

MAKE: a place for genders to intersect?

by #bjjerede

Why is it that a field that is as fundamentally egalitarian as engineering has so few women in it?

The technology fields accept diversity at a gut level - professionals in the field mostly tend, ourselves, to be some sort of "different" and are dismissive of those who consider those differences to be detriments. We care more about ideas than personalities. If an idea is strong, it wins - regardless of whether it came from the grizzled Unix veteran or the girl intern.

Geks do battle with words and concepts, show supremacy through our deep and broad and systemic understanding of any technical topic at hand, and are delighted when more people join in win or lose. Gender-blind, engineers welcome women as easily as men into the fray and out of courtesy will even accept

those foreign systems models that include "soft" arguments and metrics involving human capacity, human interactions, user experience, and design esthetics.

In the end, though, we fall out along the lines of those who indulge technology as a hobby, staying up until 3:00 am playing with algorithms or devouring technical articles or soldering circuits, or hanging out at assorted physical and virtual geek watering holes, and those who, well, don't. We respect, we truly do, those people who can engage with us on our own turf, even if at the end of the day they go home to families or art or they choose to stick to their knitting. But let's be honest, we can't really call them technical, now can we? Why won't more women choose to be technical? We really want them to.

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DON'T YOU WANT TO BUILD A ROBOT? YOU CAN PRINT IT PINK!!

hmmmm...

It was always this way for us techie types. As kids the girls would prefer dance team to science club, even when they were stars in chemistry class. Not even pink microscopes could persuade them! Invited in to show they were "just as good", they were still uninterested in building battling robots, even though we knew some of them would be good enough to win. We knew girls weren't so different from boys, so why didn't they get it?

But today, when we look at our own kids, we see many that are different somehow. Girls who design and MAKE wearables imbued with electrical circuits that light up and play sounds are both artistic and technical. Boys who MAKE eight-foot fire-breathing dragons are both technical and artistic. Kids who MAKE enjoy teaching and learning from each other more than beating each other, and together MAKE art, MAKE technology, MAKE friends, MAKE a community, and MAKE a future: one that's gender-blind. And eventually, maybe, a technology landscape that's gender-balanced as well?

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