

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Women entering STEM career paths break stereotypes

PHOTOS BY ALINA DHANANI AND ANNA SOLCHER

Scientific research shows that women have the same intellectual capacity as men. However, according to the Census Bureau’s American Survey, only 24 percent of those in the STEM workforce are women. Despite these limitations, trends show that the numerical gain of women in the industry presents improvement in society’s initial perception of women.

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News Editor and Entertainment Editor

Amidst the positive change in society, not only are experiences with stereotypes still present, but they begin prior to high school, which puts women at disadvantages in the future. “We have to work ten times as hard to get half the amount of respect because of how few women there are in STEM fields,” said senior Aggela Polymenis, who is one of three girls in her AP Physics C class. “It’s disheartening at times, but that is not going to stop me from entering the field. It is just going to be more of a climb.”

[SOCIETAL STIGMA]

According to engineering and architecture teacher Jill Conlin, women currently entering STEM fields are disadvantaged because girls are not ex-

pected to participate in clubs such as Robotics, due to early-age stigma surrounding gender roles. “I think that men typically have more experiences in high school and college than women do, and that’s not the career field’s fault. Rather, it’s the environment that they grew up in,” Conlin said. “Women don’t often put themselves in those situations to work in hands-on testing scenarios, and this is especially hard for them.” Some women often feel deterred by their male peers and must be more independent and assertive in order to achieve respect from those around them. “It feels like I can never ask for help or show any signs of weakness. I have to always be perfect and know what I’m doing,” said Polymenis, who also competes in Skills USA. Women also experience trials associated with the role to bear children and tend to a family. Senior Maddie Dudley, who wants to major in mechanical engineering, believes that family should not be a

hindrance. “Family is going to come first, and having a family is something I am choosing and do not see as an inhibitor,” Dudley said.

[CHANGE IN THE AIR]

Though the STEM field presents plenty of obstacles for women, it also offers benefits that only women can attain. “Most people tell me going into engineering is a really good idea, especially with me being a girl,” Dudley said. “I think I will have an advantage just because there aren’t a lot of girls that are in the engineering force, so it would make me different, and I feel like being different is good.” As society evolves by giving women the same work ventures as men, opinions over women in STEM have also developed positively. “Women can definitely do things, make great

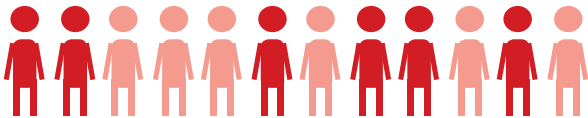
advances and be excellent in STEM areas,” said senior Wesley White, who plans to major in mechanical engineering. “If people understand that women can accomplish work, then they should get any job as long as they’re the best candidate. It’s great, because they’re more ambitious and aren’t shying away from the field of stereotyped expectations.” [IN THE FUTURE] In a growing economy, STEM also offers a different route from the typical career choices that encourage a variety of different professions from women. Junior Ellen Wang hopes to venture into biomedical engineering. “I think women’s ambition has definitely increased, skyrocketed even. Usually women just went into something like nursing, but now people are aspiring to become researchers, professors, doctors and surgeons,” Wang said. “I think women’s ambi-

tion has definitely changed and that we’re reaching for higher goals, which is a great thing.” Due to increasing participation and collaboration from women in a male-dominant workforce, stereotypes that deduce inferiority are now progressing socially. “I feel like a lot of those stereotypes are being broken down,” Conlin said. “With the growing attention and more conversations about the ongoing change in STEM, more women are able to be comfortable and not think twice about going into the field. It’s important that women aren’t afraid to be smart and go into those tough classes.” To establish equality in the work field, society must be the force of change, according to women in this industry. “I hope this won’t be a problem in the future. The parents of today’s kids aren’t raising their children with those same values, so hopefully with each generation, it will get better,” Polymenis said. •

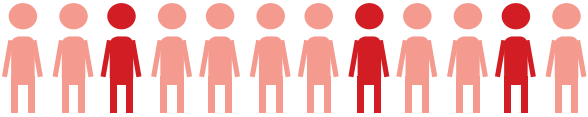
[BY THE NUMBERS]

ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE:

ALTHOUGH WOMEN MAKE UP NEARLY HALF THE U.S. WORKFORCE...



THEY HOLD LESS THAN 25% OF STEM JOBS.

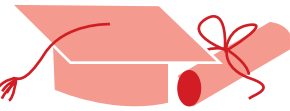


WOMEN IN STEM JOBS MAKE 14% LESS THAN MEN IN STEM JOBS, AS OPPOSED TO 21 % LESS IN NON-STEM JOBS...



MEANING THAT THE GENDER WAGE GAP (WHILE STILL PRESENT) IS SMALLER IN STEM JOBS.

WOMEN WITH A STEM DEGREE ARE LESS LIKELY TO WORK IN A STEM FIELD THAN MEN; THEY'RE MORE LIKELY TO WORK IN EDUCATION OR HEALTHCARE.



THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN STEM JOBS IS...

HIGHEST IN PHYSICAL AND LIFE SCIENCES (40% OF AREA'S WORKFORCE) ...



AND LOWEST IN ENGINEERING (14% OF AREA'S WORKFORCE).

BASED ON A 2011 REPORT BY THE U.S. ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS ADMINISTRATION