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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Avoiding a SPICE WORLD

*Though the power of women has been increasing, pop culture is doing a lot to promote gender bias and to push young girls into gender roles*

Americans are masters of the art of self-deception. We've gotten used to the idea that if things look fine on the outside, then they must be fine on the inside. Consequently, we sometimes miss the big picture.

For example, when we gaze around a pop culture landscape littered with female icons like Madonna and Oprah Winfrey, it is easy to forget that sexism still exists in this country. When asked for examples of powerful women, we can cite Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Attorney General Janet Reno almost without thinking. And there was, of course, last summer's Lilith Fair, the consummate example of female domination of a traditionally patriarchal enterprise. After all, we say, if so many women are so popular and successful, then it's obvious that sexism is on the decline.

That might be a valid argument if sexism simply entailed the unequal distribution and exercise of power between men and women. Furthermore, if that's what constituted sexism, then it would be no problem to fight. The easiest enemy to defeat is the obvious, predictable one. But like most other social ills, sexism thrives by taking on far more complex and insidious forms.

There are certain undeniable facts in this world, things that are more matters of common sense than of studies or statistics. And one of these undeniable facts is that

America has been giving its girls the short end of the proverbial stick for centuries.

But it's easy for us who are by now many years removed from our preteen days to overlook that. After all, the blatant gender bias of the not-so-distant past is gone. The Easy-Bake oven is passé, and Barbie has a computer. This doesn't mean that things have gotten that much better for

**OPINION**



**Kameron Cole**



girls. Now more than ever they are prodded into gender roles by the considerable force of pop culture.

Consider, for a moment, this year's crop of preadolescent icons. The Spice Girls, the manufactured darlings of the 9- to 13-year-old demographic, peddle their vapidly under the guise of "girl power." The teen magazine market continues to expand, with new publications offering the same crop of "How to Make Boys Want You — Bad" arti-

cles and self-esteem busting beauty tips that many post-adolescent women remember from their youth.

These things exist for one key reason: They fulfill a need for a group that is largely ignored by society.

The three- to four-year period before they reach adolescence is prime time in the development of girls. Unfortunately, evidence shows that this is the time when most girls fall through the cracks.

If we really intend to change the way women are perceived in this country, then it is imperative to address the needs of young girls. If we fail to offer realistic, positive female role models, then we are ensuring that the young adult media/advertising complex will pick up the slack. And do we really want a whole nation of Spice Girls?

*Kameron Cole is a columnist for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.*

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Check eligibility**

This January, the Oregon Student Association gained a major lobbying victory: The Oregon Health Plan was once again expanded to cover students. Due to this change, thousands of students across the state are

able to apply for medical coverage pending a few restrictions. If you are interested in applying for assistance through this program, please take a moment to look over the guidelines for eligibility. You may be able to receive aid and not even know it.

Full-time undergraduate students are able to qualify for OHP coverage if: you are uninsured or pregnant; you are in a program serving displaced workers per section 236 of the 1974 Trade Act; or you receive AFDC or Poverty Level Medical. Although there are re-

source requirements that must be met in addition to the above guidelines, it is worthwhile to further consider your eligibility for the Oregon Health Plan.

If you or someone you know doesn't have health insurance, call Health Choices im-

mediately at 1-800-359-9517 and apply for coverage. Coverage can go back to the date of application and may make a major difference in health costs.

**Sadie Rogers**  
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