables are extended for larger families. I was spared the task of digging out the dried food that collects in the center crack. Now I love this table for a different reason. Groups of people can sit around it comfortably, and over the years, the table has become the place where we meet, eat, play and talk.

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The Persuasive Means

REBECCA JOHNSON

IN ONE OF OUR AFTERNOON SESSIONS around the kitchen table, my father observed, "You know, that really illustrates the difference between beneficent and pernicious imperatives." Those of us who have lived with father for most of our lives know that a request for a definition invariably initiates a trip to the unabridged dictionary and a good 10-minute examination of the etymology of the word. So, it was not surprising that most mouths remained closed. However, my sister-in-law Patti, who has only been around for the past 15 years, said, "Okay, Kelvin, define those words or use a couple of normal-sized ones."

Dad obliged, "The general form the imperative takes in negotiation is, 'Do this for me because . . .'. The 'because' element of the imperative contains what we will call the persuasive means. There are two main categories of these: the beneficent imperative and the pernicious imperative. The beneficent imperative takes the form, '. . . because if you do it, it will benefit us both.' The pernicious imperative takes the form, '. . . because if you don't do it, I will harm you.' Beneficent imperatives preserve your agency and dignity. Pernicious imperatives have a coercive quality to them and demean you."

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Of late, the conversations there have focused on feminism. Because we now sit around the table with adult children, these discussions are both intense and lengthy. The only rule we have is this: if you do not want to be part of the conversation, you can go do other things. The discussions are unstructured; people come into the discussion at odd times and leave whenever they wish. We try not to offend one another, but in some discussions the women seem more comfortable than the men. Of the men, Kelvin seems best able to sustain the stress, and he sits around the table with us the longest.

A particularly memorable conversation took place one Sunday evening. Seated at the table with me were Kelvin, our 21-year-old daughter Catherine, with whom I took women's studies classes, and our son-in-law Steve and our oldest son Trell, both of whom are firmly grounded in patriarchal tradition. Also there were Bonnie, our 23-year-old, and Rebecca, our eldest daughter, then a law student who was distressed at the degree of patriarchal bias in the law faculty and the incompatibility of this with her own feminist feelings.

The topic on this particular day was no doubt some aspect of feminism. However, since Kelvin was there, you can be sure that language concerns were not far from the surface of the discussion. For years he had been telling us that language is imperative. Despite the fact that he had been thinking and talking about this for most of Rebecca's life, its usefulness was not truly apparent to her until that year. She sensed a conflict between her father's ideas about language and the language theory and practices of her strongly male-biased law faculty. Discussions with her father had told her that: words do not have meaning, rather people have meaning for words; all language is imperative; language is experienced differently at the center than at the circumference of consciousness; and communication is the negotiation of meaning. This combination of ideas had placed her at the circumference, as it were, of patriarchal language practice.

I might also add that my four daughters and I have committed Kelvin to come to terms with women's ideas about language, like those in the books *Man-Made Language* (Dale Spender, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) and *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, New York: Basic Books, 1986). He has been changing in his sphere as we have been in ours. All of this is background information to help you understand how the

following simple conversation became the object of an in-depth discussion of male and female language interaction.

At five on this particular Sunday evening, my 22-year-old son Doral, a political science student, walked into the house. Whatever we were talking about was interrupted by Kelvin asking me, "Has Doral eaten yet?"

I was tuned into the table conversation and was interrupted by Kelvin's question. Wanting both to get back into the conversation as quickly as possible and to practice some of the language theory that Kelvin so often blesses us with, I responded, "I don't know. Doral is 22 years old. If he is hungry, he can go get something out of the fridge."

Bonnie leaned over to me and whispered, "Thank you. The knot in my stomach just disappeared." I replied, "Tell your father what you just said to me." Bonnie did this and

the conversation shifted to Kelvin's favorite topic—but with him on the hot seat. He quietly listened for a long while to a critique of his language theory and practice.

First, I supplied the group with a reconstruction of what went on in my mind during this brief exchange. I knew that the question, "Has Doral eaten yet?" was directed at me. I thought: "I know he is asking me to DO something; but I don't know if

he is asking me to give information or to 'feed Doral.' If he is asking for information, he is saying, 'Tell me if Doral has eaten yet.' I cannot supply him with the information, 'Yes, he has eaten,' or, 'No, he has not eaten.' I don't know the answer to the question. Kelvin knows I have been sitting beside him in church all day, and he knows that Doral has been at work in a department store.

"Kelvin must be asking me something else. Maybe, Kelvin is saying to me, 'Go get Doral food.' Kelvin and I do have unexpressed concerns about Doral. We are concerned about his family relations, his physical survival, his economic condition, his social, psychological and intellectual development. The message could be, 'Here comes Doral. We need to draw him into the family discussion. We can do this with food. So you go get him the food and bring him into the discussion because you are better at that than I am.' Or he could have been saying to me, 'Acknowledge that Doral is here; say hello to Doral and shower him with attention.'

