

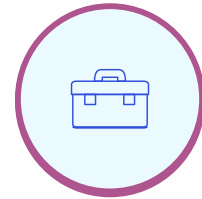


THE TOOLKIT

A collection of resources designed to provide practical tools for women and non-binary undergraduate students.

Facing "Onlyness"

Sometimes you're going to be an "only"; in some majors or careers, it's going to be harder to avoid. You might be the only girl in the robotics club or the physics class, and eventually you might be the only woman in the boardroom or the laboratory. Being an "only" is not easy and it can make you feel like an outsider with less role models and mentors. While it's easy to focus on the negatives that result from this status, in this issue of The Toolkit, you will find a number of ways in which you can view this status as a strength at the college-level and moving forward into your career.



"I WAS THE ONLY GIRL IN MY ROBOTICS GROUP PROJECT. WE TOOK THIRD PLACE IN THE ENTIRE SCHOOL, DIVIDING THE PROJECT WORK EQUALLY. I TOOK A LEADING ROLE IN ORGANIZING EVERYONE ON THE TEAM, BUT I DIDN'T FEEL RESPECTED BY ALL OF MY MALE PARTNERS. POST THE COMPETITION, ONE WROTE IN MY PEER-REVIEW THAT AS A GIRL I TOOK CARE OF THE GROUP, BUT MY IDEAS WERE NOT PARTICULARLY USEFUL."
- MECHANICAL ENGINEERING MAJOR

Tips & Tools

1

Do not underestimate the importance of your presence amongst your colleagues. Studies have shown consistent results that the diversity within a company is positively correlated to the overall performance and productivity of the business. You should remind yourself and your colleagues that your "onlyness" offers a different perspective and a brand new set of ideas. It is important that you remember to speak up about your ideas because your silence is not helping anyone, neither your project, your colleagues, or yourself. When you feel like an outsider, remember the value that you add to the group and that you have the opportunity to offer a new perspective.

2

Find people that support you and build your community. Don't confuse being an "only" with being alone. Do your best to surround yourself with allies that you can share your experiences and frustrations with. You can spot allies through various behaviors; it could be as simple as a classmate checking in with you after a rough presentation. Additionally, you can find people like you by looking outside of your major, joining student organizations, and becoming an active member of a professional society. By doing this, you will strengthen your network and support system.

4

3

Speak up about your successes. Often times, the "only" may feel that they have to work extra hard within the group to be acknowledged for the work that they do. Keep track of your successes and make them known; practice saying them out loud to yourself. It's important that you are able to speak up for your hard work and that you can recognize bias when it is present. Knowing your own impact will help you recognize biases; please see our resource on "Combatting Mansplaining" for more details on dealing with oral comments.

Be aware of the emotional impact of "onlyness". Sometimes being an "only" can make you feel that all eyes are on you or that you have to be the model minority. Don't spend your time trying to live up to impossible standards or set your sights on perfection; instead, focus on being excellent. Trying to be perfect can stop you from taking risks or practicing self-care. As an "only", try not to feel that failure is a complete stop. Each failure is only a single point on an entire journey to reaching success.

Further Reading

"The Power of Being the Only Woman in the Room" by Michelle Bogan | Elevate
"What it's like to be the only woman in the room" by Julia Carpenter | CNN Business
"One is the loneliest number" by Kevin Sneader & Lareina Yee | McKinsey & Company

A note from the author

It's hard to be the only woman in the room. I have been the only woman in many rooms, starting from my first day in college when I met with the classmates that I would share a degree program with for the next four years - all men. I know what it's like to feel that if you don't show up to a class, your absence will be more noticed, but the important thing to remember is that you are powerful and an asset to the group. Your ideas matter. Your presence matters. You may be an "only", but you are most certainly not alone. -Kaitlin Gili, CEO