

Cracking the *CODE*: Why Women Aren't Equally Represented in the Tech World

R--- R---'s path to making a film about women and the tech world wasn't a simple "if, then" logic equation like those used by the programmers in her new film.

After earning an MBA from American University's Thunderbird School of Global Management, R--- worked in international business, living for several years as a stockbroker in Luxembourg. Upon her return to the States, R--- married and had children and knew she didn't want to work the long hours of a stockbroker as a new mom. Instead, she developed her interest in photography, and turned that into a profession. All the while, she harbored a desire to make a film, without knowing when an opportunity would present itself.

It did six years ago when her daughter's running coach was diagnosed with ALS, and R--- made the film *Running for Jim*, taking over from the film's previous director. R--- discovered she was driven by the cause-based film and subsequently began work on *CODE: Debugging the Gender Gap*.

CODE's focus is the lack of diversity in the tech industry, where women are underrepresented as software engineers and programmers. "To me it's about equal opportunity," R--- says, and determining "why does the word feminism have such a negative connotation still?" Rather than assert that men and women are not different from one another, the film highlights the importance of diversity in the tech industry, showing that when men and women work together, the end result is so much better. A perfect example is the retooling of airbags, which killed a disproportionate number of women, as they were designed with the average American male in mind. The main reason? Men were the only ones in the room working on them.

R--- is currently touring the country with *CODE*, and is somewhat surprised to do so with a film that has struck a nerve with audiences beyond Silicon Valley and NYC. She is screening the film at corporate companies from Comcast to Mastercard, and speaking on panels. She has screened the film in Norway, Germany, New Zealand, India, and South Korea, and she has just sold the rights to BBC Persia, which will air the film in Iran. Although the reasons why women aren't equally represented in the tech world are different among the countries, R--- has found that audiences are using the film as a catalyst for opening up discussion. And despite the differences, across cultures there is a commonality in the way that women are treated in the workforce.

The response to the film that R--- has found the most rewarding is the men in the audience who approach her after a screening and say, "I had no idea these things were going on," or tell her later on, "I saw your film and the very next day I was in a meeting and noticed that the women's voices weren't being heard as much." Depending on who is sitting in the audience, R--- says, your takeaway from the film will be different.

CODE also highlights that change *can* happen, from Harvey Mudd, whose number of women in computer science classes increased from 10% to 48% in eight years, to Etsy, where the number of women engineers rose from 3% to 30% in three years, both from a concerted effort to get more women in the door and create an environment to keep them there.

R--- credits her experience at SYA in Rennes with her ability to tell her films from a place of objectivity. She finds her style is one of discovery, of looking for different ways of finding the truth. “I believe you need to have that diversity of thought and opinion in order to tell a story that is relatable to a varied audience,” R--- says. And it was SYA that jumpstarted her interest in and familiarity with different cultures. R--- returned to France her sophomore year of college, lived and worked in Luxembourg for several years, and moved the family to Florence for a year when her children were 6 and 7.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that my year in France opened my eyes to the importance of understanding and appreciating different cultures,” R--- says. “But as different as we all are in different cultures, what SYA taught me is that there is a similarity. Those differences are there and valid and need to be respected, but at the core we’re all human, if you can dig in and find that personal connection wherever you are in the world, especially if you’re a documentarian.”

Returning to China, Again and Again

Working as the Senior Manager of Robotics at iRobot allows I--- R--- to live out the “inner 7-year old Lego fanatic” side of himself. But for the grown-up side, it also provides the opportunity to improve people’s lives with robots.

Prior to working at iRobot, R--- worked in a mix of consulting and startup roles around the world and developed a skill set in growth strategies and consumer-centricity. These themes of growth and a central focus have been repeated in his life since his semester abroad with SYA in Beijing.

R--- originally studied Spanish in high school, getting his language requirement out of the way. He was always intrigued by the Chinese language, though, the characters specifically, and as senior year approached, he realized a semester with SYA would be his last chance to take advantage of this interest.

