# Girls STEAM Project Talladega County, AL

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research.

The Girls STEAM Project goal is to help seventh and eighth grade girls in Talladega County expand their horizons in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) with an Art component.

Childersburg, Fayetteville, and Winterboro 7th & 8th Grade Girls break barriers in STEM

Breaking Barriers – Girls in STEAM November 17, 2017
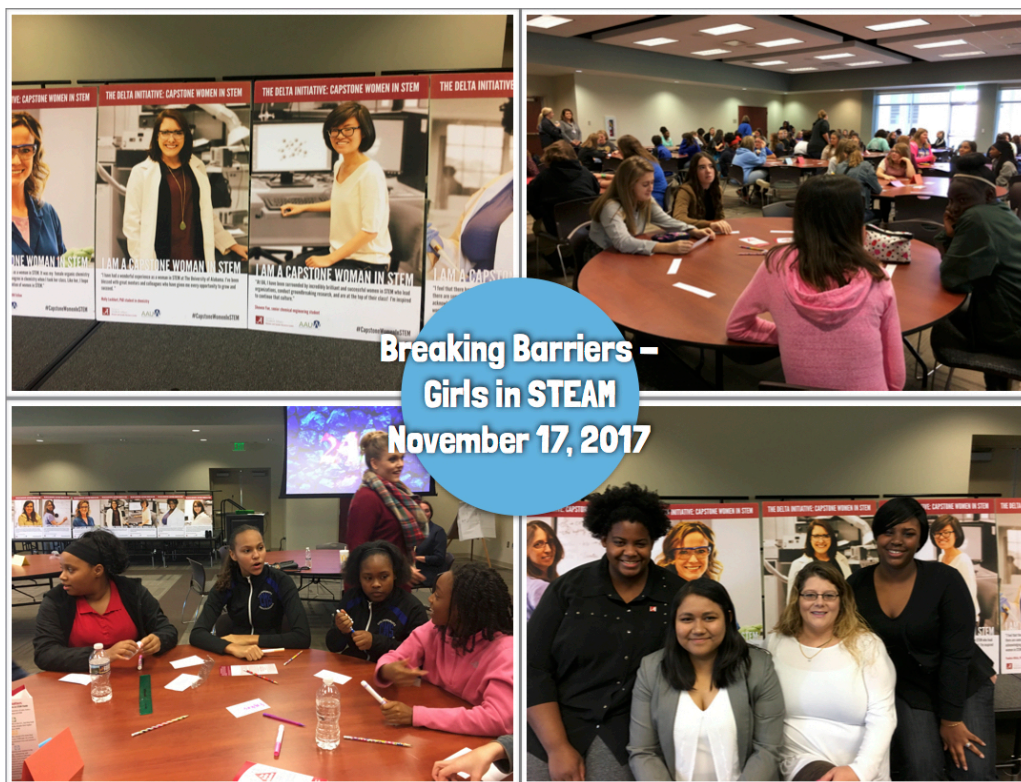
On November 17, 2017, 7th and 8th grade students from Childersburg, Fayetteville, and Winterboro Middle Schools met at Central Alabama Community College to learn about opportunities to overcome gender biases and explore their potential in various STEM fields. Undergraduate and graduate-level professionals in STEM gave presentations on their experiences, and the girls collaborated in groups to create motivational creative displays.

Ticking Clock: An Etsy Engineering Manager Describes Tech Culture

March 24, 2015 – Article written by AAUW Research Intern Jean DeOrnella

The best part of Lara's job is getting to help people every day. The worst part is being a part of an industry that she describes as "a little snake pit of the patriarchy."

"I didn't fit the typical mold of the type of people they normally talk to, and I found that occasionally I'd be characterized as intimidating."

- Lara in speaking on her experiences as a woman in the technology industry.

Lara is a senior engineering manager for the online marketplace Etsy, where she writes code and helps others write code to make Etsy's website faster for people all over the world. She enjoys knowing that what she does helps people, and she is happy to be with a company that works to be a force for good. But she knows that as a whole, the technology industry is a tough place for women.

Unexpected Hurdles

Lara didn't go into tech expecting discrimination. "I think that when I was growing up I had no idea the kind of discrimination that people could face in the tech industry," she says. "My mother's a Methodist minister, and I saw her face some discrimination as a woman in that profession, but it didn't occur to me that I would experience something similar."

Her dad is a middle school math teacher, and Lara credits both of her parents with protecting her from the stereotype that men are better suited for STEM work. But she found that being a woman leader in a technical field — she spent a long time as the only woman in engineering and was sometimes the only woman manager — came with consequences. "I felt other people's discomfort around me, specifically male leaders at specific companies," Lara says. "I didn't fit the typical mold of the type of people they normally talk to, and I found that occasionally I'd be characterized as intimidating."

At conferences, even as a keynote speaker, she would get feedback on her looks and tone of voice, not her content. Attendees would ask, "Whose girlfriend are you?" or "Are you a marketer?" instead of what she was working on. She got similar comments at work events, where the spouses of her co-workers assumed that she was another spouse instead of an employee. At a previous employer, the nursing room for female employees became a secret "daddy's room" for client meetings, complete with scotch and whiskey.

