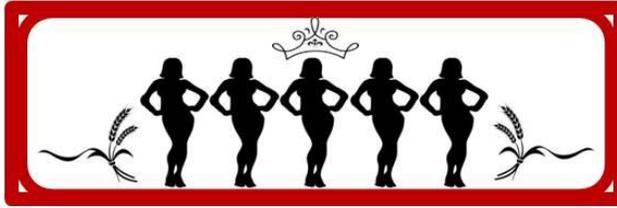


ARE WOMEN HONORED, MERELY TOLERATED, OR A TREASURED COMMODITY?

It is 2AM, and I cannot sleep, because the events of the past week or so, in particular, keep running through my head, and have set off triggers for me that I did not realize still have an impact on me as a woman, a human being that happens to be female. While the current political campaign has been the nucleus for much of my reflection, and the platform for the plethora of feelings that I am experiencing, I am rehearsing the remarks that the Republican candidate has made, and allegedly said and done during this campaign. By the way, those who are emotionally injured must not be issued a time frame in which they come forth with their valid infraction. Everyone processes grief differently, and no one should be ridiculed or made a mockery of if they decide to wait years before speaking out, or if they find comfort knowing that the perpetrator had others whom he violated, and thus decide to be a part of a group or class action discovery. Returning to my thoughts on this candidate whose remarks regarding women, people of color, the disabled, and so much more, are co-mingled with his abilities or lack thereof, to make decisions in the best interest of the United States.

Not that he has the best approach to the issues, but let's assume for a minute that he did. What would we look like as a nation, if we had a leader who made great decisions on the economy, clean air, health care, defense, foreign policy etc. but his/her character traits are so flawed through arrogance, biased thinking, entitlement, lack of good judgement, and lack of accountability, and unapologetic at the core, it wouldn't take long at all for such an Administration to erode the very principles of the Constitution of this great nation. The Democratic candidate has not escaped the scrutiny of the political microscope either, and one could argue her motives and decisions on several political matters, however, the huge difference for me is which candidate is going to have the best interest of the people in mind, and which track record predicts or points us in that direction. But I digress, because what's troubling me is not the politics.

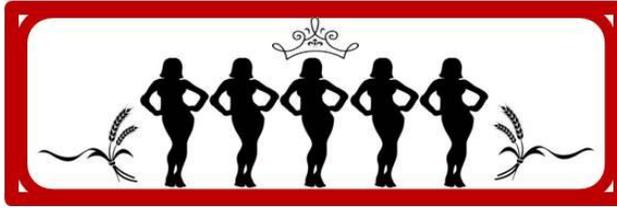
What's bothering me, is that the Republican candidate (a wealthy, visible, and influential person) represents a large group of men who still conduct themselves in a manner that suggests women are on the planet to serve their needs, wants, and commands at the expense of women putting their own needs, goals, wants, ambitions, expressions, and desires second to those of men. This conundrum is apparent from the bedroom to the boardroom, and places between. You can see the line in the sand in the workplace, in the home, in houses of worship, in education, with sexual predators, in domestic violence, even in loving relationships, not all, but too many men still diminish women by overpowering them (physically or psychologically) by drowning out our voices, our bodies, our perspective, our contribution, our right to an opinion different from men, and ultimately, our value and worthiness as human partners with mankind. For a man to say that he respects women is one thing, and to demonstrate respect in his daily life by both his actions, and his words, whether behind the scenes or openly, is quite a different story. I'm thinking of a dear male friend who has not shown aggression towards women, to my knowledge, but he and I got into a heated discussion when he marginalized and minimized "rape", by saying that at some point during the encounter, the woman consented or submitted to the violence, even if to save her life, therefore, did he really rape her?



Why don't women talk about such ridiculous and insulting notions more? Some women have so immersed themselves in the culture of male superiority that they themselves don't even realize or recognize the problem, which is sad to me, since none of us can change what we don't acknowledge. For other women, the challenge is so enormous; they are overwhelmed at the prospect that their voice could possibly make a difference. There's also the extremists, who emasculate and disrespect men, in an effort to somehow balance the playing field, and mostly there's women who know instinctively of the disparities, but don't have the courage or confidence to speak out against it. I also realize that there are many men, perhaps good men, who really do not understand why I am angry, hurt, sad, and sometimes just numb on this issue.

Let me try to make a comparison with some past and current events. Image how the slaves (men and women) felt on the auction block as their bodies were inspected for the purpose of satisfying the needs their oppressors. Consider how they tried to reckon or find logic in family members being stolen from them and sold to other slave owners, with no voice in the process, only screams from the anguish inflicted upon them. More currently, can you identify with a Black male who is pulled over by a police officer who is engaging in racial profiling? How about a sales person following you around a "high end" store because it's assumed that you can't afford to shop there, so you're only there to "case the joint" for a theft. What about attempting to rent or purchase a home in a neighborhood where someone thinks you don't belong, and they find a reason not to sell or rent to you? This is just a short list of scenarios where anyone experiencing those situations feels helpless, vulnerable, and at the mercy of the one deciding your outcome at the moment. What do you do? To get out of the situation alive, and/or with some degree of safety, poise, or dignity, you adjust your demeanor, quiet your voice, and submit to the violation, at least until you can get to a safe place to recover from the infraction, gather your thoughts, and decide how or if you choose to respond. Why? Because you were violated! Someone or some system entrenched on, infringed upon, or disregarded your humanity, and the right to human dignity and respect. This basic element is snatched from women regularly, in both overt and covert ways.