"It could be just a remnant of Kelvin's own childhood worry about not having enough food, and he could be saying, 'Here comes one of your children who might starve if you don't take care of him.' Or I could be hearing, 'Help Doral save money for summer school; feed him at home so he won't spend his money on fast food.'"

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Other people at the table supplied their private thoughts. Rebecca had heard Kelvin's question; she confessed, "I have been getting practice at law school ignoring patriarchal imperatives. I hear a lot of messages directed at me. I know I can only do a certain number of them. I chose to receive no message when I heard Father speak."

Bonnie, on the other hand, said, "I did hear Dad's question. I immediately had a knot in my stomach thinking, 'Mother is tired. I will jump up and get food so that she will not have to do it. But I am exhausted also.'"

I continued my reconstruction, "Before Bonnie could get up, I had finished the sorting process going on in my head and had responded to Kelvin, 'I don't know. Doral is 22 years old. If he is hungry, he can go get something out of the fridge.' I knew in saying this that I was running a risk in making Kelvin angry. This is not my usual way of dealing with things, and he would not expect this response from me."

Bonnie added the following: "When I whispered in your ear, 'Thank you. The knot in my stomach just disappeared,' it was because I had experienced such a sense of relief with your reply and felt that you had taken the risk for me."

To this I replied, "Because Bonnie had only whispered her thanks to me, I told her to make public to Kelvin what she had just told me so that he would know what she had heard in his question. I was taking a risk that he might think that I was just diverting his anger away from myself, but I was now aware that two of us had heard him say 'Go feed Doral.' You have all heard him say that he does not want to make the women he loves into his slaves. I believe him. But his question was doing to us the very thing he doesn't want to do."

Bonnie finally invited Kelvin, who had silently listened to this roasting, to share his thoughts. "How did Mother's answer to your question make you feel?"

Still a little hurt, he replied quietly, "I felt a little miffed and not understood. Okay, I felt the patriarchal assumption that a mother is always happy to nurture and comfort her children was being attacked. I guess I was responding as if Arta were saying, 'Believe me, I couldn't care less whether Doral has eaten or not.' In Arta's response there seemed to be an edge of resentment directed at my cherished patriarchal imperatives."

The conversation at the table continued, focussing not only on this experience, as seen both from the center and

from the circumference of consciousness, but also upon the inferences that women and men draw when in conversation.

In the weeks that followed, the family talked quite a bit about this experience. I think it illustrates so much that is typical. And I love to share my feelings of being freed to think in a new way. Deep in women's hearts we have always known that all language does, in fact, command us to do things, and we have acted accordingly. But I, for one, had no idea how to articulate this explicitly.

I began to see the usefulness of this theory in a Sunday School class. We were talking about religious experience and language theory. On the chalk board Kelvin had written down a number of religious ideas. Instead of addressing the religious ideas that were expressed in the sentences, he showed that each sentence, though different in idea and different in grammatical form, was in actual fact giving a command. I found myself persuaded that all language is imperative.

Now as a family group, we began looking more closely at the way people spoke to us, and we started identifying the implicit imperatives, that is, what we were really being asked to do. I had to find out what the implicit imperatives were in the three sentence types: in the question, in the assertion and in the exclamation.

Questions were easy. They were simply commands for information, like, "What time is it?" or "When does the movie start?" or "What time did Mary say that she would be home?" However, many questions seemed to be commands, not for information, but commands or requests to do something. For example, I think most of us have seen the following interaction. The family sits down to dinner, the father says, "Is there any bread?" and the wife jumps up and brings the bread to the table. If this were a simple command for information, "Yes," or "No," would have been the appropriate response. Clearly, there are imperatives embedded within imperatives or different levels of implication.

Then we looked at assertive sentences, those that appear to be statements of fact. They were commands or requests to do something in the mind—mostly, to believe. However, the statement, "Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess," is telling you to imagine. Most novels and stories are imperatives of this type.

"So, what do you do with Bonnie's 'Thank you?'" asked one of the more skeptical members of the group. "Thank

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you!' is an exclamatory sentence," answered Kelvin. "It is an implicit version of the explicit command, 'Feel appreciated!' In its non-ironic use, it can at least be taken as an implicit performative declaration of indebtedness. The equivalent explicit imperative would be 'Witness that I declare my indebtedness to you for. . .'"

I had noticed that Bonnie followed her, "Thank you," with why she was thanking me: "The knot in my stomach just disappeared." Loosely translated into an explicit imperative she was saying, "Do feel appreciated and know that I owe you for taking the knot out of my stomach." As Bonnie explained to the group, "Mother's response freed me from what I had taken to be father's imperative and a false map of my responsibility."

The fundamentally imperative nature of language was clear: the imperative sentence was structurally explicit, the exclamation, the question and the assertion were implicit imperatives. Any one of them may have second-, third- and fourth-level implicit imperatives imbedded in them. For example, the question "Has Doral eaten yet?" is, on the first level, a simple request for information: "Tell me if Doral has eaten." I responded at this level when I said, "I don't know." In the "lippy part" of my reply, I was responding to a second-level implied imperative, "Get up and get Doral some food." This can best be seen in the context of unexpressed concerns to which both Kelvin and I were party.

