

May More Voices: Sexism

Category: Sexism

written by Paul Gross | April 30, 2022

Dear *Pulse* readers,

My wife and I have raised two daughters. When our girls were little, and I was casting about for stories and characters to inspire them, it struck me with visceral force how the vast majority of cartoon and fantasy characters were male—from Micky Mouse and Bugs Bunny to Kermit the Frog and Winnie the Pooh. From Donald Duck, Daffy Duck and Yogi Bear to Rocky and Bullwinkle. Bert and Ernie. Felix the Cat. Superman.

Everywhere I looked I saw images and stories about brave, intrepid boys, while girls were often relegated to passive supportive roles. Even in our supposedly post-feminist world, it took real effort to find books that presented girls as clever, courageous and capable.

It made me angry. And I wondered how more difficult that search would have been, and how much angrier I would have been, if our daughters had been girls of color.

When our daughters got a bit older, we faced a new challenge: Movies where comely young women in skimpy attire drew avid attention from leading men whose clothes were not revealing at all.

“What do you think of the way this movie pictured women?” I’d ask my daughters. This question was inevitably greeted with eye rolls. “*Daad*, can’t we just enjoy the movie?”

Fast forward to 2019, and despite the shortage of role models, despite the sexist stereotypes, the Association of American Medical Colleges reported that women now constitute the majority of medical students.

This hopeful news is tempered by stories from the front, where women physicians report unsettling incidents of harassment by patients and superiors and describe struggling to be accorded the same respect as male colleagues: Doctor Smith introduces herself to a family, who promptly call her by her first name. A female physician orders an EKG in the hospital, and the result is handed not to her but to the male medical student standing next to her.

As a male physician, I don’t experience these slights, although I have listened as a female resident described how a male patient’s friendliness had suddenly, sickeningly crossed a line. This young doctor was now torn between her oath to heal the sick and her need to protect her own dignity and self-respect.

I’ve also had a female patient come to me for medical clearance so that she could have cosmetic surgery in an effort to meet some unrealistic standard of beauty. In those moments, I, too, have felt torn—torn between offering

support to a young woman for a freely made decision, or trying to talk her out of a procedure that was, in my opinion, unnecessary and potentially harmful.

May's *More Voices* theme is Sexism. Use the [More Voices Submission Form](#) to send us your lived experience of experiencing, seeing or coping with sexism.

For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme: [Accidents](#).

Remember, your health-related story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With warm regards,

Paul Gross
Editor