Written by **Selwyn Duke** on January 8, 2025

Stereotypes or Reality? Study: 6-year-olds Believe Boys Are Better at Computing and Engineering

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Back in 2005, while explaining why so few women occupied top science positions, economist Lawrence Summers suggested it could partially have to do with "issues of intrinsic aptitude." It was one reason why he was forced from his Harvard presidency position the next year. And if this standard still holds today, a lot of little kids will have to be canceled. After all, by age six already, a large number of them embrace Summers' theory.

That is, they believe boys are better at computer science and engineering.

That's what a recent analysis of almost 100 studies found, anyway. And, of course, this is a major problem, the mainstream media warn. As they may put it, this means the kids "are internalizing gender stereotypes." Yet there's another reason children may think males are better at computing and engineering.

Because they are.

If that sounds like bias, well, there's plenty to go around. Just consider that one of the studies analyzed found that by age eight, students believe girls possess greater verbal gifts. Other research has found that kids think academic success is "for girls." But neither is what the media lead with (in fact, it's hardly mentioned). It's not something they say is a problem. It's also not suggested that this could be the result of "internalizing gender stereotypes." (And now we know why, increasingly, people are internalizing a certain mainstream-media stereotype. Hint: It's the one that's gradually putting them out of business.)

Oh, the Patriarchy!

The aforementioned analysis was conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and encompassed 98 different studies. AIR senior researcher David Miller related the analysis' scope and a bit about its methodology at *Scientific American*, writing:

> We set out on a five-year-long expedition to synthesize more than four decades of past research on children's gender stereotypes about abilities in STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math]. We compiled a massive dataset of more than 145,000 children across 33 nations whose stereotypes had been measured in various ways. For instance, a study might ask kids, "Are girls or boys better at computer coding?"

The results? Miller writes of how the sex-differences perceptions start early:

> For example, 52 percent of six-year-olds think boys are better at engineering, whereas 10 percent think girls are better — an early male bias of 42 percentage points. Computing also

> shows male bias at age six, though to a lesser extent. But for math, the fraction of six-year-olds who say boys are better (28 percent) is about the same as those who say girls are better (32 percent), showing no clear winner among young kids. (The remainder of kids did not see one group as better than the other.) These differences mirror related patterns among adults. For example, 40 percent of employed mathematicians but only 16 percent of employed engineers in the U.S. are women.

Nothing but AIR?

Now, these results inspire much hand-wringing. If these perceptions aren't addressed, warns Miller, they could limit girls' "future aspirations for fast-growing tech fields such as artificial intelligence." It's that very modern concern: that sex-stereotyping will stigmatize the lasses.

But does this really hold water here? Consider, for example, that little kids don't even know what engineers do. To wit: One study cited in Miller's "paper found that roughly three-fourths of young children think that engineers work on engines and repair cars," relates website The 74. ("Engine" being in the word "engineer" throws them.) But then, will a generalization relating to what's not truly engineering really discourage girls from getting into actual engineering? Wouldn't it ultimately (if you accept the premise) discourage them from becoming auto mechanics?

Then there's that supposition that at issue here is some oppressive patriarchy. If so, however, why do kids believe girls are better at reading and writing and that academic success is their domain? Is the patriarchy throwing the feminists a bone (or two)?

A more logical explanation is that kids believe the above because girls get higher grades and, especially at the younger ages, are better with language. (During adolescence, while girls remain more fluent, boys begin using more complex language. So it's a mixed bag.) In other words, these perceptions aren't "stereotypes," a term with a negative connotation. They reflect *reality*.

Yet couldn't *proper* generalization also explain the children's wokester-bemoaned beliefs? After all, 84 percent of employed engineers are, and 82 percent of computer science degrees are awarded to, men. And, obviously, people with advanced training in a field *are* "better" in that field than people untrained in it.

All Socialization?

But don't the above disparities result from conditioning, as the feminists insist? Not according to data.

Question: Where would women be more likely to enter traditionally male-dominated fields? In a more patriarchal nation such as India or an uber-egalitarian one such as Norway?

Answer: India.

The reason?

Poorer countries (e.g., India) don't have as much of a luxury of indulging feminism and hence are more patriarchal. Nonetheless, circumstances force their women to go into more lucrative STEM fields to make money to survive. Women in the wealthier and more feministic lands (e.g., Norway) have the luxury of going where female hearts lead — toward things feminine.

Note that this phenomenon was illustrated beautifully in the Norwegian documentary "The Gender Equality Paradox" (below).

In other words, we *know* why the STEM sex disparity exists. Understanding it is just a matter of "following the science" — and not the feminist ideology.

Fantasy vs. Reality

Following common sense helps, too. Consider something else Miller and others lament: That girls' interest in science is robust in elementary grades, but wanes as they move into higher schooling. This is supposedly the result of that dreaded patriarchal pigeonholing. But there is again a more logical explanation.

Small children's conception of careers is generally very fanciful. They may think, "A scientist! Yeah, that sounds cool!" And simple grade-school science may be fun, too.

As they grow, however, and must tackle more complex, perhaps "drier" science, the reality sets in. And the shine may be off it when you learn that, as an MSN commenter amusingly put it last year, you must "spend hours figuring out how to inverse a binary tree against a recursive function."

Really, though, a more fundamental question should be asked about the male/female STEM disparity:

Who cares?

The notion that all groups should be equally represented across all endeavors is an unrealistic hang-up. It's also, quite hypocritically, not actually what the Equality Police lobby for. As writer Katie El-Diwany pointed out at American Thinker in 2018, within

> the feminist grievance narrative, there is no whining about women being "excluded" from working-class male-dominated professions. There is more than plenty of talk about the dearth of women in science, in engineering, in upper management positions, and as CEOs. But there is no one asking: where are all the female garbage-collectors, the female elevator technicians, the female landscape laborers, the female oil rig workers?
>
> All of this reveals that feminist clamoring for "equal representation" is not about equality at all. It is about power and prestige.

Feminists also don't complain about men constituting 92 percent of all workplace deaths. "Equality" cries are ploy, not principle — and never were anything but.

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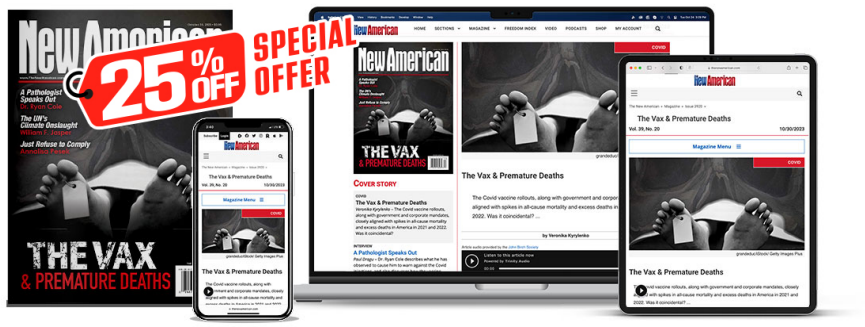

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