All this will be clear to every woman who has had to deal with patriarchal language habits. However, embedded in the second-order imperative, "Go get Doral some food!" are a series of third-order imperatives that are distinctly patriarchal. They are a series of implicit "believe me" imperatives, the purpose of which is to persuade or remind the woman that it is her duty to carry out that second-order imperative, "Get Doral food!" These third-order imperatives can be made explicit as a series of assertions: "It is women's responsibility to nurture and feed the children, women do this better than men, etc." Taken together they can be thought of as a blueprint to guide women in their work. Men would have women believe this blueprint is a map of reality, the truth about women's nature.

This embeddedness of imperatives is true of language practices generally, not just of patriarchal language practice. When a mother says to her daughter, "Bake a cake!" it seems like a simple imperative, but implicit in it are a host of subordinate imperatives, one group of which are called "the recipe." A recipe is itself a blueprint, a plan or agenda for

building a cake. A map is also a plan in a drafting sense, but it is a representation of what exists, not a representation of what may be constructed.

So we see that there is complexity in the imperative tissue of language: levels of imbeddedness and various degrees of generalization. To deal with all this requires a great deal of rational thought on the part of women and men.

Kelvin could ask a simple, direct question and mobilize three women to have knots in their stomachs, to feel their tiredness and resentment or to purposely withdraw. How often have men, not familiar with the nature of this exchange, been amazed at the responses of women and labelled them irrational or intuitive? And how often have women, not articulate about the nature of their own experience, accepted this assertion about their irrationality as though it were a map of reality?

But how irrational are women? They have had to develop a highly efficient rationality to understand language in its implicit and complex imperative forms while dealing with men who have fooled themselves into thinking that language is something else, a means by which to exercise their patriarchal right to enunciate truth, to lay out the map of reality. This map tells us that women are intuitive, that they com-

fort, nurture, understand and respond to the needs of men and children without men having to articulate the details of their desires or having to negotiate for their realization. And furthermore, unless women respond as if this were all true, women are somehow out of touch with reality.

Here we have a clear case of blueprint confused with map on a global scale. When this became clear to me, it wasn't hard to figure out what to do next. I claimed my right to ask the question, "Why should I do what you are asking me to do?" And in time I was to discover that the answer to this question always followed the same general form. I would hear the clear imperative, "Do this," followed by, "Because . . ."

The reasons that followed were of two kinds: "It fits the map of reality," or, "It suits the blueprint of my vision." In either case I knew I had the right to be persuaded—in the first case, of the truth of the map; in the second case, of the blueprint's relevance to my desires.

I grew up in a world where, beyond the classroom, it was generally impertinent for a woman to ask questions. Knowing now that questions are imperatives, I am feeling free to say to people: "Tell me exactly what it is you want me to do, and convince me that cooperation with your program, your

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blueprint, your itinerary, your agenda is in my best interest also. What will it do for me?"

I have been hearing about this theory for a long time. But I have only been thinking about its implications for women for a short time. I love thinking about the theory. What has come out of practicing it at the dinner table has

been fascinating for me. And lest you are worried about Doral and wondering if he ever did get his supper, let me say that he was only passing through the kitchen on his way to take his girlfriend out to dinner. That wonderful son is patriarchal enough to know that our conversation couldn't possibly have concerned him.

(Rebecca—continued from column 2, page 1)

Patti's rejoinder was, "Since imperatives are seldom so neatly explicit, how can you really tell which is which?"

I suggested that you could tell the difference by the way they make you feel. However, I went home that night thinking more about these so-called pernicious imperatives. I realized that there were times when I could feel the pernicious nature of an imperative long before I figured out exactly what the command was. In such situations I had the feeling, "I don't know what is going on here, but I know that I don't feel very good about it, whatever it is."

I decided to re-examine, in the light of my litmus test, two experiences that had occurred the previous year at about the same time. They were somehow related, though the exact nature of that relationship had not been quite clear to me. Both experiences had frequently come to my mind, and I had spent a lot of time trying to sort out my feelings about them.

The first involved only my friend Marie and me. We bumped into each other at school, and a 10-minute visit lengthened into a four-hour discussion. I told her how frustrated I felt, trying to reconcile my personal desires with the patriarchal influences that I was feeling both at school and at Church. I was hard at work trying to make a fulfilling career for myself, yet was constantly confronted by such messages as, "Women don't make good litigators," or, "You can't be a feminist and work in a large law firm." At the time, I was still feeling a bit sensitive about the "To the Mothers in Zion" talk President Ezra Taft Benson had delivered at a general women's meeting (February 22, 1987 [pamphlet]). She listened to me talk and finally said, "You know, sometimes I worry about you; I worry about your testimony."

