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## If Bachmann and Palin Weren't Pretty



By Marty Kaplan

I wonder how much airtime Michele Bachmann would get if she didn't look the way she does. I wonder how much of Sarah Palin's political appeal arises from her physical appeal.

I have a feeling that wondering this will get me in hot water, but what the hell.

I think Michele Bachmann (R-MN) is pretty. I think that Sarah Palin is pretty, too. I'm not saying they're smokin' hot babes. I'd reserve that for someone younger, like Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly. If I were in my 20s, I suppose that having any corporeal thoughts at all about these women would be, as the kids say, ewwww. But from my boomer perspective, they're real lookers.

Now given my politics, you would think that my knowing what Bachmann and Palin say and stand for would be a total turnoff, but my familiarity with their wingnut views seems to cause no diminution of my spontaneous appreciation of their assets. Even Dana Perino, who as press secretary defended the indefensible George W. Bush, makes my head turn.

All these ladies regularly say things that are — to use Professor Jon Stewart's formulation — evil or stupid. Bachmann, for example, has called the Obama Administration a "gangster government"; she's proposed a witch hunt for "anti-America" members of Congress; she's said that Lexington and Concord, where the shots heard round the world were fired, are in New Hampshire; her claims about Obama's policies on everything from taxes and monetary policy to the environment and health care have earned her more than a dozen grades of Barely True and Pants on Fire from Politifact.com, the independent, Pulitzer Prize-winning fact-checking site.

But as Michele Bachmann inches toward a bid for the GOP nomination for the presidential nomination, and as Sarah Palin launches a media frenzy about her White House intentions, I have to think that their plausibility as candidates doesn't simply derive from their Tea Party cred. After all, Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Jean Schmidt (R-OH) also adhere the most extreme right wing positions of the Republican party's base,

but I don't see MSNBC lavishing on them the kind of base-riling scorn that Bachmann and Palin get; they're not asked to keynote all the big creationist-birther-AK47 confabs.

In a politainment era, looks — even sex appeal — matter. On the male side, this could account for Sen. John Thune (R-SD) still getting mentioned as a presidential contender, even though he's said he's not interested, in contrast with Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), whom nobody is mentioning as a 2012 possibility, and whose cheekbones aren't remotely as chiseled. It also could explain John Huntsman's appeal, and Mitt Romney's frontrunner standing in the polls. And in an inverse way, it makes the effort by Roger Ailes and Rush Limbaugh to draft New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie for the Republican nomination completely plausible (who could be more authentic than a guy who looks like Chris Christie?), and it lent gravitas to the Mitch Daniels boomlet (real wonks don't have great hair). Speaking of hair, Donald Trump could be the outlier that proves the theory.

Let me stipulate, in case any Bachmann or Palin fans are reaching for stones to throw at my glass house, that I am not a 10. I'm not a zero, either. I know that my looks haven't gotten me anywhere, and they also haven't stopped me from getting anywhere, though an Abercrombie job interview would likely have been a sobering exception. If you think my take is nothing more than a nerd's revenge for an unrequited crush on the prom queen, I'll be glad to forward your messages to my therapist. And if you think my focusing on their looks is shamefully sexist, I guess that just goes to show that the political correctness cartoon doesn't apply only to liberals.

In the end, it could be that it's hard to my eyes off Bachmann and Palin not despite their political views, but because of them — that is, because the gulf between how pretty they are and how doggie they talk is so shocking. It's a bit like that character type you sometimes see on a TV show, the sweet little old lady who swears like a stevedore. It wouldn't be remarkable if some crone had a potty mouth. But the verbal foulness is ironically endearing when it comes from the last person you'd predict. Maybe this is too big a stretch, but I can't help thinking that the reason Bachmann and Palin don't repulse me is the same reason I'm so fond of Betty White.

*This is my column from [The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles](#). You can read more of my columns [here](#), and e-mail me there if you'd like.*

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