Lara says she didn't really have the words to understand and label the experiences she was having in the workplace. She just tried to deal with them and move on. "You focus on being thankful for the things that are going well. You don't want to see it as a pattern. You don't want to make it bigger than it is. You only get penalized for making a thing out of it," she says. "So for me it was a lot easier at

those companies to wrestle with it privately and then try to focus on getting my work done."

Now that she has the space and language to acknowledge it, Lara is able to more actively talk about how the treatment of women in the technology industry is a problem that is particularly harmful. "Obviously misogyny is everywhere, but in tech I've seen it be pervasive in ways that I don't think I'd experience if I left tech," she says. "There's a great blog post that showcases how women in tech can have a ticking clock on when we're going to leave. And I definitely feel that way. At some point I'm going to be like, you guys have fun. I'm going to go to an industry that's a little less sexist, where I don't have to deal with these things on a regular basis."

"I've landed in a magical wonderland."

Lara's experiences and the research report *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing* highlight the importance of good management practices for women's persistence in technology and engineering workplaces. When Lara moved to Etsy, it made all the difference.

"When I was hired at Etsy, it was the first time I didn't feel like I was hired because I was a woman. At nearly every other place that I've interviewed, someone during the interview process or when offering me the job has said to me, 'We're so excited to have a woman developer.' Etsy was the first time I felt like I was hired for my skills, not because I felt like I was going to be a token."

Etsy is a certified B corporation, and holds that business interests and social and environmental responsibility are interwoven and aligned. In contrast to one of Lara's previous employers, where a group of women (including Lara) were publicly berated after they proposed changes to the firm's parental leave policy, Etsy's CEO modeled his commitment to work-life balance by taking all five weeks of his parental leave. Lara points to Etsy's support in letting her take on initiatives that she cares about, as well as "a really fantastic group of managers that are good at being managers," as two of the things that make Etsy a good place for her.

She is also quick to point out that Etsy knows it isn't perfect. "Etsy is good at acknowledging that it has a long way to go. And that's important for me to point out because it's true that I landed in a magical wonderland, but it's also true that that magical wonderland is 5 to 10 percent of what it can be."

In addition, the larger tech culture is still a problem. "Just because Etsy is an awesome place to work doesn't mean that we can escape the rest of the industry's terribleness," Lara says. Although her work experience has improved, she is still dealing with sexism at conferences and online, two spaces that are crucial to her networking and career development.

Things outside her own workplace still affect her and her colleagues. "Last fall when I was reading stories of other misogyny elsewhere in tech, when I was reading about Gamergate, when I was reading about my friends' lived experiences, it really had an effect on me. I was exhausted all the time, I was having nightmares, and I started to talk with other women I worked with, and they shared that the same thing

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was happening to them." They too felt drained by the discrimination and harassment, even though they weren't experiencing it directly.

A Life of Advocacy

Looking back, Lara has always been interested in helping people. She studied visual media and philosophy, volunteered in advocacy groups, started a photography business catered toward nontraditional weddings, and was certified as an EMT. (The photography business, which she continued to run after college while she was working at a tech start-up, gave her a place to experiment with web development.)

One of the benefits of her current job is that "I go to work every day feeling like I'm doing good in the world. Etsy in particular has a great mission that I feel very closely aligned with and that I really believe in, and that motivates me."

Her commitment to advocacy also means that she is aware of the problems still facing women in tech, and that she feels a sense of responsibility to try to address them. "I think we would like to think that things are getting better, but what I think is actually happening is that we're getting better at having a dialogue, and that is probably going to enact great change, but for right now I haven't really seen it. For example, we talk about women getting more visibility in tech, and then you realize that that's true for white women, and it's not true for women of color," Lara says.

"I feel an obligation to stick with tech to see what I can do to make it better for girls who are just starting to look at their career options. I feel an obligation to do as much as I can to make it a better place by the time that they get here." Source: AAUW website: https://www.aauw.org/2015/03/24/ticking-clock/

AAUW Talladega County Branch to Launch Website

AAUW Talladega County Branch will launch a website in 2018. The website will feature articles about empowering young women and girls. It will focus on college/university relations, research affecting women, such as "Student Debt," and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

If you are a 7th or 8th grade girl, or the mother of any of these girls in Talladega County, please consider being interviewed to be featured in one of our 2018 articles. The branch is searching for professional women in the STEM areas. Girls who attended AAUW Tech Trek, Breaking Barriers in STEM, and/or have any other STEM/STEAM experiences are being sought to share their stories for publication by the AAUW Talladega County Branch. Contact Audrey L. Salgado, audrey5190@yahoo.com, or 205 249-7788 (cell/text).

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Are you a former participant in one of our programs and interested in being interviewed for a future newsletter?

Contact Audrey Salgado at audrey5190@yahoo.com or (205) 249-7788