**THE STICKY FLOOR AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS**

Gender roles are ingrained from early childhood, with children exposed to traditional gender roles and stereotypes from their immediate environments, cultural influences, and the media. Early gender stereotype beliefs translate into career choices. And although entrants to medical school in the UK are evenly stacked in terms of gender, women are typically underrepresented in more senior clinical and academic roles.

In this issue, Jefferson and her colleagues write about the glass ceiling in medicine and women’s constrained career progression in terms of the gender pay gap and gendered barriers in taking up partnership roles. Aside from the glass ceiling, the ‘sticky floor’ metaphor highlights a pattern where certain groups get mired at the bottom of the employment ladder, with fewer opportunities for promotion and professional advancement. Although the metaphor traditionally was used to depict the barriers faced by women, it’s relevant to inequalities faced by ethnic minorities and LGBTTQIA+ groups. It also applies to academic general practice, where female GPs make up a larger proportion of junior positions, but somehow don’t progress to more senior roles where the vast majority of general practice professors are male. Just as female GP partners describe the importance of mentoring by positive role models throughout their careers, female clinical academics describe a lack of realistic role models and mentors, meaning that they often don’t have anyone to turn to for career advice and guidance. The lack of diversity in senior academic roles, by gender and other minority groups, is well documented, and speaks to the paucity of diverse role modelling to influence future generations of clinical academics.

Role models can help release us from that sticky floor by showing us what’s achievable, acting as inspirational representations of the possible. Clive Myrie, considering journalism for his future, wondered if he would fit in as a Black presenter: ‘I saw Sir Trevor McDonald on ITV. A man who looked like me in the job? I knew it was possible.’ And although many of the imbalances in senior roles are rooted in historical problems and we can’t change our own background or attributes, it’s worth thinking about how we can act as role models through our behaviours and actions to set an example to inspire others.

Aspirations are influenced in childhood. A friend sent my 2-year-old daughter books a big things. We ask her at bedtime, ‘What do you want to read?’ ‘Emmeline’, she replies, beady-eyed and certain, and snuggles down to hear again the story of Emmeline Pankhurst and the suffragettes. Role models indeed.

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See online Supplementary Data for references.

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