This amazed me since I had never imagined that someone might worry about my testimony. It seemed to be intact to me. Since we were on the topic, I asked her what she thought was central to the gospel and to her own testimony. She shared these with me. As I listened, I could see that our lists were not identical. There were things I agreed with, things that I disagreed with, and things I thought conspicuous by their absence.

She told me that she, too, occasionally felt dissatisfaction in the Church and troubled by some of the messages that she heard, that there were things she hadn't figured out and things (like polygamy) that she didn't want to accept. She shared these with me, but concluded that though she had questions, she felt it important to follow the Brethren.

I remember thinking, "How different we are and yet so, so such alike! She comes from a conservative background, I come from a more liberal one. My own religious leanings are finitist, hers more absolutist. We both have questions that have not yet been resolved, and we both are trying to find answers. Our ways of trying to deal with our concerns are different, but this does not seem to be a big problem. She is concerned about my happiness, and I am concerned about hers." I went home feeling a very strong sense of sisterhood and thinking how wonderful it was that people could be different and yet make a place for each other in their lives.

The second experience is one I think of as the Breakfast Club Meeting. Marie and I had agreed that Sunday School classes were particularly unfulfilling. She thought it might be helpful to get a group of us together Sunday mornings for breakfast and pre-Sunday School class discussion. This would allow us to have a more active discussion about gospel topics. So she invited a group of us to her home. The first (and, as far as I know, the last) breakfast topic was "the Gadianton Robbers." Tom (name changed), one of the Sunday School teachers in the ward, opened the discussion by suggesting that the Columbian drug lords were modern-day Gadianton robbers. His evidence included President Gordon B. Hinckley's October 1989 conference talk, "The Scourge of Illicit Drugs" (*Ensign*, November 1987, pp. 48-51).

I was familiar with his talk and had been a bit disturbed by one particular passage—the place where President Hinckley said that the blood of those killed or injured fighting the drug cartels was on the hands of drug users. I thought the statement passed over the real problem of addiction, heaping guilt upon the heads of those already suffering addictions and upon their families, in a manner which did not seem to fit the gospel principle of personal responsibility outlined in the Second Article of Faith.

Since the meeting was to be a forum, I outlined my concerns and expressed my wish that the talk had dealt with the problem differently. At least three people present had family members suffering drug addictions. My assumption that this would have made them share my concern and compassion was misguided. Two told me flat out that they had no feelings of compassion for the addicted, who in their opinion should indeed share the guilt of murder: they were addicted by choice.

The discussion became heated, touched on the nature of freewill, determinism, faith, repentance and the role of prophets in the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times; and the patriarchal artillery was called in. Threatening use was made of scriptures, Mormon folklore, priesthood manuals and missionary experiences. No matter what I said, two or three people supplied reasons compelling me to believe I was wrong. When I said that I felt offended, I was told that I should repent of such feelings. The longer we talked, the more firmly entrenched people became in their positions.

And all this time, Marie and her husband were working very hard to re-interpret each side for the other, trying to diffuse the situation. The sister-in-law of the Sunday School teacher terminated the discussion by pointing out that criticism of the Brethren indicates that a person is on the pathway to apostasy. I knew this was not a general comment.

I had left my meeting with Marie feeling encouraged about the Church and feeling that there was a place in it for people like me. I left the Breakfast Club meeting feeling alienated, chagrined, embarrassed for Marie and dismayed at the problem I would have calming my convert husband who had quietly listened with angry disbelief at how I had been treated. Yet on both occasions, the closing imperative seemed to be "Follow the Brethren." Why were these experiences so different?

My litmus test suggested that the persuasive means in the first experience were beneficent, whereas in the second experience they were pernicious. When I try to identify more precisely how the imperatives in the first experience were beneficent, I am able to articulate the following impressions.

Although Marie and I did not see eye-to-eye on every topic, she did not try to force me in any way to hold her opinion. Although neither of us felt it essential to show the other person where she was wrong, Marie told me that she had a different opinion than mine, but she did not invalidate the opinion that I held. She disagreed with my conclu-

sions, but she allowed me space to express my feelings, agreed that it was possible to have such feeling, admitted that she too had had such feelings, even though she chose to react in a different fashion.

Seeing my questioning, she was worried for me. However, even if she thought I was making wrong choices because we had different views of reality, she did not seem to feel it necessary to shame me into making the choices that she was making. She respected my right to make my own choices. The way her concern was expressed lead me to feel that, even if it turned out that my choices were wrong, I would find in her a non-critical and a non-condemning friend.

She was willing to let me pursue my own blueprint and agenda, and even willing to let me express my concern about our received "Mormon map." I felt that she valued me personally, respected my mind and my autonomy and trusted my intentions and my agency.

The imperatives I heard were two: (1) "Be careful and cautious in your questioning because a testimony is such a fragile thing and so important to our happiness;" and (2) "Consider my advice that in controversial matters it is safest to 'Follow the Brethren' because I love you and I believe the Brethren best understand God's will."

