

# CHANGING THE WORLD— WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY

This biennium, Zonta International launched a pilot program to encourage women to pursue education, career opportunities and leadership roles in technology. More than US\$100,000 was awarded to 30 recipients through Women in Technology scholarships.

Two recipients of the Women in Technology Scholarships, Lucy Pei and Giorgia Di Tommaso, recently shared what this scholarship means to them while also giving some insights into the world of technology.



The Zonta Women in Technology Scholarship was the first award **Lucy Pei** won in her graduate career. She felt honored that she was able to connect in with Zonta, but also felt that there was recognition of her research path.

Lucy's work in technology is focused on researching the growing influence of digital technology. As an undergraduate, she saw that technical innovation was being focused on high-profit areas like entertainment and warfare and that the uneven distribution of technology was exacerbating existing social inequalities. She became involved in projects that sought to use technology to mitigate social inequalities and promote

education and opportunities for social mobility.

"As I continued to work on these projects and saw the longer term impacts of technology-for-good projects on the underserved communities they sought to help, I realized there needed to be more research that would delicately critique this area of well-intentioned initiatives," Lucy said. "Such critique is necessary, not to undercut the good work that is being done, but to evaluate how underlying assumptions and ethical frameworks may still reproduce inequities that the projects are trying to address."

Lucy also sees opportunity for the future of the world of technology.

"Technical work is prestigious and difficult; it requires sacrifices, and it's doubly difficult for women to make it in the world of tech. Women pursuing a career in tech should always remember to care for themselves, and for other women aspiring to work in tech," Lucy

said. "Equally we should care for the people who will be impacted by the digital products we make, and for the people who don't have access to technology or the opportunity to learn about technology."

To read Giorgia and Lucy's full interviews, please visit [www.zonta.org/news](http://www.zonta.org/news).

**Giorgia Di Tommaso**, another recipient of the Women in Technology Scholarship, also was drawn to the technology that surrounds us when she began her education in computer science. "I liked the idea of the power that gives computer science: you can create anything you imagine, computers are pervasive in every field of our daily life," Giorgia said. But she also set out to bring down a barrier.



"I wanted to break the false stereotype that computer science is not suitable for girls," Giorgia said. During the first years of her education, it was hard for her to understand a new subject and live in a "males" world. She knew it was not going to be easy as she was not only in a field dominated by men, but computer science is known to have a high dropout rate.

Giorgia recently completed her Ph.D. at the Sapienza University of Rome, where her research was focused on data and web science, particularly on semantics-aware

recommender systems. She has the following advice for young women looking to pursue a career in technology:

"Keep in mind that the stereotype that computer programming is boring and only for men is wrong," Giorgia said. "Coding, for example, often requires more inventiveness and problem-solving ability than technical ability... [and] the ability to work in teams and to be creative, areas in which women are very skilled."

(Left) Lucy Pei, 2020 Women in Technology scholar (left), has researched the growing influence and long-term impacts of technology. (Right) Giorgia Di Tommaso, 2020 Women in Technology scholar, entered the field of computer science wanting to break down barriers.