Once in China, he found the diversity of the country and the people a surprise. R--- remembers an excursion trip in Datong, “seeing a Uighur [a Chinese ethnic minority group] man selling dried fruits and nuts from a pushcart. I asked our Resident Director about the ‘European man that I had seen selling nuts’, and he explained about Western China and some of the ethnic groups living there. I had never considered that there were Chinese nationals who didn’t look or talk like the majority Han ethnic group.”

This exposure to profound diversity is not the only reason that R--- is blunt when he states, “SYA changed the course of my life.” He has found himself bound to China “in a way that keeps unfolding.” R--- notes that “the familiarity and comfort that SYA gave me with China has allowed me to return to the country as it has developed over the last 15 years,” and says that “in multiple professional roles, I have been called on to spend time in China, hiring staff, opening offices, and reformulating go-to-market strategies.”

More broadly, R--- says, “it opened my mind to other cultures and ways of being. Through the curriculum and the host family experience, SYA really shook up my frame of reference.” The English course focused on narratives about expatriates and cross-cultural adventures, and allowed him to observe his experience in China from a third-person point of view. The Religion and Philosophy course, meanwhile, opened his eyes to different approaches to “ordering a life, a family, and a society.”

This comfort outside his home and expanded mindset has helped greatly in his professional life. Of work accomplishments, R--- notes, “one of my recent achievements was helping iRobot to completely redesign the way that it sells products in China and to implement that new design. China is a massive growth opportunity for iRobot, and after upgrading our understanding of the market, consumers, and competition, we’ve put in place a Go-to-Market strategy that will capitalize on that opportunity. The work was an exciting chance for me to return to China and to help share my appreciation for Chinese culture and consumers with my iRobot colleagues, as well as a chance to create significant impact on iRobot and China!”

R--- is keenly aware that his time in Beijing with SYA was a pivotal moment for him. “Living with a host family and interacting closely with Chinese culture was a terrific experience in learning how to practice empathy,” he says. “It took me far enough out of

my comfort zone that it opened my eyes to seeing the world through other eyes and ways of thinking. The ability to approach people, situations, cultures with empathy is a skill that I use daily.”

He Never Really Came Home

R--- S--- is CEO of Against All Odds Productions and a *New York Times* best-selling author with more than five million copies of his books in print. To hear him tell it, this wasn't the most obvious outcome from a lackluster academic performance. "I was the dunce of SYA; I didn't speak Spanish well when I got there and I wasn't learning it quickly. Then one morning I woke up wondering why my family was speaking in English and I realized, 'Oh, they're speaking Spanish and I can understand them!' It was like a switch went off in my head while I was sleeping."

More than just Spanish, his year with SYA showed him the potential of the rest of the world. "I remember realizing one day the top 20 hit songs were in Spanish and there was a sudden realization that, 'Wait, every country has this.' Living in another culture for a year at that age you realize there's infinite other valid ways of eating, dressing, it's what lit the fire in me to want to see other cultures and immerse myself. I liked being a stranger in a strange land."

S--- contrasts this inauspicious start in Spain to a return trip in 1987, working on the photography book *A Day in the Life of Spain*, when he spent the day with then-King Juan Carlos. No doubt SYA played a large part in the transition, but not from a mere geographic introduction. By his own admission, painfully shy and bad at sports, S---'s father sent him to Spain with a camera and he found a shop down the street to develop his film. One day after school, S--- asked if the developer could show him how to print and develop film. He soon became the class photographer, in high demand by his classmates and in attendance at all events. When he started taking pictures, S--- says, he thought it was just a hobby. But he turned it into a profession.

S---'s career since then has been a similar mix of chance and fortitude. His father didn't want to pay for college for his son to "take baby portraits and wedding pictures" so S--- ended up at Dickinson University - which didn't have a photography major. But within a week he convinced his professor to let him make his own major. That same professor knew a couple in Tennessee who ran a stock agency that ended up selling some of S---'s pictures while he was still in college.

