The Other Gender Gap

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In the last century, international focus on workplace equality has reached an all-time high. The role of women in the workplace has been a point of dispute since the beginning of this era of professionalism. Support for bringing women into the technology industry has greatly overshadowed the efforts of recruiting men to fields historically dominated by women, despite the fact that this imbalance negatively impacts equality in the workplace. Women would introduce a new dynamic to the technology world and fields like teaching and nursing would be enhanced by an increase in the number of men in those fields.

In the United States, the constitutionality of gender discrimination has been left up to the Supreme Court, as the Constitution contains no explicit prohibition on discrimination based on sex.[1] In 1908, Curt Muller's conviction for violating labor laws by forcing a female employee to work for more than 10 hours was upheld at the Oregon State Supreme Court level. His conviction made its way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it was upheld in *Muller v. Oregon*, thus setting the precedent that laws barring sex discrimination were constitutional.[2]

The precedent set by *Muller v. Oregon* remained largely uncontested until 1971, with Ruth Bader Ginsburg's reexamination of the Equal Protection Clause. As then-director of the Women's Rights Project, Ginsberg began a campaign before the Supreme Court against "benign laws that favored women, i.e., protective labor laws that, although designed to benefit women, often, perversely, had the opposite effect." She urged the Court to contribute to the elimination of conditions which "create[d] or perpetuate[d] the legal, social and economic inferiority of women" instead of focusing on protecting a gender simply because tradition had been to do so.[3] Ginsberg's attitude reflects the advancements made by women, professionally and socially, in the 20th century. By the end of the century, women had overtaken men in both education and labor force statistics.[4] Women had seized education and employment opportunities, regardless of whether these opportunities had been provided by affirmative action legislation or not. If the goal of these laws had been to open the door to previously unavailable opportunities, it had been achieved.

The achievement of a goal usually indicates some progress. However, it is difficult to detect tangible progress (in the sense of raw numbers, not workplace environment) in the push for women's equality in all areas of

the workforce. Receiving the most attention in the professional spotlight is the push to draw women into the lucrative and male-dominated fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. Only about a quarter of the STEM workforce is female, proving that aggressive recruitment, high pay and the potential for long-term career success have failed to bring women into this job sector.[5] According to census data taken from 2000 and 2009, there has been a decrease in women in the STEM sector from 30 percent to 27 percent.[6] The failure of many initiatives supporting women in technology have driven numerous members of the academic and professional communities to raise fair questions concerning the validity of continued support for this cause. Do women want STEM jobs? Why should women choose to be in STEM occupations over traditionally female occupations?

Even without answers to these questions, funding for initiatives aimed at drawing women to STEM fields continues to pour in. The discussion of the lack of women in computer programming has drawn an increasing amount of public attention. Less than 20 percent of computer science graduates in the United States are female, down from 40 percent in 1985.[7] This is a stark decrease that shows no signs of reversing. With an increasing number of social activists and researchers emphasizing the need to address this shift, resources have been allocated in the form of initiatives from organizations around the world. These initiatives range in scale from locally funded programs to international corporation-driven enterprises with millions of dollars of funding. Google recently started one of the latter. In 2014, Google pledged to donate $50 million to increase exposure of women to computer science over the next three years.[8]

The program supported by Google's pledge is called Made With Code. This is a website with basic tasks and activities that allow the user, in this case a young girl, to form a basis for understanding programming. The effectiveness of this platform has yet to be determined, and has thus far drawn both praise and disappointment. One reviewer of the site said, "if you actually want to learn how to code, do not rely on this platform. But if you're looking to inspire a girl, show her the Made with Code website."[9] This could be a discouraging review for anyone who interpreted Google's pledge to mean the company intended to teach résumé-worthy skills to young women.

Google's method of directly funding women's initiatives is not the only way internationally scaled organizations are trying to attract women to the technology field. Corporations have also begun to offset their low numbers of female employees by modifying recruitment programs to attract newly graduated female engineers.[10] Corporations' high demand for the small pool of females graduating with STEM degrees results in a climate that, intentionally or not, gives these female graduates a significant advantage over their male peers.

