

We Still Think Brilliance Is A Male Trait And It's Hurting Women

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Men are more likely to be seen as “brilliant” than women, according to a new study published today in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

Researchers found that this gendered stereotype that men are intellectually superior to women isn't held consciously but is rather a result of implicit bias, which is when associations are automatically activated in our minds

“People explicitly say that they associate women with brilliance. Yet implicit measures reveal a different story about the more automatic gender stereotypes that come to mind when thinking about brilliance,” explained Tessa Charlesworth, a doctoral student at Harvard University and co-author of the paper.

In a series of five experiments, the study surveyed more than 3,000 people from over 78 countries, including U.S. women and men as well as U.S. girls and boys between the ages of 9 and 10.

The researchers found that overwhelmingly people viewed “brilliance” or “genius” as a male trait.

[Even young children](#) fall victim to the [gender stereotype](#) that brilliance or giftedness is more common in men.

And this biased belief is [damaging to women](#).

“Stereotypes that portray brilliance as a male trait are likely to hold women back across a wide range of prestigious careers,” said Daniel Storage, the paper's lead author.

For example, previous studies have shown that this implicit bias can discourage women from applying for jobs as well as reduces the likelihood they're referred to jobs.

One [study](#) found that women are less likely to apply for jobs that are advertised as requiring a brilliant mind.

Another study, published in the journal [American Psychologist](#), suggests that job descriptions that emphasize brilliance trigger sexist assumptions as people consider their friends and peers as possible candidates.

“Despite the objective evidence of women's intellectual and professional accomplishments, it seems that their ability to make intellectual contributions is still not seen as being on par with men's,” wrote Cornell University psychologist Lin Bian in [Pacific Standard](#).

Further, previous work by this latest study's senior author, Andrei Cimpian, has suggested that women are underrepresented in careers where success is perceived to depend on high levels of intellectual ability, such as in science and technology.

The [lack of women in STEM](#), as well as women in [positions of power in STEM](#), is nothing new and [research](#) does [suggest](#) it may be in part due to this gender -biased belief that you need to be brilliant to succeed.

But the need for more women in STEM goes far beyond filling a diversity quotient.

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“When [...] decisions are made with discretion, they are likely to result in unintended disparities. But when those decisions are made based on predetermined, objective criteria that are rigorously applied, they are much less likely to produce disparities,” said social psychologist Anthony Greenwald of the University of Washington in an interview with [Discover Magazine](#).

Regardless of how we go about eradicating this bias from our collective subconscious, we need to get rid of it. [Women are just as smart as men](#) and it's about time we recognized that.