The couple turned out to know the Director of Photography at *TIME* Magazine and made an introduction. S--- showed up for the interview with his yearbook and, though unprepared, was given a job on the spot to photograph playwright Tom Stoppard. A year later, he joined a photographer who was starting a new agency and, as the "young and hungry" photographer, was sent on the jobs no one else wanted, one of which was flying to Tokyo on the first nonstop flight to photograph a handshake.

S---ended up staying for 11 months, living for a time with the Japanese police force, photographing Muhammed Ali (whose personal photographer invited him to Korea for a match), traveling to Guam during a typhoon, and traveling to Australia when then-Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser took an interest in him on a trip to China because, it turned out, S--- used the same type of camera the Prime Minister himself used. Fraser told S--- about a government-sponsored program bringing journalists to Australia, as the country was so far removed from the rest of the world, and S--- got on board. While there, *TIME* asked him to shoot a cover story on Aborigines. S--- wound up taking a picture of a girl who was washing windows to raise money for her camel trip across

Australia. Upset at first, she asked S--- if he knew anyone at National Geographic, whom she had approached about funding for her trip. He gave her a name and National Geographic funded her, as she was recommended by her “good friend”, and S--- subsequently photographed part of her trip. The girl, R--- D---, eventually wrote the book *Tracks* about the journey, which was turned into a movie in 2013. (S---was played by Adam Driver).

S---’s most recent project “The Human Face of Big Data” was inspired in part through conversations with Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer whom he had met and befriended at a TED conference. He had lamented not being interested in any new projects and she suggested looking at the world of Big Data, or the idea of the planet developing a nervous system thanks to technology’s creation of a real-time feedback loop. Initially rejected on both the topic and his insistence that the project be a book, he eventually found funding through EMC, who gave him the freedom to do a book, iPad app, movie and exhibits. The book, S--- knew, was not something that anyone would throw away. “Try to find a DVD or website from two years ago on something like this,” he says. The “Human Face” iPad app won the 2013 WEBBY for best educational app and the companion TV documentary was broadcast nationwide on PBS in February of 2016 and won the award for Best Cinematography at the Boston Film Festival.

S---’s difficulty fitting in seamlessly with his peers and the world around him helped send him to SYA after which he “never really came home”. The biggest thing he takes from his transformative year in Spain is having “realized that there are infinite other equally valid cultures around the world and things you can learn from”, a sentiment beautifully expressed in his numerous photography books.

A Career in the Film Industry? 'It's in the Can'

C--- B---'s entrance into the film world wasn't quite the stuff of movie magic, but the culmination of chance and determination. Attending a film festival the summer before her senior year of college, she got the contact information of a director's girlfriend, who was working for Fox Searchlight at the time. Knowing she would have to differentiate herself from any other potential applicants, B--- reached out and asked if she could take her out for coffee. "I think she was so surprised that I would fly from NYC to meet her," she says, "that she thankfully agreed." And she ended up putting B---in touch with her first boss at Orange Entertainment.

After her stint at Orange Entertainment, B--- worked in the International Division of GreeneStreet Films, then moved to Lionsgate. She's worked at Lionsgate for over eight years, beginning as a Director of International Sales in 2007, moving her way up to Executive Vice President of International Sales.

Based out of London, B--- is responsible for Lionsgate's film licensing and distribution initiatives in the U.K., Spain, Eastern Europe, CIS, Latin America, Australia and Canada. She's played a key part in the foreign sales of over 100 films at Lionsgate, helping to launch the global blockbuster *Hunger Games* franchise as well as *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part 2* and *Now You See Me*. She also assists in managing the company's third-party international sales business, which has included the Academy Award-winning Best Picture *12 Years a Slave*.

It's not just her career that B--- jumpstarted with chance and absolute resolve. Attending SYA was somewhat of a fluke. "My French teacher mentioned the program almost haphazardly during class. Despite my being extremely late in the application process, I was absolutely fixated on getting into SYA."

