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### *The Portrait*

Walking down these halls you can sense the greatness—it's something in the green and crimson that makes these rooms feel regal. The smell of the wood paneled walls. The recipients of awards forever immortalized in shiny black and gold. The storied gazes from the portraits of doctors who walked these halls long before.

This place is so important, yet in my first year it often felt so distant. I couldn't figure out why I felt so out of place despite the embroidered emblem and neatly laminated badge that adorned my white coat. The doctors on the walls were painted in brushstrokes of power and self-assuredness. I was supposed to follow suit.

I walked for weeks without noticing the pattern in the portraits that line these corridors: None of them looked like me. Under each crisp white coat was a pressed suit and neatly knotted necktie. They were all men. These portraits were supposed to

inspire me to greatness, but they actually made me feel more isolated.

After I noticed the pattern, I started to make a conscious effort to look for one—just one—painting of a woman on these walls. I looked for more than two weeks and never found one. Just more bearded faces.

With my quest foiled, I went about my schoolwork, surrounded by a club I seemingly couldn't join. I didn't quite fit the bill. Hardly 5'7" with long curly hair, I imagined I might not be the type of person these great men would want in their illustrious ranks. I was quite jealous of my male classmates: The people on the walls all looked like them. And if business school taught me anything, it's that what you put on your walls is what you value most as a company. Whether it's your "first dollar bill" or your family portrait, your walls say more than your words ever will about what you value. In this case, what was valued seemingly wasn't people like me.

*"I quickly looked around and asked myself - Where are all the other women?"*

Several months of classes and exams went by and I tried not to think about it. I poured myself into finals and research. I found resolve in the words of a trusted mentor: "In order to succeed, you'll have to work twice as hard for half as much." With that mentality, I dove in.

I sought out male mentors and sponsors. I took risks in asking to participate in surgeries and attend educational seminars within the surgery department. I chose to pursue research about gender disparities within surgical training. I was thriving.

In that spirit, I walked into a surgery department meeting several months later and sat down at a table of eleven male faculty and students. This meeting was an important opportunity to network with the division heads and learn about upcoming opportunities. I quickly looked around and asked myself, "Where are all the other women?" I knew other women in my class had the same goals as me, but they weren't at the table. In my personal ascension, I hadn't brought anyone else

along: My "twice as hard" had turned into advancement only for myself. I needed to change my strategy.

My personal achievements would not change the faces of these portraits. What I needed was to create sustainable change so all women might feel a sense of belonging despite the obvious lack of representation hanging on the walls.

I have spent the last year repainting this representation problem. Through mentorship programs for female medical students with female doctors and developing a curriculum on implicit gender bias, I hope to create a space for students to talk about gender issues in medicine and find mentors with whom they identify. I want my classmates to have tools to productively confront the feelings of isolation that sometimes accompany a lack of appreciable representation.

Repainting these walls will not only require oil-paints and canvas. I have learned it will also require a supportive community for women, female mentorship, networking opportunities in male dominated fields, as well as a culture of ally-ship amongst all students. This is about creating a new culture of medicine. Let's get to painting.