

These Women Matched at Stanford. Twitter Responded With Misogyny and Racism.

— Commenters attacked program for nearly all-female class, but they misunderstand the match

by [Michal Ruprecht](#), Contributing Writer, MedPage Today

April 12, 2023



The butcher knows. The store clerk knows. The local church knows. And 16 million Twitter users know.

They all know Aderinsola Aderonmu will train at Stanford's prestigious surgery program.

"My mom has gone into every establishment over the last 2 weeks and said, 'My daughter just matched into general surgery at Stanford,'" Aderonmu said in an interview with *MedPage Today*. "We went to the butcher shop yesterday, and she said the same thing to them. I'm like, 'Mom, we're just trying to buy some meat.'"

Aderonmu and 12 others are part of the school's [incoming surgical residency class](#). All but one of the incoming residents are female, which is rare for a [field](#) that is [heavily male-dominated](#).

While the incoming students celebrated their accomplishments, a Twitter storm brewed after Stanford [tweeted a picture](#) of the incoming class. With over 16 million views and thousands of comments -- some negative and others positive -- the post garnered misogynistic and racist comments. Many people [took to social media](#) to share their [thoughts](#) on the issue.

"It was disheartening to see that a large number of people from the non-medical community ... had that kind of negative mindset towards our class," Deeksha Bidare, another incoming resident, said in an interview with *MedPage Today*. "But I don't

think any of us for a second saw that as a reflection of our own accomplishments or our own capabilities. Each of us built our CVs from the ground up."

David Spain, MD, the program director of Stanford's general surgery residency, said his team focused on ranking individuals who demonstrated leadership potential in the field. He said Aderonmu and Bidare exemplify future leaders in surgery.

"It took everything I had to not respond to those people. I was angry," Spain said in an interview with *MedPage Today*. "My message to [the incoming residents] was, 'Don't let anyone take your joy. You absolutely earned it, and we're going to do absolutely everything to support you.'"

Aderonmu's and Bidare's journey to medicine wasn't easy, they said. Both are first-generation Americans and identify as people of color. Aderonmu was raised by a single mother and experienced racism but she said her mom instilled a hard work ethic in her.

"When you are a first-generation American, you are not only thinking about your success but the success of your entire family," Aderonmu said. "My mom ... didn't really have much to give us, so she said, 'Look, education is your currency. And that is what's going to get you into spaces that you would never have gotten into if you didn't invest time into studying!'"

Bidare, Aderonmu, and their colleagues weren't the only ones who faced discriminatory commentary. The University of Washington's general surgery program [announced](#) its class of residents who were also all-female except for one candidate.

Peter Billing, MD, a surgeon whose private practice is about 16 miles away from the program, [reacted to the news](#) in a since-deleted tweet writing, "Here are the new surgical residents at the University of Washington. No need to apply if you identify as male or he/him."

Billing did not respond to multiple emails and calls requesting comment for this article. His practice is affiliated with EvergreenHealth, which did respond.

"It is of utmost importance to express that this sentiment does not align with EvergreenHealth's values," Kayse Dahl, a spokesperson for EvergreenHealth, said in an email to *MedPage Today*. "We are deeply disappointed to see this reflected by an independent provider on the medical staff. Unwavering demonstration of respect, compassion, and equality is essential to our culture and organization, and leaders are addressing the circumstance accordingly."

In response to Billing's comments, many [took to Twitter](#) and [defended](#) the incoming residents. Andrew Wright, MD, a surgeon at the University of Washington, [wrote](#) that Billing's tweet was "rooted in underlying misogyny."

"The incoming surgery residents ... are students of the highest merit and have a bright future as surgeons," Susan Gregg, a spokesperson for the University of Washington, wrote in an email to *MedPage Today*. "We are fortunate to be entrusted to train them."

The incoming residents and program director at the University of Washington declined to comment for this article.

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Donna Lamb, DHSc, MBA, BSN, president and chief executive officer of the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP), said many people don't have a solid understanding of [how the match works](#). After medical students apply and interview at residency programs, students rank each program. In turn, each program ranks the students as well. An [algorithm then matches](#) students to programs based on how both parties ranked each other.

NRMP began collecting demographic data from applicants during the previous application cycle, and they [published the data](#) earlier this year. It showed that the majority of applicants -- about 50.7% -- identified as female and chose general surgery as their preferred specialty. Preliminary data from the most recent cycle suggest the number increased by nearly one percentage point.

Bryan Carmody, MD, of Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, who frequently blogs about the match, said most people aren't aware that the majority of surgery applicants are female.

"Beyond the misogyny, their comments also show that they fundamentally don't understand how the match works. Programs don't directly hire or choose their applicants. They rank them and the algorithm makes the final assignment," Carmody told *MedPage Today*. "Even if a program had absolutely no preference for male or female applicants and interviewed an equal number of each, some programs would get an all-female entering class just by chance alone."

Despite the negativity, Bidare said her team received an overwhelming amount of support from the medical community. She added the field, especially academic surgery, is more welcoming to women and people of color.

"We are in a position now where we can advocate for people who are entering the profession after us," she said. "We've made it to a point where we have the confidence to believe that we deserve the spots."

Aderonmu said she wants young women and people of color to know they belong in the field. She added she is excited to begin her training at a program that values and celebrates her accomplishments.

"Unfortunately, I'm not always the one that's uplifted or even projected to succeed," Aderonmu said. "Believe in yourself more than you think others should believe in you, because that is what's going to take you the furthest."



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