# No Girls Allowed: 'Nerd' Stereotype Means Fewer Female Engineers

Kasey Panetta, Managing Editor ECN

The Big Bang Theory — a television show that features four male scientists and engineers and an attractive blond waitress — is one of the top shows on TV. But a recent study has raised an interesting question: Does this show's — and others like it's — depiction of what scientists and engineers look like actively discourage women from pursuing STEM degrees? According to the study [1], it might.

In 1972, women accounted for 3 percent of full-time science and engineering professors; by 1998, the number was at just 10 percent, according to the National Science Foundation [2]. In 2010, the last year the NSF has data for, 51 percent of scientists and engineers working in science and engineering occupations were white males. Women made up just 28 percent [3] of the total and minority women just 10 percent. When the numbers [3] are divided by occupation, women make up just 12 percent of engineers.

Through a mixture of socialization and tradition, the engineering and science fields have always been male-dominated. In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on encouraging girls to pursue STEM degrees, but how engineers and scientists are depicted in the media could be playing a large role in discouraging the pursuit.

While men's interest in computer sciences remains fairly stable across different studies, women's interest tends to waver. In one study [4], when women read articles that suggested the stereotype — nerdy, white, not very social — fit real life, they were less likely to express an interest in pursuing the field when compared to women who read articles that said the stereotypes weren't supported by real life. In

a second study, researchers found that when asked to describe what they thought of as typical computer scientists, people reported traits that were “incompatible with the female gender role” like poor interpersonal skills and lacking an interest in anything other than computers.

Click here to read the full article [5].

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