

Opinions

Women in politics

Double standards, preconceptions abound



Ashley Jobe
Columnist

There has yet to be a female president. The political landscape is completely dominated by men. Women account for only 17 percent of Congress, and there are only six current female governors. So why are these numbers so out of sync with the nation's demographics?

It's because of America's hang-ups and preconceptions about the capacities of women and men in their respective occupational fields. Women have a more difficult time in positions that involve public scrutiny.

Though women and men are biologically wired a bit differently, that is not an excuse for the discrepancies we see in the treatment of women subject to public examination.

The ratios of testosterone, progesterone and estrogen are measured in different levels throughout both genders, but all exist in both.

But the sociological reasons for the differences associated with either gender are man-made and can be manipulated.

For those who think there are intrinsic differences between the sexes and that difference plays out in the separation between the sexes in the workplace, being a woman does not mean demoted power. Being a woman does not call for negative or dissimilar treatment, nor does it call for unnecessary preference or consideration.

Hillary Clinton has long been ostracized by her critics during her years as first lady, her run for the presidency and her current role as secretary of state. She is deemed "too emotional" and "unpredictable." The expectations placed on women start with the upbringing of America's children. Parents adhere to a number of norms that eventually form constraints within the context of the child's future endeavors.

A girl who is taught that her success is contingent upon the personality traits she displays is already at a disadvantage. She should be able to

be, act and look exactly as she likes. Her ability is not dependent upon "desirable" traits.

Controversy arose regarding Newsweek's Oct. 13, 2008 cover featuring Sarah Palin. The cover picture of Palin was up close and personal — laugh lines, crow's feet and all. She is an aging woman yet the photo selection underwent extreme criticism for being unabashedly real and honest about the subject. Then her most recent Newsweek cover, with her pictured in short shorts and athletic gear, was publicly rejected by her and her representatives.

"The choice of photo for the cover of this week's Newsweek is unfortunate," Palin said.

She deemed the cover "sexist" and the picture "out of context." First, there is uproar about the excessive photoshopping of women, and movements, such as Dove's campaign for real beauty, were created to combat unrealistic depictions of women.

But when a middle-aged governor gets her picture taken, people are up in arms about how "real" Palin should look. Perhaps they should have lessened the blow by eliminating the more candid aspects of her facial features, but even then people might be upset that the alterations were not representative of her actual age.

Would this discussion even exist if a man's photo were being selected for a magazine cover?

"Will Americans want to watch a woman get older before their eyes on a daily basis?" Rush Limbaugh said.

We cannot expect preferential treatment for a woman and overlook the fact that the difference we make in our mind, especially in this scenario, is in and of itself sexist.

The glass ceiling still exists. The reasons why professions are predominantly male or female are because of notions carried in the psyches of both men and women in the workforce because of personal experiences, prejudiced intent on the part of employers and by gender norms that have been accepted as true because of their historical precedence.

Unless America's preconceived notions of women change, the cycle will continue as is.

The heart behind the lens



Marlena Chertock
Columnist

Do we have the power to create good in this world? Photojournalist Dave Labelle believes so.

On Nov. 18 Labelle came to Elon to speak about his professional journeys. The first half of the speech was mostly techniques, guidelines and how to improve photographs. Labelle suggested a few minutes of break before he set in on the next part. He needed that time to truly switch gears.

Labelle explained why he became a photojournalist and why he and his family have been on the road since early September.

"I believe good begets good," he said.

He told a story of a month he spent shooting photos of homeless people in California. The Ventura County Star published the photos biweekly in a spot called "Hard Times."

People would often call the newspaper asking to get in touch with the homeless person pictured, wanting to offer them a room in their homes, Labelle said.

Positive outcomes seemed to come out of unveiling the problem.

Labelle said he is trying to do good in this world, just trying to create "pictures with purpose," as his Web site said. He said he thinks if newspapers show positive aspects every once in a while, instead of only the negative, the world could be better.

"I'm failing miserably," he said, evidently humble of his efforts.