Now when I try to identify more precisely how the imperatives in the second experience were pernicious, I am able to articulate these impressions: When it was clear that I held

one view and the group held another, I was not allowed to feel that I was still a valuable member of the group. Instead, I was made to feel that my views were not only inappropriate, they were intellectually unacceptable, and I was not to be taken seriously. They could not even graciously allow me to hold my own views for my own reasons. I felt that the teacher's purpose was to silence me or force me to hold a different view using the tools of bad logic, unsupported assertion and intimidation.

I felt I was a victim of a kind of psychological violence. But I couldn't quite understand why until I read *The Tree of Knowledge* (Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco Varela, Boston: Shambhala, 1987). They defined violence as "holding an opinion to be true such that another person's opinion isn't true and they must change." That seemed aptly to account for my resentment and my embarrassment with that certainty and air of infallibility that characterizes the returned-missionary pronouncements of so many young male Sunday School teachers.

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Furthermore, I felt that my feelings were totally unacceptable: that either I was not allowed to have my own feelings, or at the very least not allowed to express them. I was truly bothered by this thing that seemed dissonant. But I do not believe the men in the group could accept the fact that I had real feelings and that I might have reasons for feeling the way I was in fact feeling.

As to my right to hold a different view of reality, Tom seemed to feel it necessary to shame me into making the choices that he was making. I felt that if my choices turned out wrong, I would find him with a ready, self-righteous "I warned you." He was not willing to let me pursue my own blueprint and agenda, and he was especially unwilling to let me express my concern about our received "Mormon map." I felt he didn't value me personally; he didn't respect my mind, my autonomy, my agency, nor did he trust my intentions.

Now, he, like Marie, might have been worried about my testimony and might have wanted me to know that he resolved conflicts by choosing to "follow the Brethren." But the imperatives I heard were these: (1) "Believe me, because if you question these things, it is because you don't have a testimony;" (2) "Believe me, because if you don't have a testimony of the truthfulness of these matters, it is because you don't have enough faith;" (3) "Believe me, because those who have the priesthood have a better connection to God than you do;" (4) "Believe me, because if you turn away from the Brethren, we will shake the dust from our shoes and go on without you;" (5) "Repent and be forgiven before it is too late because criticism means apostasy, and you are criticizing, therefore you are an apostate."

Even though I do not believe that the General Authorities fully understand how central patriarchy is to general culture and that it is alive and well in Mormonism, I cannot believe that those in authority in the Church intend to send the messages I sometimes receive nor do they wish me to feel so demeaned. And furthermore, firmly believing that communication is the negotiation of meaning, I cannot doubt that they would want to know that they are known as they would be known.

It is important to distinguish between beneficent and pernicious imperatives because understanding the difference can free us from the tyranny of patriarchal language. Remember that it is through language practices that patriarchal structures have been maintained, and it is through new language prac-

tices that these harmful structures will be dismantled.

When we feel a pernicious imperative, coercive or manipulative means are being used to get our cooperation. Many of us use pernicious imperatives without realizing it. Those of us who feel them have a responsibility to let those using them know that they are in fact using them.

We need to value and mobilize our negotiating skills. We need to ask questions to ensure that we will be acting appropriately and that we understand why the other person wishes for us so to act. If we are not persuaded, we ought not assume that we are wrong. Each of us has the right to be persuaded in good faith and to participate when we desire. We may eventually agree and choose to work with others or we may not; we are each of us a valuable free agent.

This theory has made me feel empowered. It has helped me mobilize my faculties. Language is imperative even if we don't recognize it. We are all working, all the time, constructing the world we live in according to someone's blueprint. From time to time people say, "Oh well, that is just the way life is." I now believe that life is that way because we make it that way. Unconsciously, unintentionally, working as if we have a map of reality, we turn someone's blueprint into a completed structure. In this way a myth can and does become a reality.

According to the oldest version of our theology, it's always time to re-examine "the received map of Mormonism," to renew negotiations with God. Maybe women should be allowed to participate in these negotia-

tions. If nothing else, women should certainly be allowed to tell the truth, to tell how we feel, to tell what we need. We should be able to do this without having to put our testimonies, our faith or our membership on the table.

For much of my life, I felt that Mormonism had *the* map. I no longer want the ultimate map; I would rather participate in the planning as well as the building. Now, I am thinking more about blueprints. Maps have a down side: they can be dangerous and encourage a sense of completion, a feeling that there's nothing more to do but follow. I hope that there are yet to be revealed some non-patriarchal social structures in which female resources will be more fully valued and utilized—structures in which women will participate because they are valued and because they wish to participate, structures in which the good in women and men will be recognized and where people can be different and yet make places for each other.

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I Have An Answer

Questions to Gospel Answers

ANSWER: Faithful LDS historians and writers should focus on only those parts of Church history that are faith-promoting.

