

FM REVIEW 2018 32 Comments

Comments to Editor: have a slightly different take on this essay. To me, the author's message is very clear - how hard and discouraging it is to fight against structural racism within medicine; and how this fight shouldn't even be necessary. The problem, as I see it, is that it is an opinion piece and not a narrative. There is no real story here. Perhaps that doesn't matter - maybe it could be argued that the author's entire life and struggle in medicine IS the story. I strongly endorse the values - and anger - expressed by the author. I'm just questioning its appropriateness for the narrative essay section. However, now that the author has already attempted one revision, it is complicated to know what to do. I think it would be awkward to tell the author at this point that the essay lacks a narrative thread.

Especially the historical paragraph, while absolutely true and infuriating, is problematic for me. Maybe the author could discuss how this history has affected her personally, perhaps how it has propelled her forward (it comes right after the paragraph about her low point of discouragement during her pregnancy).

I like the theme of "Seeing" reflected in the title, but wonder whether a more commanding/demanding version of the word would not be even more effective: See Me! I also think the idea of being seen could be tied in to the concluding paragraph.

The author has plenty of room to elaborate more on her perceptions and show them to the reader through personal anecdotes. I think this would make the essay both more accessible and closer to the intent of the narrative essay section.

Comments to Author: Thank you for the privilege of reading this impassioned and authentic essay. Your righteous indignation and enormous frustration at the structural impediments to equality, fairness, and basic justice in this country so need to be heard (still, unfortunately).

As I understand it, the narrative essay is supposed to tell a personal story, and does not publish "opinion" essays, no matter how valid and necessary those opinions are. It could be argued that your life in medicine IS your story. The more you can ground the essay in your personal experience, the more appropriate it will be for this section of the journal. For example, your discouragement and fear during your second pregnancy as a result of information documenting worse outcomes among African-American women is very compelling. The next paragraph, documenting the absolutely true and infuriating historical legacy of medicine's neglect, oppression, and exploitation of African Americans, needs some grounding in the personal. How does this history affect you? Coming as it does right after the pregnancy paragraph, did this impel you to further action? Cement your despair?

I would like to understand better how you created your visibility cloak - i.e., the steps you took as a female physician of color to stand forth. Are there a couple of anecdotes that could help ground your story in particulars?

The theme of not being seen, or being seen with through a lens of negative assumptions and bias, and the inequity of even having to ask to be seen, is a powerful one. In that regard, I wonder if the title could be stronger. I understand that "Seeing" refers both to you seeing these structural injustices as well as the need to be seen fairly by others, but perhaps a more demanding title would be even more compelling: See Me! Also, you might consider returning to the theme of being seen in the concluding paragraph. This would tie the essay together, and perhaps through an example you could show how, despite the unfairness of needing to do so, your students and you continue to stand forth, to be seen.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: As I read it, this is a story about an African-American female physician's discouragement about the pace of change either in her personal life (as the mother of two children who, as soon as they were born, had the cards stacked against them); and in her professional life (the lack of improved access to healthcare and the pitiful emptiness of the pipeline feeding physician workforce diversity). Her lament is genuine and heartrending. My problem is that the two main points I've identified do not seem very clearly articulated to me. I would like to see these stated with a bit more clarity.

My other concern is that the writing is not always strong. In an earlier version I read, the author talked about a cloak of visibility, but for some reason that metaphor has been excised, not necessarily to the improvement of the paper. Sometimes I had trouble following the intent of certain sentences. I've tried to suggest ways of tightening the prose. Of more concern is that the metaphor of being seen, which is a good one, just disappears. Perhaps it could be reintroduced at various points in the essay - for example, when the author talks about the birth of her first child; or when she talks about the failure of the pipeline; or at the least return to it in the concluding paragraph.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: As I read it, this is a story about your justifiable discouragement and anger at the lack of structural and social change affecting the existence of racism in your personal life (as the mother of two children who, as soon as they were born, had the cards stacked against them); and in your professional life (the persistent lack of equitable access to healthcare for minority patients and the pitiful emptiness of the pipeline feeding physician workforce diversity). Your lament is genuine and heartrending, but I think the essay could do a better job of articulate these two points.

My other critique is that in places the writing itself could be improved. Sometimes I had trouble following the intent of certain sentences. I've tried to suggest ways of tightening the prose in the attached edits. Of more concern is that the metaphor of being seen, which is a very good one, just disappears from the essay. Perhaps it could be reintroduced at various points in the essay - for example, either when you talk about the birth of your first child; or when you discuss about the failure of the pipeline; or at the least in the concluding paragraph.

Your essay is a cry of rage, which absolutely deserves to be heard. I like that it does not have a "happy ending" because at this point there is no happy ending in sight for medicine or for our society. I just think it needs more crafting in order for it to be heard clearly.