

Public Abstract

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This thesis analyzes the circulation of fundamentalist women's mediated rhetoric in the wake of Texas Child Protective Services' removal of more than 400 children from the polygamist YFZ Ranch near Eldorado, Texas, in April 2008. The mothers defended their radically patriarchal community by deploying rhetorics of self-determination, claiming agency in the context of their religious community. If, as Sharon Crowley asserts, liberalism's goals are "wildly incompatible" with fundamentalism, why did these mothers deploy liberal rhetoric, which assume a free, rational agent, to defend a religious identity based on submission (17)? Furthermore, why was their rhetoric uncritically accepted by many U.S. Americans, and to what ends was it appropriated and re-deployed? Given the speed and the augmentation that characterizes the way information travels in an early twenty-first-century moment, rhetors can quickly lose control of the texts they produce. Feminist rhetoricians should be particularly interested in the implications of these conditions for women's rhetorics. The writer extends existing scholarship that complicates and theorizes networked rhetorics in order to call for the generation of vocabularies that account for the complex networks of social, economic, religious, cultural, philosophical and geographic realities that constrain free choice.