It is probable that these corporate initiatives have increased women's awareness of opportunities in STEM but an increase in female participation in STEM has yet to take place. However, these are not the only programs that exist. There are programs of a smaller scale working to draw women to STEM on the national level. For example, the United States government's White House Council on Women and Girls exists to better the situations of women, sponsoring initiatives benefitting U.S. citizens. The council supports many initiatives, including those aimed at increasing women's financial literacy, stopping violence against women, increasing women's access to healthcare and drawing women to STEM fields. The Council supports the latter by sponsoring enterprises ranging from code-a-thons to mentoring

programs.[11] The public sector has also produced many initiatives and products contributing to the advancement of women in technology. Goldiblox is an American toy brand that has recently received public media attention because of its unique story. The creator of Goldiblox wanted to create a toy which promoted problem solving and the development of engineering skills in young girls, realizing that a different type of instruction set is key to appealing to this group.[12] They like to be engaged, social and creative. Therefore, an instruction set that resembles an open-ended story is more stimulating than the typical step-by-step instruction set, and the resultant toy is a story-driven kit tailored to appeal to the developing female brain.

There are even smaller programs existing in communities throughout the country, working to better the local environment for women in STEM. For example, in Pittsburgh, the Carnegie Science Center sponsors a Girls, Math & Science Partnership that allows local K-12 girls to build technology skills and relationships with female STEM mentors.[13] Despite its small size, the program claims to receive 12 million website hits per year.[14] This is an impressive reach for a local program, arguably the most impressive out of all tiers of programs discussed thus far, but again, this program has yet to result in concrete evidence of an increase in women choosing STEM careers.

The number of programs supporting women in technology and the financial and geographical scope of these programs is astounding, especially considering the lack of results. This lack of results may prod some to ask if these resources could be used better elsewhere. Perhaps the rate at which males are falling behind in all levels of education is a worthy cause, or maybe the lack of men in nursing or teaching deserves attention. In talking about gender equality, the suggestion to switch funds from the cause of women in STEM to men's education and employment disparity is an unpopular one. The historic disadvantages faced by women have resulted in a cultural attitude that resembles appeasement. Women of today can ask for more rights and be heard, and perhaps people feel more obligated to listen because of their desire to offset historical discrimination. However, this desire to make up for past inequalities does not warrant the continuation of programs that have not shown promising results. The advancement of women in STEM careers is a cause that can afford less focus both because of its lack of results and because of the improved standing of women in modern society as a whole.

Women are now earning 57 percent of college degrees, up from just 9 percent in 1970.[15,16] In the past 20 years, the percentage of female high school graduates enrolling in college has risen from 63 percent to 71 percent while the percentage of male high school graduates enrolling in college has remained at 61 percent.[17] These are notable numbers and raise questions as to why there is such a focus on women's education and advancement when women are clearly excelling in this country's education system. A fair counter to that would be that the struggle of women in STEM is not one concerning a lack of education. It is known that women attend college in high numbers, but the struggle of women in STEM is a professional one. Unbeknownst to many subscribers to this argument, there are many men facing a professional struggle too. There are rewarding fields seemingly closed to men because of historic female domination of those fields: teaching and nursing.

Teaching as a profession is expected to grow over the next 10 years, due to increases in enrollment and the subsequent decrease of student-teacher ratios.[18] Only 2.3 percent of pre-K and kindergarten teachers, 18.3 percent of the elementary and middle school teachers and 42

percent of the high school level teaching staff are men.[19] These statistics are comparable to those representing the minority of women in STEM, however there is little to no action to change this. The lack of activism is a disservice to both potential male teachers and the students impacted by the lack of male influence in classroom settings. Young males growing up without father figures are suffering the most, and researchers have stated that male teachers could be "particularly important role models" for these boys.[20] In order to draw more men to teaching, more resources must be dedicated to the elimination of the social stigma associated with men doing "women's work" and the raising of the pay of teachers to a fairer level in order to draw men from more "traditionally male," higher paying careers.[21]

Another profession which would benefit from an increase in men and the resources to recruit them is nursing. Only 11 percent of nurses are men, a number significantly lower than the number of women in computer science.[22] Not only would men benefit from increased opportunities to enter a field with employment opportunities that are projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to grow faster than the average of all other careers, but the field of nursing would also benefit from an increase in men.[23] Men would offer a diversified workforce in the nursing profession and an increase in male nurses would also offer more male patients the choice to be cared for by either a male or female nurse, ensuring a more comfortable experience. The nursing community would benefit from efforts to erase the social stigma associated with male nurses, which could effectively draw more men to this stable field.

If the international community wants to more effectively use its resources to further workplace diversity, more resources should be allocated to the recruitment of men to female-dominated fields. The role of women in the education system and the workplace has shifted so that bringing women into the technology industry has greatly overshadowed the cause of recruiting men to fields historically dominated by women. If this increase were to happen, the global community would benefit from a more balanced workplace. Barriers will not exist to prevent people from achieving a life of fulfillment due to the simple fact that they don't feel their dreams suit their gender. By attempting to save women from this fate, society has left a disproportionate segment of men to it.

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