QUESTIONS: What does “faith-promoting” mean? What is inferred or implied when information is included, altered or withheld? For example, what is the effect on a person’s faith when they find out that Joseph Smith had a gun at Carthage? Or drank wine? Or took plural wives without Emma’s consent? How can one ascertain how this kind of information might affect someone’s faith? How is it measured?

Do we accept as accurate a primary source, such as a diary or journal account, only on those points which coincide with modern practices and attitudes? Do we reject those same sources on other points if they clash with our expectations? Do we hold back some details because they detract from a particular image? What is the effect on faith when a history book is published containing misstatements or inaccuracies which have become quite widely known and identified as such, at least among well-read members? To whom are the publishers trying to appeal? Whose “faith” is strengthened? Whose faith is being judged as unimportant to consider?

Had the Church been forthright from the very beginning, standing for truth instead of fearing that our enemies would use that truth against us, we would not be having to deal with the compounded consequences at this late date, which potentially jeopardize the faith of a far broader spectrum of members than necessary. If the Church fails to tell a more accurate account of the truth in the face of evidence produced from its own archives, then the faith of better-educated saints may be damaged.

If the Church admits to the unpleasant and hitherto avoided “inaccuracies” in its own recorded history, then the faith of those brought up to believe the sanitized version may be damaged. At the moment, it seems the Church is adhering to its historical stance of “protecting” the untruth it has propagated on the grounds that it is “protecting” the faith of this latter category of people.

The irony is, of course, that “the truth will out”: often the people whom the Church is presumably trying to “protect” learn about the things the Church is hiding. Isn’t it better to learn the truth from the Church than from outside sources? Some saints are seri-

ously shaken and leave, but the majority really do accept the humanity of the leadership in tandem with divine guidance and can deal with such “revelations.” Indeed, most people find it far easier to come to terms with the problematic aspects of our history than with the Church’s continued efforts to cover them up.

Anti-Mormons unnecessarily derive strength from the Church’s dissembling. “If they lied to you about thus-and-so, don’t you see that they could be/are lying about this-and-that?” is a powerfully persuasive argument. The Church is ultimately ill-served by its unwillingness to tell its own story as fully and as truthfully as possible, warts and all.

Finally, what does it mean when the Church places more value on public relations than it does on truth?

Lynn Matthews Anderson

Set Apart

LYNNE KANAVAL WHITESIDES

Editor’s Note: The following essay was presented at the Third Annual Counterpoint Conference as part of a panel on the 1996 BYU Women’s Conference.

I AM A WOMAN SET APART, set apart by my bishop as surely as if he had put his hands on my head. I did not know that I had been set apart. I used to say that I was a semi-retired Mormon, but during my drive last spring to Provo for the BYU Women’s Conference, I realized that semi-retired was not quite right. I have been set apart, not excommunicated like my good friends, not exactly a member of the Church, not exactly not a member. I am just set apart.

I was talking to a friend, and he told me that “set apart” in Greek means a model, an example or that thing that is put to shame. Since that ride from Salt

Lake City to Provo, I realize that this is where I am standing, this set apart place, and it is through this new understanding of mine that I must do a reading of my experience of the BYU Women’s Conference.

I got to the conference about 45 minutes late and missed the friends I was supposed to meet, so for a while I just sat under the letter “G” at the Marriott Center. Patricia and Ed Pinegar were about to speak, so I decided to stay and listen. Patricia Pinegar was first. The abstract in the program said that she and her husband would be speaking about applying the Atonement to our lives. I was interested and listened closely when Sister Pinegar began talking about the anguish of Alma the Younger in the Book of Mormon.

She told the audience of about

3,000 women that she had experienced some of Alma's anguish. She explained that her daughter was on the Provo High School girl's basketball team. She had attended one of the most important games of the season—Provo against Timp View. In the last few minutes of the game, her daughter had the ball and was going for a shot when one of the Timp girls fouled her. Sister Pinegar let us know that Provo won that game, but that she was really upset with the girl who had fouled her daughter. She was so upset that when she passed the Timp team, she looked the offending girl in the face and said, "You're mean." It is at this point that she began to experience some of Alma's anguish. Unlike Alma, who remained for days in a coma-like state, she couldn't sleep. She called the Timp coach, arranged for a meeting with the team and apologized to them all—especially to the girl to whom she had said, "You're mean."

I began to look at the women who were listening to this talk. I couldn't help but feel that out of these three thousand women, there had to be some who had been victims of incest—and like most victims, some probably felt that they were part of the problem and in some way guilty of causing this terrible thing to happen—and some who were perpetrators of incest, and some who had committed adultery, and some who were hooked on drugs, and some who were alcoholics, and some who had lied to loved ones or to authority figures in the Church, and the list goes on and on. I wondered what this talk, this story of anguish would do to them.

I could only imagine that these women would see Sister Pinegar as an example, someone set apart; after all, she was chosen as a speaker. They would look at this not-particularly-young woman and think that if this is the worse thing she had done, what chance did they have? How does saying, "You're mean," compare to what the Church would define as an excommunicable sin?

