Key points to remember

• The needs of girls: They want to keep their options open, a desire to fit in and to see the point of what they are studying or doing.

• The needs of women: A supportive work environment and career path where they can combine work with family and other commitments.

• The concerns of mothers: To see their daughters happy and successful, which leads them to recommend jobs they are already familiar with – excluding many STEM sectors.

• Girls AND their parents need to see STEM subjects as a stepping stone into jobs and careers ‘for people like me’.

The People Like Me Resource Pack uses insights into how girls develop and articulate their self-identity to enable girls to see how they can find a good fit for themselves in careers using their science and maths qualifications, so that they can see that STEM is ‘for people like me’.

Charlotte Mace
Project Manager, Networks Rail

Jenny Ogawa
Assistant Project Manager, Mott MacDonald

Rebecca Stone
Graduate Business Consultant, IBM

Louisa Awolaja
Analyst, Accenture

WISE offers training in using the People Like Me resources for teachers, careers advisers and role models.
We have included ideas for working with mothers and other family members in the resource pack. Please contact us for more ideas and resources to help you inspire girls to choose science, technology, engineering and maths.

www.wisecampaign.org.uk

People Like Me
Why this revolutionary approach to attract girls into science, technology and engineering will make the difference
It's not what you think

It's a myth that girls and women are not choosing STEM subjects. In fact girls outnumber boys in STEM subjects across the world and in the UK. The issue is that girls are not choosing the right STEM subject. When you look at different subject streams, these often see an individual with a particular expertise pop up: a talk that is likely only to appeal to a very small percentage of the class. By allowing women to opt out of curriculum by non-participation, or by A-level for boys but not only the girls, and of girls choosing engineering among those who have significant difference to their attitude, reinforcing their determination not to be disadvantaged by ‘the system’. Parents have a huge role in influencing the career choices and aspirations of their children: a fact that to date has not been surfaced in the outreach and engagement programmes run by the engineering discipline. Women in particular have significant experience in directing their daughters’ education and role models. Female role models, quoted by the Royal Academy of Engineering:

What's going wrong?

Nothing has worked! Despite more than 30 years of focus on “reaching, fascinating or encouraging girls into STEM, there has been NO CHANGE in the proportions of girls choosing physics at A-level. It is clear that one-off interventions don’t work. Initiatives that use ‘reach out’ methods of encouraging girls into STEM, girls must fit into the science world are extremely difficult and are a role model. Girls do not need competition to motivate them and are often more successful in operation activities. Companies have female employees who works in STEM doesn’t make someone an effective role model. Some role models are ‘too perfect’ and are unattainable for girls. A girl, enjoying, being interested in and being good at a subject isn’t enough to persuade her to continue studying it – she has to be convinced that it has a value for her future and that it doesn’t limit her future options.

What have we missed?

The new approach is needed.

The Royal Academy of Engineering surveys of girls aged 14-16 show that 54,000 vacancies. In 2014, 39% of businesses who were seeking employees with STEM skills had difficulty recruiting. This means that girls are less likely to talk about themselves in terms of what they do, competencies. Traditionally, science careers focus on what scientists and engineers ‘do’ in the workplace and rarely use their advice to address the attributes required. This means that girls are less likely to talk about themselves. There is a conflict between their self-identity and their perception of a STEM-identity which leads them to conclude that STEM is not ‘for people like me’.

The People Like Me

I trust the report will inspire you to target messages about STEM careers in a way that connects better with women and girls. Collectively, we can help create an environment where more people perceive STEM careers ARE “for people like me.”

Jane Simpson
Chieff Engineer, Network Rail

Introduction

The revolutionary People Like Me approach is based on evidence contained in a report which WISE published in November 2014. “Not for people like me?” draws together previous research to explain why girls and other people like me find it harder to choose STEM subjects. What is new here is that the research now draws together the results of studies that have been carried out by researchers, but have not previously been connected by a common methodological perspective. The core findings are drawn together here to create an effective role model. Some role models are ‘too perfect’ and are unattainable for girls. A girl, enjoying, being interested in and being good at a subject isn’t enough to persuade her to continue studying it – she has to be convinced that it has a value for her future and that it doesn’t limit her future options.

What the research said

There are significant differences between the ways girls and boys talk about their self. Although they are perceived to be similar, girls are less likely to say that they are good at a subject and are more likely to say that they are interested in a subject. This means that girls are less likely to talk about themselves in terms of what they do, competencies. Traditionally, science careers focus on what scientists and engineers ‘do’ in the workplace and rarely use their advice to address the attributes required. This means that girls are less likely to talk about themselves. There is a conflict between their self-identity and their perception of a STEM-identity which leads them to conclude that STEM is not ‘for people like me’.

The 12 types of scientist

Looking at current outreach initiatives, many seem to ‘offer’ girls an alternative career. This is problematic, particularly as girls’ perceptions of what a STEM career looks like are based on their perceptions of what the workplace is like.

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