

THE RACE TO THE TOP IN SCIENCE: *hurdles women face*



Ellie Jones

There are some really difficult questions that people have tried to answer. One that has always played on my mind is why there is such a huge gap in the number of women in science and engineering. Obviously, after some thought, it doesn't seem so difficult. The root of the answer is that for years women have been oppressed into gender specific roles, through the view being implanted into people's minds that women are intellectually inferior. This was ages ago, so why, now, with the rapid advancement in gender equality, has this gap stayed the same, or at least lessened at a slower rate? To me, I would've thought that the number of women in science and engineering would be increasing at an exponential rate, especially as there is such a need for scientific professionals in the modern era. However, even though this question has been partially answered, there must be another reason to answer this in a modern context. Some experts say that women are less likely to take risks than men; we are more calculating and cautious. Women don't want to take the risk of going into science. Now, science is a risk to some extent, as it takes a lot of courage and hard work to succeed due to the difficulty of the subject. This coupled with the whole stereotype has meant that more men go into science and engineering, therefore further putting more women off due to the intimidation of being in an all-male environment. This basically is a circle, so it's really important that we go off on a tangent and get away from this.

Even just being a 16 year old, it's completely apparent in school. Now, I'm not being dramatic, but the number of amazingly talented girls in year eleven at my old school who enjoy science but are taking a more traditional route is shocking. It's silly that many of my friends feel that they can't take the sciences when they are better than some of the boys who are taking them for their A levels. Biology however is an anomaly, but this could be underpinned by the psychological affiliation that biology is the easiest subject of the sciences, which is undoubtedly untrue. One of my friends, Grace, states "It's such a male dominated world, it's like everything, even in the jazz band I play in, there are very few women. It's sad, you know, there's so many talented women scientists, there should be more equality." My other friend, Eleanor, states one of the reasons she didn't like science was because most of the teachers were men.

Having also interviewed Hannah Brooker, a trainee teacher who recently graduated with a chemistry degree from Oxford, the situation has become more clear. She stated "*In the last 20-30 years, there's been a lot of focus on A levels to get girls and people into science and maths, especially maths. On my course, it was pretty much a 50:50 ratio, and that was the same with other courses and maths. But the real gap is in the physical sciences.*" When asked if she thinks

there's a stigma attached to physics, she replied *"Yeah, I do, I think a lot of people assume it's a boy's subject as that's how boys' brains work, but that's really not true."* I then proceeded to ask Hannah what she thought should be done. She said that there should definitely be more female teachers.

This view is shared by many, and highlights that encouragement needs to start from an early age, and that women teachers would increase the likelihood of an equal divide.

Of course the situation's improving, and people should only go into science if they are actually any good, as quality of scientific minds is far more important than the gender to which those minds belong. All WiSE is trying to do is make sure that there aren't any barriers to dissuade young girls from following their desired career path, and personally, I think that's inspirational.

Biography: Ellie Jones is currently studying at the Priory Academy LSST, having previously studied in Moscow and Pembrokeshire, moving to Lincoln to undertake her A levels. Ellie hopes to pursue a career in biochemistry and biology; however her interests in science cover all fields from physics and chemistry to astronomy. After undertaking work experience within the Historic and Ancient Materials Research Group at the University of Lincoln, Ellie has realised that her dream is to be an academic researcher and is planning to apply for a master's degree in biological natural sciences, and then hopefully go on to do a PhD.

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