

Talking with girls about GEMS

Common sense and experience have shown that the best thing to do is explain the presence of GEMS as ordinary, and not as solving a workforce or gender equity problem. We never discuss the shortage of women in these fields. Instead, we talk about what great jobs there are, how much money you can make, and how satisfying these careers and fields can be.

Girls do not need to know that they are a minority in these fields. Informing them of this falls right into the trap of “Stereotype Threat” a well-researched phenomenon that means confirming a negative stereotype or thought pattern about one’s self. See the information and research at

<http://reducingstereotypethreat.org/> . or

<https://www.ncwit.org/resources/customcatalog/unconscious-biasstereotype-threats>

For example, if we told our GEMS members that we started the club because there are fewer girls and women in STEM and because girls in general seem to stop wanting to go into these fields, we are subliminally suggesting to them that this will happen to them.

How much better is it to say, “We are inviting you to join this fabulous club where you can do all these cool math, science, and engineering things and meet people who do them for a living?” “What girl wouldn’t like to be in that club?”

So, if you are asked why you started GEMS, think of some good answers ahead of time:

- I love math and science and want to share that with you.
- I love blowing things up.
- Math is the best mystery in the universe.
- Engineering is the coolest job—you are solving problems and helping people at the same time.
- Isn’t it fun to build and create?

Chances are they will never ask you. They will just come and have a great time.

And if they ask you why it is just for girls, try turning it gently around and say, “Are you having a good time?” The answer will invariably be “Yes” and you may hear a few stories from the classroom.

