

# FRCC students push gender stereotypes, pursue passions

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In a world where society is constantly pushing the boundaries and stereotypes that previous generations have placed on gender, Washington, Mo., is no different from the rest of the world in attacking the once so definite pink and blue line.

At Four Rivers Career Center, boys and girls alike face the challenge of pursuing predominantly male or female careers, as well as the struggles that come with it.

"It's weird at first because [the boys] try to be more dominant," junior Amber Walter said. "You really have to have tough skin ... especially in this field (construction), because they think they are more dominant."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2016, jobs such as heavy vehicle technicians and mechanics, diesel engine specialists, stonemasons, electrical power line repairers and more all fall under fields that are 99 percent dominated by men. Along with Walter, St. Clair High School senior Mackenzie Mackley, who is in the Machine Tool program, is covering that 1 percent.

"Being the only girl in the class was a big adjustment for the guys... but I stayed to myself and did my work," Mackley said.

Mackley, who has grown up working in machine shops with her parents, is now working to make a career for herself. And as the only girl in her class, her battle is filled with added obstacles.

"They have said some things that I haven't liked, but it just pushes me to work harder and do better things," Mackley said.

The difficulties for these students don't end when they leave the classroom—outside societal pressure

and judging eyes have forced these students to develop a tough skin.

"A lot of people are stubborn and view it (Collision Repair) as a man's job," St. Clair High School junior Haley Fenne said. "It's equal. I get a lot of odd looks when I tell them I'm in body work...It's made it a little complicated."

However, these female students are not the only ones who plan to pursue career paths that are not traditionally representative of their gender. WHS senior Matthew Dyson is in the CAPS Teaching Careers class and wants to become a special education teacher. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 24 percent of elementary and secondary teachers are male.

"I've never had a question about me being a guy and being a teacher," Dyson said, "but there has been a lot of questions about why would I want to be a teacher because I was a guy."

Volunteering his time to work with special education students since elementary school, Dyson plans to continue this work in his preferred future career and is choosing to embrace his role as a male special education teacher.

"I always heard that it was good to have guys in the field of teaching, and so I've heard that a lot that people love that I'm there with them," Dyson said. "The girl thing really doesn't change anything because it's fine with me...I don't really think it's really a big deal that there is a lot of girls in the class and it's just me and another guy."

In some cases, though, gender can offer different perspectives and impact certain skills in all careers, making gender diversity an asset.

"Girls, when they're taught something, pay more attention on the steps," Fenne said. "When you're doing body filler (used to fill out dents and cover blemishes on cars), you can see the boys just throw things on there. Girls actually pay attention on how it goes and the preciseness...Girls can be more precise than boys...girls like things to more detailed. It gives you an advantage in this."

While Fenne finds that gender can affect how people execute a job, CAPS Teaching Career senior Seth Cavenar does not believe that either gender has an advantage in the education field—it just depends on the individual.

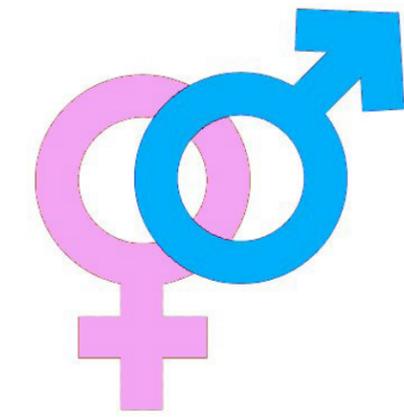
"I think everyone goes through [the classroom] with a different mindset, that's kind [of] what teaching is all about," Cavenar said. "If you do what everyone else does, you won't help your students."

For these students, and many more, gender stereotypes and societal pressure have not stopped them students from pursuing their passions. From engineering to teaching, Four Rivers Career Center has given the opportunity for students to learn more about potential career paths that, because of their gender, they may have never been exposed to or thought about pursuing. A century ago, gender defined the interests individuals could pursue, and without the earlier generations, students participating in fields dominated by the opposite gender would not be able to learn and contribute their thoughts and advice to dilemmas in their respected field.

"If you only have half the population going in with their life expe-

riences trying to solve those problems, then you're missing out on the other half," Project Lead the Way engineering teacher Joseph Callahan said. "Different perspectives solve problems differently, and it's that brainstorming and coming together from different backgrounds that make good solutions. If you always

look at it from the same way, you're going to come up with the same way, you're going to come up with the same solutions. You don't get anything new. You don't get improvement, so you definitely need everybody from every walk of life, not just girls, but everybody that has a problem."



## Careers by the Numbers

24 percent of elementary and secondary teachers are male



1 in 100 automotive service technicians and mechanics are female



3.5 percent of construction laborers are female



According to the U.S. Department of Labor



(Top) Senior Emelie Gross poses with her Project Lead the Way Engineering class. "I didn't know anybody in the class, and it was kind of weird being the only girl in there," Gross said. "All the guys are together and friends." Gross plans to attend the military after graduation. (Left) Junior Breanna Moses shows the restoration of a Stingray during Collision Repair. "Ever since I was little, I really liked the cosmetics of the car..." Moses said. "I didn't know much about body work... so I decided to learn how to actually do that." Moses originally became interested in collision repair because of her father.



Photos by Sophie Koritz and Willa Reust