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[The end of the sexy nurse](#)

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Is Mariah Carey denigrating the fine profession of nursing?

That's what those running the American group The Truth About Nursing think. They have started a campaign that criticizes Carey's new video for her single Up Out My Face because she dresses like that old stereotypical sexy nurse — short skirt, high white heels, bursting bosom, pert hat. "These images associate nursing with female sexuality, undermining our claims to adequate resources," said Sandy Summers, director of the Baltimore advocacy group.

Notwithstanding the lyrics of the song might actually empower women, Summers is serious about this. She even co-wrote a book called Saving Lives: Why the Media's Portrayal of Nurses Puts Us All at Risk. In it, she argues inaccurate media portrayals of nurses — usually as sexualized fantasies or brainless do-gooders — harm the profession, discourage students from entering the field, and create unrealistic expectations for medical patients.

I asked a couple of nurses what they thought. One wondered why so many people have so much time on their hands. The other agreed with Summers, saying such images give people the wrong idea, encouraging them to think about nurses "(taking) care of needs in a sexual way rather than a therapeutic way."

Well said. Summers is probably right. Like most stereotypes, that of the nurse as sex-starved provider of services, is obviously inaccurate, and doesn't do much to help anybody.

Since I'm married to a nurse, I feel qualified to throw out a couple other things to consider. First, does anyone actually believe in the naughty nurse stereotype? Most people adore nurses, in the right kind of way. When you are laid up with illness, and a smiling nurse comes to help, pushing the bedpan out of the way for a cold-sweat romp behind the curtain in a shared hospital room is the last thing on your mind.

And secondly, if you have to be stereotyped, aren't nurses doing pretty good? There are worse things to be stereotyped as. Ask car salesmen (hucksters, all of them), or computer programmers (asexual geeks) or politicians (crooks). Take it from me, a journalist (ink-stained wretch who never met an agreeable comb and would sell my mother for a scoop), being thought of as sexy might not be all bad. If all the world thought of reporters and editors as sexy, we might own the Internet by now.


Maybe we should take a page from comedian Louis C.K., who once suggested that since stereotypes are false anyway, we should make up positive false ones. His suggestions were this: "Mexicans are made of candy," and "the blacks can fly." Let's try: Nurses smell like chocolate. Nurses have lovely feet.

Or even better, maybe we ought to think of most nurses as hard-working, compassionate, caring, fallible, human and integral to the health of our society and deserving of our respect. Even Mariah could get behind that one.



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