

Why women resist high tech

In 1982 the average math score for males on the Scholastic Aptitude Test was 492 vs. only 443 for females. The result is consistent with past years.

Scoring between 600 and 800 on the math test were 20 percent of the males and only 9 percent of the females.

This is significant because mathematical competency forms the basis for most, if not all, technologies.

Research on learning-style preferences shows women fear and resist numerics, or mathematics. Although they possess the ability to achieve, women have such a derogatory self-image of their math abilities that they have no confidence they will succeed in math classes.

EDUCATIONAL researchers argue the American educational system is largely responsible for any differences in achievement. Girls are not encouraged to take high-level math. In math classrooms, they often aren't given the kind of attention boys get.

In high schools as well as colleges, most advanced math classes have few, if any, women enrolled. "Before they become teen-agers, little girls do well in all subjects. In high school, the paths veer apart," according to Jacqueline Scherer, sociology professor at Oakland University.

Scherer believes sufficient evidence exists to show that it is our culture and socialization, not biological limitations, which have steered women away from technology.

"As they mature, girls begin to avoid 'male' activities and, more sadly, 'male' subjects such as science and mathematics," declared Scherer.

SEVERAL STUDIES indicate there are about as many women as men who have high mechanical aptitude. Also, women often score higher than men in the areas of motor coordination, finger dexterity and manual dexterity.

Given these findings, it is surprising women received only 10 percent of the bachelors' degrees in engineering in 1980. This statistic has improved, however, from less than 1 percent in 1970.

In vocational education, women comprise 46 percent of all students enrolled. Yet the U.S. Department of Education notes that in 1979 only 12.5 percent of students enrolled in technical vocational education programs were women.

Professor Scherer feels myths about women continue to perpetuate female isolation from technology. "These myths," she concludes, "condition our daughters and perpetuate the gulf that keeps women away from technology."

ONE MYTH promotes the persistent view that girls get along better with people and should avoid the study of objects.

A second myth encourages the belief that women are not tough-minded enough to deal with hard facts.

The third, and most insidious, myth is that women by nature have no role in technology.

The perpetuation of these myths places women at a severe disadvantage when they seek work in the marketplace. It closes doors to women. It makes them weak in opposing the improper use of technology. In plain words, it renders them powerless.

Women currently make up more than 40 percent of the labor force in America at a substantially under-represented in the technologies.

"TRADITIONALLY in our culture, women have been steered away from machines," said Sherry Turkle, an associate professor of sociology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Even women scientists will tell you that their fathers taught their brothers how to wire a house. But when they get near the wiring, their fathers would yell, 'Don't touch that! You'll get shocked!'"

"It's the same today. To a large degree, the computer culture is made by men for men."

Technical fields have always yielded much higher salaries.

Most high school counselors do not even consider advising the female student to enter the engineering field, although many have strong mechanical and mathematical aptitudes. Gender stereotyping must cease. Females should be encouraged to consider a technical occupation.

Dr. Watcke, a Troy resident, is dean of liberal arts at Wayne County Community College.



Women students are taking an increasing interest in math, computers and technology — despite society's efforts to scare them off.

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