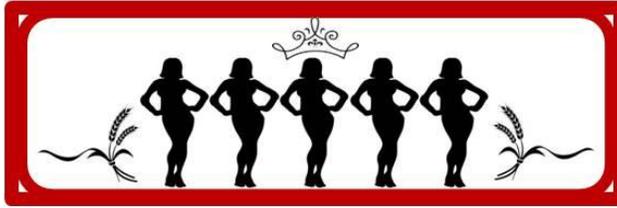
I am reminded of my younger years, when I didn't know how to combat this dilemma, and my silence was taken as acceptance of the behavior. Somewhere along the way, I reached my limit on silence, and couldn't take it anymore. I remember working in corporate America in my mid-twenties, avoiding a very influential man who constantly openly commented on women's breasts, butts, and legs, and although the women in my department did not like it, they feared losing their jobs if they spoke out, because he was holding a vice-presidential position. I too had concerns about voicing my opinion concerning him, and he had not said anything directly to me, until one day he showed up in our work area and commented in derogatory ways, to and about every woman in our work space, and they just chuckled with a nervous laugh. Then he looked at me (dressed quite conservatively at the time), and said, "I bet you would take off everything for me, except your hat". I immediately saw "red" figuratively, and forgot who he was, and where I was. I went "off" on this man, and was later applauded by the President of the company for standing up to him. The offender later gave a weak apology. I can also recall being in a boardroom, and a man literally stood up, shaking his finger in my face, when I disagreed with his



approach to an issue. His towering over me was intended to intimidate me into letting me know that he had the perceived power and I did not. I went “off” on him too. I’m also thinking of a man, who my family trusted to bring me home from choir rehearsal years ago, and on the way home, without any intimate conversation or advances from me, pulled the car over to an empty lot, and aggressively began touching me inappropriately, leaving me stunned and afraid to tell anyone for fear that I would not be believed or somehow was responsible for his actions. I know of a pastor who ex-communicated his own wife, because she disobeyed him, a personal matter that could have been handled privately, but instead he used his power in a public forum to humiliate her and demonstrate that she was powerless in the grips of his authority. I cannot count the times when I’ve offered a suggestion or solution in a business meeting with mostly men, and my comments were not acknowledged at all, and minutes later, when a man suggested the very same thing, it suddenly became a good idea. Let me not forget the times where I’ve become hopeful of increased respect, in light of a woman being assigned a leadership role, only to soon find out that either it’s in name only, without authority as her male partners had, or everything that she says or does must first be sanctioned by a male. It’s very difficult for me to even express to you the level of rage I feel as I am still learning of close friends and women in my family that have been raped and otherwise violated, not by strangers jumping out of the woods, but by trusted men close around them, and I’m further confused by some of the adult women’s responses to daughters, nieces, sisters, and friends who were brave enough to tell what happened, and the adult women’s responses were dismissive, perhaps because they felt defenseless themselves? Some of these women are so damaged until their own filters, boundaries, esteem, trust, and sometimes sanity are forever gone without their consent. Women are still too often enduring wholesale disrespect, and inferior treatment on many fronts, around the globe, across the lines of race, religion, socio-economic status, age, culture, sexual orientation, and education.

A man once asked me, “why do you often seem like the victim rather than the victor?” At the time, I really didn’t know how to respond. In retrospect, I should have responded this way; a victor sees themselves as having the ability to control, overcome, or triumph over a situation, whereas a victim still feels “stuck” in it, I actually feel both ways, different feelings on different days. The problem is far from over, but I am grateful that God has instilled in me the resilience to try again another day to make things better, by speaking up and speaking out, much in the same way that I cannot hear jokes or other disparaging remarks about a group of people and not speak out against it. Gone are the jokes at someone else’s expense. It’s not funny.

I’m not looking for dominance over men. I rather like being a female, and the soft and delicate ways of being, in the appropriate setting. I love being protected and spoiled by a man on a personal level, and will happily return the same to him. What I abhor are men who feel that women are great, as long as they “stay in their place”. I’d like to know what place that is? We are intelligent thinking, rational, and wise creatures. Men, don’t relegate us only to roles that are sexual, maternal, and culinary, although many of us do all those things well too! Stop calling us partners but treat us like hired help, where you can, at your discretion and whim, alter the outcome negatively, if a female does not yield to the model of who you think she should be or how she should react in the moment. I’d like to give a “shout-out” to



all of the supportive and open minded strong and confident men, who are willing to stray from the status-quo, and perhaps even stand alone among their peers to not support injustices against women. True that we can all do a better job at controlling our emotions sometimes, and learning to choose the right time to bring up sensitive issues, but that goes for both men and women. Too often, women feel that our value is limited to our body features, shape, size, and performance. There is a keen distinction between admiration and violation. For women who know their worth, we are not impressed, but rather insulted at words that describe us as objects or renamed body parts, when we are whole contributors, not invisible robots, void of feelings, programmed to compliance.

For my critics, male or female, I'm not having a "monthly period" moment, another dismissive response from some men towards women who are passionate as it relates to their stand on these matters. I am not expressing a temporary state of emotion, but rather a build-up, stemming from generations of social improprieties, where women have largely been disrespected, overpowered, overlooked, and presumed inferior. Whether we are as cavalier as a woman who chooses prostitution as an occupation, or as regal as the queen of England, we who are females deserve to be honored and respected, in the same spirit that we should honor and respect ourselves and our male counterparts. For young women who should grow up expecting to be treated in such a way, they need to see it modeled as they develop into adult women. I feel that it is our job as the responsible adults to teach and model unconditional mutual respect. Where do you stand on this very sensitive topic?

"Are Women Honored, Merely Tolerated, or A Treasured Commodity?"

e-Wise Contributor Article

Author: Anonymous

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