

Why we need to stop requiring churches to interview a woman

By [MaryAnn McKibben Dana](#)

May 21, 2012

How do we solve the gender gap in ministry? With women outnumbering men in seminaries today, how do we break that stained glass ceiling?

Our current approach in the Presbyterian Church is to require churches, when looking for a pastor, to interview at least one female candidate. The thinking is, of the final three or four candidates, there would be a woman in the mix, and perhaps even churches with an unspoken default of pastor=male might be sufficiently moved to think outside the box. Not that every church will follow that up with a call to that woman, of course. This is mysterious Holy Spirit stuff, not to mention that there are women pastors who aren't all that. But churches should at least *look*.

Do you think this helps? Have you seen this approach be helpful?

[Insert standard disclaimer about how people are complicated and are more than their gender.]

I was talking to some friends last week who were questioning this approach. And here's the piece I found interesting. People have done studies about how we make decisions, and we do a much better job evaluating when we can compare two relatively similar things to one another. My friend told me about a study (I think I've got this right) in which they showed three pictures. Two pictures were of handsome/beautiful celebrities and the third was an image of one of those celebrities, but with the face badly distorted.

So for example, Brad Pitt, George Clooney, and George Clooney with big jowls and an enlarged forehead.

Subjects were asked to choose the most handsome/beautiful face. The study showed that people overwhelmingly chose the face that had its own distorted image to compare it to. These images were so much better looking than their distorted image that they ended up coming out on top most of the time. So in the example, George Clooney over Brad Pitt.

OK that might be a bad example. The Clooney *always* beats Brad.

Anyway.

If this study is accurate, a lone woman among a final four of candidates will not get a fair look-see because there is no basis for good comparison. She becomes a non-sequitur.

So maybe we shouldn't require churches to interview a woman candidate. Maybe we should require them to interview more than one!

What do you think?

Originally posted at [The Blue Room](#)