Once there, she found she had underestimated how strange it would feel to live in a country without the basic tools to communicate. "But then you just adapt. Sometimes even the smallest success gave me such a huge sense of accomplishment."

Settled into the daily life of Rennes, she and her classmates competed to see who would be the first to dream in French. While other students watched TV to pick up French vernacular, B---'s family refused to own a TV. Instead, her host mother would read her poetry after school or go to the theatre. While none of this propelled B--- into first place of dreaming in French, it did help fuel her love for the arts.

B---'s journey afterward also became a mix of chance and determination. "I became so infatuated with this year of constant discovery that I found myself slightly lost at University to find the right direction. It was only when I did an internship at the Cannes Film Festival that I was determined to incorporate an international component into my career path. Admittedly the south of France has an obvious appeal, but it felt like I could find a career that naturally fit my love for travel, various cultures, the arts and business."

In France, it was immediately apparent to B--- that she was a guest in someone else's home and that she needed to acclimate to her new country. "My year in France provided the basic emotional tools to appreciate a culture that wasn't necessarily my own, regardless of my personal beliefs."

Tools that have helped her tremendously in her current position. “I need to use that basic appreciation for another culture on a daily basis as I build relationships with clients from around the world. I enter into negotiations acutely aware of my clients’ cultural perspective and the nuances of our conversation whether they’re English, Russian or Brazilian.”

And they’re tools that have been useful in other aspects of her life, as well. “When I moved abroad, I learned to observe and appreciate a culture that wasn’t my own. I think there is a certain humility in that process. When my current employer relocated me to London nearly two years ago, I was more than prepared to assimilate and start a new life in the U.K.”

All due to a combination of chance and determination.

Learning a New Language Abroad: Fashion

A--- P--- set off for Zaragoza with an open mind and open eyes, and what she found there has kept them open since.

Surpassing the highest Spanish course offered in her high school, P--- found herself in conversational AP Spanish with native speakers by her sophomore year. When she learned about SYA, she decided it was the logical next step in her path.

Her life in Zaragoza certainly helped shape her future. As she says, “making a life in a foreign country and growing to feel at home there opened the world up to me in a very real way. After that, the thought of entering a new environment didn’t seem scary anymore. Whether it was going to college, spending my junior year in Paris, or more abstractly, embarking on a scary entrepreneurial career, SYA taught me that the unfamiliar can become dear very quickly if you are open to let it. I think it surprised me how quickly Spain felt familiar, and like home, actually.”

It was also in Spain that she first set roots in the fashion industry. Her Resident Director connected P--- with a clothing manufacturer who let her help in the atelier before school and work in the retail store after school. And, “because all of the teachers took such a personal interest in our passions and hobbies, one of my other teachers offered to sew one of my designs for me, and I ended up wearing it to my high school graduation back home.” P---’s time in Zaragoza became the first time she merged her academic pursuits with her love of fashion design and creation.

P--- started her brand, O--- P---, in 2014 after working briefly at another contemporary clothing brand and realizing that her love wasn’t for fashion, exactly, but for creating and promoting a new idea of dressing for women. That passion couldn’t be fulfilled anywhere but with her own brand. While most fashion brands are understood based on physical characteristics, O--- P--- is built on a message, meaning P--- is “careful that each piece represents this message well, whatever the physical product looks like.”

“When creating the brand,” P--- says, “I would think of all the formidable women I’ve ever met – meaning the smartest, the wisest, the most successful, the most generous, the most confident, the most humble ... and I create the ideal woman based on these characteristics, and then I try to imagine what THAT woman would wear. O--- P--- promotes the idea that a woman should value her inner assets above her physical assets, and her physical appearance should indicate this, including her wardrobe.”

Just as she embraced the language in Zaragoza, P--- has embraced the language of fashion. P--- sees her job as creating the clothes that communicate a positive message that a woman can take pride in. As she says, “My goal is to engineer garments that are sharp, chic, and elegantly simple, so that one associates the woman with these characteristics as well, and allows her to best represent herself.”

