Where are the Moun[ə]ns in Utah?

It is fairly common in American English to release the glottal stop nasally yielding \([k^h\text{\element}}\text{n}].\) However, it appears that the stigmatized pronunciation, although it is described as “T dropping,” actually involves oral release of the glottal stop (e.g. \([k^h\text{\element}}\text{n}]\) and \([\text{maw}\text{\element}}\text{n}]\)). Glottal stops were produced in 92% of the cases, while only eleven percent had an oral release following the glottal stop. Few instances of oral releases were produced by participants who had spent less than 66% of their life in Utah.

The effect of gender and age for participants who had lived 66% or more of their life in Utah is given in the graph below, where the percent of oral releases is plotted. It shows that women who are younger than 50 use more oral releases than men in all age categories. Oral releasing among men occurs almost exclusively among teenagers. As is often the case, women tend to be on the forefront of linguistic changes (Haeri 1997). This is true as far as oral releasing in Utah is concerned. These cross-sectional data suggest that oral releasing is an innovation that is being propagated among younger Utahns.