

When women get their hands on technology

by Hilary Webb

In October 2015 co-founder of Lastminute.com Martha Lane Fox shared her notes for a speech entitled 'Women as Digital Warriors'. Fox, who found her career on the Internet, says that when she first began her adventures with the web she expected it to become a 'democratising and empowering force for men and women'. While women were heavily involved in computing from its earliest development in Bletchley Park right through until the 1960s, since then something seems to have gone wrong.

The percentage of women in the digital industry actually *fell* from 33% in 2008 to 27% in 2015. Fox reports that just 4% of UK programmers and 10% of VCs in the industry are women. All these figures are baffling when one realises that women in the UK make up just under half of the workforce.

Despite last month's research

revealing that girls think boys are more intelligent from the age six, in recent years campaigners for women and girls in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) have doubled their efforts. Here at Swansea our Pro-Vice-Chancellor Hilary Lappin-Scott is a leader in efforts to encourage women to get involved in STEM and last year was awarded the WISE Hero award by Her Royal Highness Anne, Princess Royal. WISE is a campaign to promote women in STEM of which the Princess Royal is the patron.

While it will take a little longer to see the results of the efforts of recent women in STEM campaigns, from the small number of women in the industry already we're finally starting to see what happens when women feel free to create with technology.

The rise of social media has given everyone a platform, and while sexist Trolls still lurk in dark corners (and sadly still in very public spaces of the net) women are beginning to show how much of an impact we can have



Swansea University Pro-Vice-Chancellor Hilary Lappin-Scott

Picture: twitter.com/lappinScott

with just social media alone.

The Everyday Sexism Project was founded by Laura Bates in 2012. The website and Twitter feed offer a place for men and women to log everyday experiences of sexism, from catcalling in the street to gender stereotyping at work and school, no matter how major or minor you consider the incident. Bates founded the project to prove that sexism isn't over and that feminism is still needed. The project has since led to two books and continues to open and extend the conversation on sexism.

Bye Felipe is an Instagram account and now website that offers a space for women to share screenshots of conversations with men they meet online. Bitchy? No, because the conversations are of women politely rejecting men and the explicitly hostile and confrontational responses. It turns potentially frightening messages into something comical and raises awareness of a startling double standard around horrible reactions to a simple 'sorry, I'm not interested'.

Most notably however, is the rise of so-called Femtech. The likes of Ida Tin, CEO and founder of **Clue**, a period and ovulation tracking mobile application have found a category of technology that no one saw coming. The Femcare industry, that's sanitary towels, tampons and

women through innovative technology and research that should speak plainly to women about their reproductive health and break down social stigmas surrounding it. There are hundreds of period/fertility trackers, pill reminders, pregnancy and breastfeeding apps available for smartphones and this new market is offering more data and insight than ever before about women's health. Companies like Clue, who offer users the ability to sync the app with their FitBit for further understanding into their health and to share data with friends or partners in Clue Connect, are using this data to find ways to improve women's quality of life and their understanding of their own bodies.

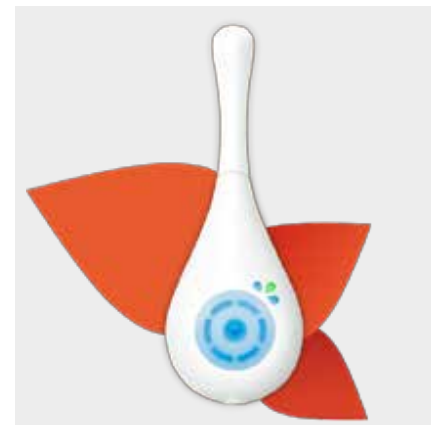
It is still a new market, but Clue's CEO Ida Tin makes a bold statement about Femtech on the company blog in autumn 2016 when she wrote that:

"This will be a massive category. It's growing faster every day. I believe venture capitalists will list Femtech as one of their areas of interest. There will be Femtech conferences. Femtech will not be a term referring to "women in technology" but rather as an expanding category of technology that serves the vast opportunities that exist for female health."

the likes, is a \$30 billion market, but the leaders of the Femtech industry have decided that the technology they're working on has outgrown the vague Femcare title. There are over 45 Femtech start-ups that have recently emerged, like Clue, Glow and Flex, the likes of which are working on empowering

Importantly, the emerging Femtech companies are sharing data, resources, and enthusiasm as they marched together in the Women's March on Washington earlier this year against President Donald Trump's rhetoric, which threatens the security of women's reproductive

rights and therefore health. Femtech is by no means limited to social media and mobile applications, as we can see with the development of **Daysy**. Daysy is a fertility tracker, that works by taking your temperature daily and tracking your menstrual cycle, not only in a means to help you conceive but to prevent pregnancy and to add to the limited number of non-hormonal contraceptives available. While the futuristic looking device isn't cheap it, offers to fill a small space in this wide gap in women's health and this innovative use of technology is welcomed by those unable to use traditional forms of contraception.



Daysy

Thanks to the examples of Martha Lane Fox, Laura Bates and Ida Tin it is clear that women and technology most certainly do go together, and it's difficult to imagine what would happen if and when the numbers of women in the digital industry finally begin to rise as they should. As much as it can feel as though the Internet is still a man's world, women are finally realising the potential we have to use technology to raise each other up and even fight The Patriarchy while we're at it.

Picture: hellocue.com



Clue

picture: eu.daysy.me