

## **Encouragement about future for U.S. women**

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A father is hopeful about gender equality for his daughter's generation.

Many social debates concerning women have centered on violence, adequate child care, a woman having the right to choose and equal pay and opportunity. As a father of a bright 22-year-old daughter, I am concerned with gender equality in the United States.

When my daughter was growing up, I wanted to lessen the impact of the real world for her, so we discussed how she would not have to choose among marriage, children and career to be considered successful. Basing my comments on the insights of my female colleagues' experiences, I hoped to prepare my daughter for the struggles she would experience as a woman in the U.S.

I was reminded of my concerns while attending a Harvard seminar where I am studying as a National Security Fellow this year. The guest lecturer asked everyone sitting on the outside of the table to take a seat at the table. Of the men and women present, all the men but only a couple of women took seats at the table.

"Women, you must be confident, realize you are capable and deserve a seat at the table," the lecturer implored the women. Her comments have stayed with me both as a man and a father.

There are signs that women may be on the verge of something transformational. The United Nations reported, for example, that having women in politics and other social institutions challenges tough problems like corruption, promotes efforts in education and improves basic needs like clean water and housing.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton maintains that experience shows that integrating women into transition, reconciliation and peace-building processes from the start helps promote long-term peace and stability by ensuring a focus on critical broader priorities and needs.

It's ironic that, while the U.S. endorses the integration of women into institutions globally, improvement regarding the rights of women is still needed here at home. Women in the U.S. earn only 77 cents to every \$1 earned by men, by some accounts.

Women make up 57 percent of students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities and make up nearly half the workforce, but they account for 3.6 percent of CEOs at Fortune 500 companies.

When women exercise their voice and power, the focus of the social debate changes. They insert different perspectives and solutions into the dialogue. A culture change within our institutions must create an enabling environment for women.

My experience in the military suggests we have been too slow to change this culture. During a recent dinner conversation I had with two female military officers, one Marine and the other Navy, they discussed their concerns that the next generation of women will act or look a particular way to gain acceptance with mostly male colleagues and superiors.

They maintain that despite being competent or intelligent, women contend with self-doubt about their rise to senior military positions. Women are subjected to grim comments like "You are only here because the organization was pressured to promote a woman."

But at the best educational institutions, you will find many talented women who will not settle for sitting in the "peanut gallery." I sit in classrooms with future governors, writers, physicians, lawyers, professors and military officers. These women are conscious of their worth and know that nothing is out of reach. As a father, I am encouraged and eager to see this new era of women who will enter their chosen fields with fervor.

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