Influencing CHANGE in Global Gender Equality

When she decided to follow her older sisters' footsteps and spend her own year abroad with SYA in Beijing, D--- S--- didn't know it would ultimately lead her to working with men and women across the US and sub-Saharan Africa.

S--- studied gender and feminist analysis at college, where she graduated summa cum laude, and spent a semester at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London as well as interned with Columbia University's Committee on Global Thought. Combining these experiences, S--- discovered her deep interest in the relationship of gender, race, and sexuality to the state, globalization and development.

After graduating college, S--- moved to Washington, DC to work for a legal nonprofit and found herself as a volunteer community organizer with an Asian American reproductive justice organization. She served as a DC Chapter Leader with the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum for three years, focusing on the impact of local, state, and federal reproductive health policies on Asian American women and girls.

For the past two and a half years, S--- has worked at the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) and is currently their Policy and Outreach Associate. CHANGE's mission is to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights as a means to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by shaping public discourse, elevating women's voices, and influencing the US government.

As part of CHANGE's policy team, S--- leads outreach activities and builds relationships with people to mobilize them to advance CHANGE's goals. One of the most important parts of her job, S--- says, is building and managing partnerships with advocates and grassroots organizations based in the Global South - or women, men, and young people who work directly with communities that are most affected by US global health policies on HIV, reproductive health, and maternal health.

Of her recent work, S--- is proudest to have organized a meeting of US and sub-Saharan African sexual and reproductive health advocates to develop a prevention agenda to ensure that women and girls, no matter where they live, are able to avoid unintended pregnancies and HIV.

Although SYA is "about immersion - constant learning through daily interaction and exchange," and S---'s current work has her oftentimes build relationships over email and Skype in different timezones, S--- sees a link between the work that she does now and her time in Beijing. "At SYA China one of the biggest lessons I learned was that you should always carry a little bit of humility with you wherever you go. The idea that your way of seeing the world is just one of many, that the way you've always done something isn't necessarily the only - or the best - way," S--- says. "This is a huge part of how I approach my work now. To act in solidarity with - instead of on behalf of - women and girls around the world whose lives and experiences are different from mine, whose approaches and solutions to the problems of gender inequality in their communities might be different from my own, requires an openness to constant exchange and a willingness to be challenged. We can only get better at what we do if we listen and learn from women and girls who are most affected."

From SYA to Social Justice

A year living and studying abroad in Viterbo with SYA helped C---B--- take the leap from making a small impact in the wellbeing of other's lives to being on the forefront of fostering large-scale social change. Spurred to apply to SYA based on an interest in language and classical history, B--- found herself learning about the many historic cultures in Italy throughout the centuries and how this history led to those in power present-day. These studies strengthened B---'s interest in how societies are formed and the philosophies upon which they are built.

Thanks to this immersive education, B--- attended Georgetown University where she focused on linguistics and philosophy and subsequently dedicated herself to working for social justice in a variety of forms. Early in her career, B--- worked in direct social services in both Washington DC's child welfare system and by securing housing for DC families experiencing homelessness. Of her work B--- says, "While I felt I was able to have some small, positive impact in individual cases, I was interested in making broader and more sustainable change at a more macro level."

B--- subsequently studied social work and public policy in graduate school at the Catholic University of America. She currently works at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) as a policy analyst for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Benefits from SNAP – previously known as the Food Stamp Program – are widely considered the country's first line of defense against hunger and provide food assistance to as many as 46 million low-income Americans.

In a society with an ever-changing relationship to both food and food access, B---'s work focuses on preserving, developing and interpreting SNAP policies to maintain program access for eligible participants and to promote the program's integrity as a far-reaching anti-hunger and anti-poverty program.

B--- is certain that the skills she began to develop at SYA are critical in her work now. "Studying history and other languages and cultures at SYA helped me gain a better understanding of the world and of my own culture and society," she says. "And I credit my education at SYA as an influence on the social justice focus of my career."