

Why is the UK so bad at getting more women into engineering?

According to the Royal Academy of Engineering, the UK will need more than a million new engineers and technicians in the next five years. However, despite huge efforts to entice more women to enter the badass world of engineering, there hasn't been much of an increase in the numbers. In fact, only 6 per cent of the UK's engineering workforce is female and the UK has the lowest percentage of female engineering professionals in Europe.

In recognition of Women's Month, let us talk about the causes of the engineering sector's glaring gender disparity, in the hope that we will find solutions and ultimately break the glass ceiling.

The first cause I'd like to tackle is an institutional one. In the UK, the General Certificate of Secondary Education choices made by students aged 13 or 14 can rule them out of a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) career. Meaning, students have little choice but to narrow their studies too early and I think that's very problematic. *Puberty is hard enough without adding the pressure of making a choice you'll have to live with for the rest of your life!*

Pic: <https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/enhanced/webdr02/2013/2/13/10/enhanced-buzz-25929-1360770209-5.jpg>

A recent study discovered that girls generally opt out of STEM-related subjects at around the age of 16, which highlights how important it is that examples women in engineering are presented to students in a relatable and interesting manner. ***We have to make engineering fun and badass.***

GIF: <http://i.giphy.com/13ud0jrGRdmrcl.gif>

The next problem I'd like to delve into is a much more complex one, mainly because it is culturally embedded in our society. It starts in the subtle way that boys and girls are being treated differently. (Hello, sexism and misogyny, I'm looking at you.) It boils down to the notion that parents, and society as a whole, have about what the kids could and couldn't do.

We call them norms because they seem normal – so normal that many of us don't even notice them. Until someone does and points them out, hoping that the world pays attention. And only when we see the problem with these norms, can we finally rid ourselves of these archaic limitations.

According to research conducted by The Institution of Engineering and Technology last year, about 50 per cent of parents believe that engineering is a boy's profession. Only 45 per cent of parents with a daughter said they would consider engineering as a suitable career for her. The figure did increase to 67 per cent but only after it was demonstrated to them how diverse and creative the profession. *Come on, moms and dads, we can't all be Kate Middleton!*

We need to combat the unconscious biases of parents, teachers – everyone – that discourage girls from pursuing a career in engineering. We need a cultural revolution.

Do we dare shatter the glass ceiling? I say, yes, we do!

GIF: <http://i.giphy.com/3oEdvcxpg987sdDWcc.gif>

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