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Preteen children tend to associate 'brilliance' with males, study finds

by Nanyang Technological University



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Children hold stereotypical views that "brilliance" is a male trait, and this belief strengthens as they grow, up to the age of 12, researchers from Singapore and the United States have reported.

The study, led by NTU Singapore in collaboration with New York University, was published in the scientific journal *Child Development* in May 2022. It involved 389 Chinese Singaporean parents and 342 of their children aged 8 to 12.

Tests were carried out to measure the extent to which parents and their children associate the notion of brilliance with men, and to probe the relationship between parents and their children's views.

The study defined brilliance as an exceptional level of intellectual ability and results showed that children are as likely to associate brilliance with men as their parents are.

This belief was stronger among older children and stronger among those children whose parents held the same view.

While previous research on gender stereotypes has found that the idea that giftedness is a male trait can emerge at around the age of six, it was not known whether and how this stereotype changes over the course of childhood, until now.

Lead author of the study, Assoc. Prof. Setoh Peipei from NTU's School of Social Sciences, said the Singapore-based study is the first to identify that the tendency to associate brilliance with men (also known as the "brilliance equals to men" stereotype) increases in strength through the primary school years, and reaches the level of belief seen in adults by the age of 13.

"Stereotypical views about how boys are smarter than girls can take root in childhood and become a self-fulfilling prophecy," said Prof. Setoh. "For girls, this may lead them to doubt their abilities, thus limiting their ideas about their interests and what they can achieve in life."

"Our research work shows parents must also be included in policies and school programs to effectively combat children's gender stereotypes from a young age," she added.

More information: Siqi Zhao et al, The acquisition of the gender-brilliance stereotype: Age trajectory, relation to parents' stereotypes, and intersections with race/ethnicity, *Child Development* (2022). DOI: [10.1111/cdev.13809](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13809)

Journal information: [Child Development](#)

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