Much of Labelle's philosophy came from a life-changing experience when he was seven. In January 1969, there was a flood in his hometown of Ventura County, Calif., and he and his family were trapped

on the roof of their house. After this near-death experience, Labelle and several of his family members were saved, but his mother did not survive.

The day after the destruction, a reporter came to interview Labelle and his father. Labelle recalls the reporter being sweet and understanding. He said he wanted to be just like that reporter, to be able to help others in their tough times.

Labelle explained he wants God to look back on his life and say, "Well, he tried."

I never thought such professions could have religious motivations. Often, giving a project or occupation a sense of religion gives it more meaning to people. This is what Labelle has found, and he is helping others with his talent.

Labelle used PowerPoint slides with sayings such as "It's not all about me" to emphasize the need to help others.

Throughout his speech, Labelle encouraged the attendees to use their talent to make a difference. He said we have so much power — we only have to use it.

Of course, that's not to say photojournalism or journalism needs a Christian motivation to be meaningful. People can find and give meaning to their professions on their own. That, after all, is the end goal of this life — to give life its own meaning, to find something to truly enjoy that gives existence significance.

Religion sometimes guides the way, but it is not always needed. As long as there's an occupation that satisfies and it's used to raise awareness of issues or to promote respect and humanitarian aid, Labelle would agree with the journey.

We must realize the world is a bigger place than what surrounds us. The world does not revolve around us and it is important to care for our global community.

As Labelle says, if more people act as bridges to a better world, perhaps more good will follow.

The Opinions podcast

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No, seriously.

It was pretty bad.

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A church's ransom



Dan Rickershauser
Columnist

Given the many political missteps the Roman Catholic Church has made throughout history, one would be led to believe that the church would be reluctant to continue to inject its beliefs into United States politics. But they make that assumption.

On Nov. 12, the Washington Post reported that the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., would cut all social services they provide for the city if the Washington, D.C., City Council approved same-sex marriage.

The Washington, D.C., Council is expected to approve the gay marriage proposal in the coming months. The church's social services branch, Catholic Charities, serves 68,000 people in Washington, D.C., and the organizations shelters serve up to one-third of the city's homeless willing to go to them.

What the Catholic Church is threatening is nothing short of blackmail, throwing the thousands of Washington, D.C., residents dependent on the church's social services under the bus. Such an action would be nothing less than using these dependents as mere pawns as the church flexes its political muscle.

It is an extraordinary lapse in morality for the church, threatening those who have nothing to do with the Washington, D.C., City Council's decision.

That's not to say that the Catholic Church has no right to say and believe whatever it wants. This is, after all, the United States of America, a country whose First Amendment in the Bill of Rights ensures both the freedom of speech and religion (two things that are oftentimes synonymous).

But to use social services that assist the homeless and others in need as a political wager is nothing short of blasphemy. So far, Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine and Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley, both Catholics, have come out criticizing the church's threat.

While the proposed gay marriage law won't force churches to perform same-sex marriages, the church is concerned that the anti-discrimination laws in the bill would require Catholic charities to extend employee benefits to their employees in same-sex marriages as a result of city contracts.

The Catholic Church has made many steps to ensure its steadfast loyalty to biblical doctrines that consider homosexuality a mortal sin remains intact, even if that means stepping away from other church doctrines.

In October, the Vatican announced a plan hoping to recruit conservative Anglicans and Episcopalians back into the Catholic Church who have been dissatisfied with their own churches' decisions to allow women and openly gay priests, as well as blessing homosexual partnerships.

This new policy even allows married Anglican and Episcopalian priests into the Catholic Church, a huge step away from the age-old Catholic policy that demands that priests remain celibate. The Vatican is apparently willing to compromise on those doctrines.

If the Catholic Church wants to become a haven for intolerance, it is well on its way. Given young people throughout the Western world's increasing acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality, the Catholic Church is going to be on the wrong side of history.

It has been there before, in the Crusades and the Holocaust to name just a few instances. If we've learned anything about how the Catholic Church has dealt with these mistakes, perhaps in a 100 years or so it will issue a formal apology for its actions.

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