And what did this mean to their eternal salvation? What chance was there for them to go anywhere but the lowest of kingdoms for eternity?

I don't know for sure, but I can't believe that this is the worst thing that Sister Pinegar has done. You just don't get to be in your forties or fifties without making poor decisions—decisions that, I believe, teach us who we are and let us know how to make better decisions in the future. Frankly, I'm tired of the lies from the pulpit. It is time, I think, to listen to what our Savior said and did; it is time to help carry the burdens of the people around us. We cannot do this until we all begin to tell the truth.

I realized that while many of the women at the conference had not been set apart like I had been, they were set apart by the belief that they were the only ones who had done worse things than to tell a high school girl that she was mean. Some of them had no real community that they felt would be able to hold their pain, their lives.

After the Pinegars spoke, I went outside and began to watch the women as they left the Marriott Center. I listened to their conversations. I think this was the first time I understood why Women's Conference is so important to so many women. I watched their faces as they ran into people they had not seen in years. I saw their excitement and joy in renewing old friendships. They told each other about the children they had, the marriages they were in, the divorces that had occurred. I think the moment I liked the best was when I heard one woman say to another, "You put the bleach right on the stain." This comment amused and moved me, partly because I wonder about stains and their removal myself, and partly because when I finally met up with my friends and told them about the stain comment, we began talking about the wisdom of putting bleach right on the stain ourselves.

It is easy for me to feel, because of my passion for feminism, that there is absolutely no common ground between me

and most Mormon women. But after listening to the conversations of the women at the conference, I began to think we had more in common than not. We all worry about our marriages, relationships and children, jobs and money, and, yes, stain removal. It is true that I am set apart from the official Church; but set apart from the women of the Church? I'm not so sure.

Maybe Sister Pinegar is not in a place in her life where she is able to speak about the deep anguish she has suffered. Or, maybe whoever approved her talk wouldn't let her say her truth. I must admit that I cannot always tell the truth; I cannot always share my burdens with the people around me. And maybe the truth is that Sister Pinegar and I are not so far apart.

The last session of the conference I attended featured the General Relief Society Presidency, three women who have been set apart by the laying on of hands, women I respect and love and stand in amazement at what they are trying to do, for what they have accomplished. It cannot be easy for them to work so tirelessly to change how women are treated by a Church that, as far as I can tell, is not too interested in that change.

On the panel with them were two other women. One was a grandmother who had worked with troubled youth. She told about her life with these kids in an eloquent and touching way. She spoke about teens who had never been told that they were loved or that they mattered. She told us how she had reached down and held the lives of these teens in her heart. She had loved them, and they had felt her love. And she watched as they changed over the years. Some had hope where none was before, some completed their educations, and for the first time many believed they could have successful lives.

The other woman was the wife of a bishop in a ward in one of the Salt Lake City canyons. She talked about

the tiny congregation and how they had come to share each other's burdens. She spoke about her son and his drug addiction. She told us that her family did not try to keep it a secret and that the ward had rallied around them, providing the strength to hold their family while they went through this difficult time. She told other stories of families in the ward, and in her telling, I began to see the web they had woven together—a web that was able to contain the pain and the joy that were part of all of their families.

After that session, my friends and I talked in the hall of the Marriot Center and watched the women pass by—all of us women set apart in one way or another. But at this conference, there were women who were telling each other their stories in the truest way

each of them could. I could feel the stories in the air.

A few months ago I had a dream, and in my dream I was given a gift. I watched as one woman began to weave a blanket and then pass the partially woven piece on to the next woman, and the next, and the next. And when the piece became a large blanket, they all came together and placed it on my body. It fit so closely that it felt like skin. And I understood that I was made of all the stories of all the women in my life—my mother, my grandmother and her mother, my daughter and my friends and their daughters, and so many more. I knew then what a blessing it is to have so many women in my life and that I, too, am weaving every day more to add to the cloth of it all.

Readers Write

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Women in Support of Women

Contributor's Note: *Four of us sitting together at the first Counterpoint conference struck up a conversation and exchanged phone numbers. We were a little hesitant to actually phone each other in the following weeks, but, luckily, one woman called us all, and we started meeting. That was more than two years ago. We still meet—in a park during the summer and in our homes during the rest of the year.*

We discuss whatever is on our minds. We bring in newspaper clippings on women's and religious issues. Sometimes we recommend a book to the others to be read and then discussed at the next meeting. We talk about our experiences of growing up female in this culture and dealing with our families of origin who often don't understand us. The group has been a source of support and help to each of us. The size of the group, four to eight

women, has been very good for encouraging discussion and developing friendships.

Your readers might be interested in the following. It was written by one of the members of our group.

I AM ONE OF THE "core four" in a group we call Windows (Women's Independent Nurturing Discussion with Other Women). We all started in a similar place; yet each of us is in a vastly different place now—Christian or non-Christian, exploring a new faith or finding sustenance in the old one. The four of us span 28 years in age. We are diverse but equal. We have no organization, no leaders, no agenda. We just are.

