



# Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic

*Mary Kelley*

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Education was decisive in recasting women's subjectivity and the lived reality of their collective experience in post-Revolutionary and antebellum America. Asking how and why women shaped their lives anew through education, Mary Kelley measures the significant transformation in individual and social identities fostered by female academies and seminaries. Constituted in a curriculum that matched the course of study at male colleges, women's liberal learning, Kelley argues, played a key role in one of the most profound changes in gender relations in the nation's history: the movement of women into public life.

By the 1850s, the large majority of women deeply engaged in public life as educators, writers, editors, and reformers had been schooled at female academies and seminaries. Although most women did not enter these professions, many participated in networks of readers, literary societies, or voluntary associations that became the basis for benevolent societies, reform movements, and activism in the antebellum period. Kelley's analysis demonstrates that female academies and seminaries taught women crucial writing, oration, and reasoning skills that prepared them to claim the rights and obligations of citizenship.

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