COMMENTARY

Women still have a long way to go

I haven’t quite decided how I am going to celebrate Women’s History Month. I’d love to go hear former Hinsdalean Leslie Goddard portray Jane Austen or learn more about the 19th Amendment at the Robert R. McCormick Museum or try one of the special menu items offered at Davanti Enoteca this month in honor of female culinary icons such as Alice Waters and Julia Child. I can tell you two things I will not be doing this month (or any month for that matter) — going to see “Fifty Shades of Grey” or buying Sports Illustrated’s swimsuit issue.

I really haven’t had much of an interest in reading “Fifty Shades of Grey” or seeing the movie. My decision was reinforced after I read Michelle Lewsen’s column on Facebook. She wrote a letter to her children about succumbing to peer pressure and going to see the movie with her girlfriends. And how sorry she was that she did.

She described the story as one of “a narcissistic man’s controlling and violent sexual desires and his sense of entitlement to use and abuse a vulnerable young woman’s body and mind as tools for his own gratification.”

Even more troubling were her comments about the audience’s reaction — or lack thereof.

“I sat in the theater and looked around me at hundreds of women, buying into this so-called ‘sexy love story’ and I felt sick. If an entire theater of women three times your age couldn’t see how damaging this plot line was, you wouldn’t be the first. But I find it appalling that a magazine that addresses women seriously when they are playing a sport seems to think it’s OK once a year to put a scantily-clad model on the cover and fill the inside pages with what amounts to soft porn. And no one seems to mind. Why not? This is 2015. There’s a good chance we’ll elect the country’s first female president (like it or not) next year. Women sit on the U.S. Supreme Court. Women serve as executives at companies like General Motors and GE and AT&T. They are doctors, lawyers, scientists, bankers, business owners. And we all sit by while other women are objectified and degraded. Some make excuses and say it’s not exploitation when models are paid to take off their clothes. Or that women are simply owning their sexuality and the power that comes with it. That may be so. But I don’t see many movies being made about abusive relationships in which men are the victims. Or Cooks Illustrated magazine doing a special issue featuring men in their skivvies. Or, as I suggested in a column years ago, a franchise called Peckers (short for Woodpeckers, of course) featuring Chippendale-type waiters in tight shorts opening up all over the country.

No, these lovely opportunities are reserved just for women. Remember that old Virginia Slims ad — “You’ve come a long way, baby”? I’m not sure we have.

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