On one Sunday evening we gathered on a green hillside at a cemetery

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Founded in 1988, The Mormon Women's Forum invites all people to examine women's issues, particularly within the context of Mormonism. It makes no formal demands on any organization or system of belief. It does, however, examine and question traditional interpretations of women's roles, their history and their relationship to deity.

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in Bountiful to redo the funeral of our friend Carlene's father. The original funeral had been a painful experience; Carlene's mother had refused to allow her to give her father's eulogy after she had cared for him during a long illness.

After Carlene welcomed us, Wanda opened a circle around the grave, addressing our Mother Goddess and Father God. Gantry talked about fathers and Christianity with emphasis on God's love for us.

Linda told us that Carlene had asked her if she could sing. "Although I do not have the voice I always longed for," she said, "I do have a voice. So I will sing." As I listened, I wanted to weep for all the things I have not dared to try.

Carlene presented the eulogy "Avi Met," Hebrew for "My Father Died." She introduced us to her father through memories and photos and shared her grief. Kathy burned Indian sweetgrass (cedar and sage) as she banished the negative and thoughtless rejection of Carlene's mother. After strewing the grave with flower petals and bits of Carlene's red hair, we sang "Beautiful Savior," after which Wanda led us in closing the circle. Homemade snickerdoodles completed the ceremony.

I wish I had words to express the wondrous sharing of that holy experience. Carlene expressed amazement that we who had spent all of five hours with her offered this gift. But I am amazed that after knowing us for so little time, Carlene asked each of us to participate in a way that expressed so fully her respect for and acceptance of us.

I believe that God was there—God the Father, the Hebrew Yahweh, the Mother Goddess, the Great Spirit. And God saw that it was good.

Without Kathy, Windows would have faded away after six months. In-

stead, our relationship has deepened to a level of acceptance, respect and support that I have never experienced before. I thrill to our diversity in beliefs, talents, age and experience. I thrill to our common values of respect, caring, mutual support and an acceptance that is so much more than tolerance.

We met as strangers, sitting next to each other at The Mormon Women's Forum. We were looking for a place to be honest about our lives without fear of censure. What we found was acceptance and family—women in support of women.

Counterpoint in Review

DEBORAH ROSSITER

CAN WE BE FEMINIST and still contribute to our church community? How can we strengthen our civic community? What is the experience of the wife of a bishop? Are there ways that we can show support for the gay community? How can we heal from sexual abuse? When will we be able to openly discuss our personal revelations? Can we be faithful to

God and still be full of doubt?

These questions and many others were discussed at the Fourth Annual Counterpoint Conference held on Saturday, November 9, at Utah Valley State College in Orem, Utah. The day began with a panel discussion on community activism. The women on the panel shared their passion for social ac-

NETWORKING

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tivism. They spoke about their individual struggles, such as raising a lesbian daughter in a predominately Mormon community, and of wrangling with a welfare system un-sympathetic to single mothers. They explained how these struggles led to their social activism.

At lunchtime, conference participants were treated to a talk by Connie Ostlund, one of seven women to graduate from the Franciscan School of Theology at UC-Berkeley. She recently obtained the same degree which Catholic priests are awarded before their ordination into the priesthood.

After prayerfully struggling with the idea of becoming a nun, Connie decided that her calling was to minister, not to become a sister. Finally, Connie decided to go into considerable debt and study for a Masters of Divinity degree. While pursuing this degree, she and her colleagues dealt with many ethical questions such as how does gender inclusive language fit into our

theological rhetoric and where is God as mother?

Like many Mormon feminists, Connie struggles with the issues of authority, hierarchy and feminism. She shared her passion for the Catholic tradition, while at the same time understanding the problems inherent in that tradition. Connie suggested that often the greatest evil is found in our own churches, where we least expect it. For her, this evil is the taking of trust in the name of God and then abusing that trust. As a result, staying in her tradition is challenge borne with heartache. Much of the heartache comes because she feels she has been called to preach, has a gift to preach and yet her gift is frequently rejected because she is a woman. Despite these struggles, Connie shared her hope for the future, pointing out that Susan B. Anthony, a Quaker woman, never lived to see the changes she put into motion by starting the suffrage movement. Connie ended

with a plea to abolish ignorance and to trust in revelation and the goodness of God.

The conference ended with a lively discussion addressing the future of Mormon feminism. Margaret Toscano moderated the panel which addressed such problems as why women will not apply the term feminist to themselves and what the future holds for Mormon feminist groups like The Mormon Women's Forum and *Exponent II*. Two of the central questions asked were these: Do you think it is possible to defend feminism from a gospel standpoint? Can you be a believer in Mormonism and a feminist? One of the panelists, Maxine Hanks, pointed out that the polarization in the Church is not caused by feminism, but that feminism simply unmasks the polarization that already exists. She also said that as long as male oppression and patriarchy prevail, feminism will thrive.

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