

“But you’re a man...”

Call it what you will. Profiling. Stereotyping. Prejudice. Bias. Inequality. I strive to avoid either thinking or acting in ways which limit open-mindedness and fight this behavior in others when I can. Recently, I was almost the victim of such perfidious inconsideration. By nothing more than my gender, I was nearly precluded from a joyous celebration by the erroneous belief that “men don’t do that”.

Of course, I’m talking about going to a baby shower!

Thankfully, I was able to debunk this little misconception before it prevented me from missing the fun party. It was close, though, as I found out the actual date with only a week to go.

As I will often do during this blog, I refer back to my time in “Corporate America”. Working with so many people over a long length of time, you become friendly with many of them. With *great* luck, some of those will even become *friends*. That’s a subject large enough for several posts, so I’ll not digress here. Suffice to say, many of these co-workers are female and quite a few of them have had kids during the time we’ve worked together.

It has always been common practice, within the companies I’ve worked, for the friendly employees to throw a shower for the impending Mom. This may be in addition to a shower she has at another time or it may “join up” with an existing shower. It’s safe to say that many male co-workers show up for the happy event. A few of them even take part in the games (I opted out after two parties had those “identify the smell” games). All of us, male and female, are excited and happy to share the joy and laugh at the gifts. It’s a special time for every woman (and man, if we are able to get the husband to show up, too).

So, when my good friends' daughter, who I've known for 20 years, was about to have her first child, I was *expecting* to be invited to the shower. For the longest time, I wasn't even sure there was going to be a shower, since I hadn't heard anything from her Mom. After much poking and prodding (I'm an effective pocker and prodder, just ask my friends. Too effective, they will probably say.), I finally determined there was going to be a shower but that Mom hadn't thought to invite me because, well, I was a man. And men don't go to baby showers.

Despite assuring her that I (and other members of the male community) did attend baby showers, I was still unable to obtain an actual date and place for the shower. Finally, she fessed up. She cautioned me that I would be the only man attending and she had invited over two dozen women. Would I be OK with that? I wondered if that was a trick question.

With so little time remaining, though, the list of items on the registry was less exciting than I preferred. Another digression: I love to give gifts. Actually, I love to give gifts more than receiving, but we'll leave that for yet another blog entry (you can see I won't have any problem filling this section up continuously). My friend and I discussed maybe just waiting until after the shower and seeing what she *really* needed. I considered this, but at the very last (the day before), I felt I couldn't show up at the shower without *any* gift so I picked up what I thought was the most fun thing remaining. That did cause a bit of an oopsie, which we'll get to shortly.

Arriving early, as I nerdily do at all parties, I offered my usual beast-of-burden services as needed in helping to set-up (or, in the case of one guest, carrying their heavy package from the distant parking to the house). I was strongly lectured that I needed to "eat a lot", because women don't want to feel self-conscious about eating a lot at parties and if a man was only "nibbling" it would look bad. And here I

had scrupulously gone and eaten before the party so I wouldn't "hog" any food from the ladies. Chivalry is just so unrewarded these days. I put a decent amount of stuff on my plate and hoped no one noticed that I wasn't really eating much of it. That seemed to work.

In one of those wonderful bits of symmetry that only happen in real life because they sound contrived any other way, my friends' daughter was joined at the party by her friend she had known since sixth grade, also with her first child, due about a month later. With a boy coming to my friends' daughter and a girl to her friend, they can avoid any anxiety about relationships by just arranging for the two of them to get married (in a few decades). The two expectant Moms took center stage among the many presents and created a storybook-like scene.

Of course, the gift unwrapping was fun and the varied desserts were delicious, from cake to brownies to more cake to even more cake. My gift, a Baby Einstein Adventure Gym (very cool, I would have liked a full-size one to play with), was a big hit...and a big miss. Although an old hand at baby showers, I made a poor assumption. Even though I shopped the afternoon before the party, I should have deleted the item from the registry. Turns out, the very last gift opened was also the Adventure Gym. And it was from her friend, expectant mommy #2. She works all week and only got to shop the day of the party. D'oh! That was a big "sorry" on my part (especially, if you remember, because I wasn't going to bring anything originally). We both had receipts, but she insisted hers be returned (she had paid more than me. I *have* learned a few shopping tricks after doing that many baby showers). I apologized a few more times during the day, anyway.

Of course, I stayed for a couple hours afterward to assist in the clean-up and help load as many of the gifts as made sense into soon-to-be-Mommy's car. It was a very satisfying and gratifying day. She looked beautiful and happy and I know

she'll make a great Mom. I look forward to visiting and playing with her son often. I don't think I'll be babysitting, though. I mean, men don't do that, do they?