



Your Story
MATTERS
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Columnist

Leading with accountability

March is Women's History Month. It is a time to reflect on the many women and men who have carved pathways toward the sought-after hopes of equity, respect, and opportunity. It is a time to reflect on privilege and intersectionality where systems in our society continue to favor some while sizeable gaps remain for others. It is a time to remember the women in our own lives and take inventory of sacrifice, resilience, and compassion, but also acknowledge the dark spots. It is a time for inspiration and mobilization as we seek togetherness and connection. It is a time for honesty.

It is a time for accountability.

Accountability can be a controversial word. Accountability insinuates responsibility and responsibility insinuates blame, which can often lead to

defensiveness. The reasons behind continued inequities for some women are complex and layered. However, amid the effects of patriarchy and discrimination also lies the subtle and more obvious ways in which we as women sabotage each other.

Women and girls have been historically socialized to lead with softness, hospitality, modesty, beauty, and maternalism. While these traits have value, the roles of assertiveness and boldness have had historically masculine connotations. As women, we may become caregivers, people-pleasers, and super-moms, but too often carry silent resentments and loneliness as speaking up, setting boundaries, and being direct can seem challenging. We may act like who we think we should be rather than who we may truly be, which can ultimately be exhausting and isolating.

Historically, women have also been too frequently in a place of dependence — often on a man. This is evident in our story books, fairy tales, media, and cultural values. This dependence has been and remains socially reinforced as a woman's worth, financial standing, property, and welfare may be socially dictated by her marital or relationship status. Yes, this has changed in the United States (for some) although in other parts of the world it continues to be reality. Meeting social norms for

some women is not simply about fitting in, but about survival. This dynamic creates competition, desperation, and disempowers a woman as her society may dismiss the value of her character, work ethic, or intellect. Women have made great strides, but for many women and girls there remains a hypervigilance of being accepted and attractive even at the expense of their welfare and aspirations.

While opportunity continues to remain staggered for women across the United States and inequities continue to be problematic, a good number of women in this country are privileged to have autonomy, free agency, access to education, financial independence, and professional opportunity. It seems these 'privileges' should be rights; however, they can be a luxury when compared to women on a global scale. In this place of privilege, there can still be struggle. Simply being aware of the grossly unsettling rates of abuse, assault, and mistreatment women endure creates widespread resentment, sadness, and anger.

Ultimately, many of us have been hurt, wounded, and traumatized. We have ample reason to be defensive, on-guard, and mistrusting. Many of us have faced situations where we have felt powerless and out of control. Too often this leads to self-blame, insecurity, and shame, which if

not acknowledged, can be projected frequently on our female counterparts in ways that can be very ugly.

Arising from our own insecurities, we tear each other down for how we look, judge each other's successes, shame each other's sexuality, insult each other's intelligence, and maintain rigid viewpoints of what constitutes a worthy woman. We gossip, backstab, serve the silent treatment, and spread rumors. We must learn to lead with accountability rather than blame and self-reflection rather than projection.

Women need to support women. There is a special resilience that binds us all. It is a strength that transcends labels, political affiliations, beliefs, occupation, relationship status, and financial standing. We must own our voice, our prejudices, our privilege, our decisions, our feelings, our actions, and our story. Jealousy, competition, and judgement only regresses our progress. So, let's honor our history and lead with courage, togetherness, humility, openness, and yes, accountability.

We still have work to do.

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