

Girls as young as 6 believe men are smarter than women, study shows

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.02.17

Word Count **721**



News anchor Barbie (left) and computer engineer Barbie are arranged for a photo at the New York Toy Fair in 2010. A new study published January 26, 2017, in the journal *Science* suggests that girls as young as 6 can be led to believe that men are inherently smarter and more talented than women, making them less motivated to pursue novel activities and ambitious careers. AP Photo/Mark Lennihan

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Can women be brilliant? Little girls don't know.

A study published January 26 in the journal *Science* suggests that girls as young as 6 can be led to believe men are smarter and more talented than women. The authors of the study were surprised that these stereotypes affect children at such a young age. Gender stereotypes are ideas about men and women that are not based in truth. One gender stereotype is the idea that men are smarter than women. This can make girls less likely to go after difficult careers or activities.

Society Connects Natural Ability With Males More Than Females

Andrei Cimpian is a professor who co-wrote the study. Cimpian studies the way people's minds work. He said that society connects natural ability with males more than females. "Our research suggests that this association is picked up by children as young as 6 and 7." The study looked at 400 children ages 5-7.

In the first part of the study, girls and boys were told a story about a person who is "really, really smart," and then asked to identify that person. They were shown photos of two women and two men. The people in the photos were dressed professionally, looked the same age and appeared happy.

Girls Less Likely To Say Women Are "Really, Really Smart"

At age 5, both boys and girls chose a photo with a person of their own gender. But as they became older and began attending school something changed. Children began believing more in the gender stereotype that men are smarter than women. At ages 6 and 7, girls were much less likely to pick women as someone who is "really, really smart."

The study also asked the kids to select photos of children who look like they do well in school. Interestingly, girls tended to pick girls. This means that their ideas of brilliance are not based on academic performance, only on natural intelligence.

The second study presented them with two new board games. They were told that one was for children who are really smart. The other was for children who try really hard. At age 5, girls and boys both wanted to play the game for smart children. At ages 6 and 7, most boys still wanted to play the game for smart children, while most girls chose the activity for children who try hard. The only change was how girls thought about themselves.

Girls Begin To Believe They Are Not As Smart As Boys

These results show that girls begin to believe they are not as smart as boys. They avoid difficult subjects in school, leading to big differences in goals and career choices between men and women. The authors of the study wrote that stereotypes keep women from trying to have careers in fields where brilliance is favored.

It is still unclear where the stereotypes come from. Parents, teachers, peers and the media are the usual suspects, Cimpian said. It is clear that action must be taken so that these ideas don't stop girls' professional goals, he said. "Instill the idea that success in any line of work is putting your head down, being passionate about what you are doing," Cimpian said. She added that it helps girls to see successful women as role models.

Barbie Doll Maker Tries To Encourage Girls

Toy companies, like the maker of Barbie dolls, have tried to encourage girls. The "You can be anything" Barbie campaign tells girls that they can have careers as veterinarians, professors and many other careers.

Rebecca S. Bigler, another professor, says that the stereotypes might start in early elementary school when students are taught about famous scientists, composers and writers. These are called the "geniuses" of history and most of them are men. Bigler said it is important that when students learn about these people, they also learn about the reasons why not very many women are in these groups of famous "geniuses."

Professor Says Children Can Believe In Their Own Intelligence

"We need to explain to children that laws were created specifically to prevent women from becoming great scientists, artists, composers, writers, explorers and leaders," Bigler added. She believes children can believe in their own intelligence and potential. Then, they can pursue any career and fight for women to be treated equally with men.

Quiz

- 1 Which two of the following sentences from the article contain CENTRAL ideas?
1. *A study published January 26 in the journal Science suggests that girls as young as 6 can be led to believe men are smarter and more talented than women.*
 2. *The people in the photos were dressed professionally, looked the same age and appeared happy.*
 3. *The authors of the study wrote that stereotypes keep women from trying to have careers in fields where brilliance is favored.*
 4. *Toy companies, like the maker of Barbie dolls, have tried to encourage girls.*
- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 1 and 4
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 2 and 4
- 2 Which sentence from the article supports the idea that history plays a part in making girls think men are smarter than women?
- (A) At ages 6 and 7, girls were much less likely to pick women as someone who is "really, really smart."
- (B) "Instill the idea that success in any line of work is putting your head down, being passionate about what you are doing," Cimpian said.
- (C) The "You can be anything" Barbie campaign tells girls that they can have careers as veterinarians, professors and many other careers.
- (D) "We need to explain to children that laws were created specifically to prevent women from becoming great scientists, artists, composers, writers, explorers and leaders," Bigler added.
- 3 Select the paragraph from the section "Girls Are Less Likely To Say Women Are Really, Really Smart" that suggests girls begin to think they have to work harder to do as well as boys.

- 4 Which detail would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Girls can sometimes be helped by seeing successful women who are role models.
 - (B) The maker of Barbie dolls has tried creating a campaign that tells girls they can be anything.
 - (C) The recent study looked at 400 children who were between the ages of 5 and 7.
 - (D) Girls at age 5 continued to think girls were smart, but at age 6 they began to think boys were smarter.