The odd one out: Revisiting and investigating the gender imbalance in ICT study choices

ABSTRACT
For the past two decades there has been an imbalance between male and female students entering higher qualifications from high schools. Only one in six students entering higher education to study computer related degrees are female. Occupational stereotyping can be linked to the decline in the number of females entering computing degree courses.

INTRODUCTION
The past two decades have seen an exponential growth of employment opportunities within the ICT industry [1]. Despite the availability of employment opportunities, there has been a downturn in the number of females entering the industry. This decline has been steady over the past two decades to the point where there is a real risk that females will be almost entirely absent from the ICT industry [4].

The popular stereotype of people working in ICT is that they are geeks; hiding in darkened rooms, staring at computer screens all day [2, p.128]. This image is promulgated in popular media to TV shows such as Criminal Minds, which portray a negative stereotype of females within the ICT industry.

QUESTION
What perceptions of IT related jobs and role models do females get from family, friends, teachers and guidance councillors? How do social media and traditional media (TV, film, etc.) influence female’s perception of IT? Does this impact in their decision-making when it comes to taking ICT at high school and or as a viable career choice? Have ICT interventions started to change perception of the ICT industry for girls?

PARADIGM
Design Science Research approach (DSR) [6], incorporates mixed method design. DSR has been described as an evaluation cycle methodology [3] which can benefit from the strengths of mixed methods.

DSR is to facilitate the different research questions within a single study. Neither qualitative nor quantitative methods can be used to answer all strands of the questions, so the use of DSR should prove a way to answer the research questions. See figure one for an overview of the process.

NOTE # The term ICT, has been used to define any related jobs within the technology field and also for the technology high school qualifications used within New Zealand. It is assumed that computer relates to any device used by the students that can connect to the Internet such as tablets, games machines, desktops, phones and laptops.