

**“Of dolls and cars: The role of masculine and feminine roles”**  
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([Published at Politikon, December 18, 2013](#))

Christmas holidays are here and advertisements remind us that toys are different for boys and girls. But do they have to be? According to research in psychology, at the age of 18 months there begin to be differences in how boys and girls play, what impact might this have in the long term? Is this a result of biological factors (hormonal, physiological, etc.)? Or is it the result of the socio-cultural environment? [Recent research](#) found that brain connections have a different structure in men and women, but such differences are much smaller at early ages (Verma et. al 2013). And for anyone who thinks that is completely free from sexist influences, I challenge him or her to see the French film "Tomboy" without facing any internal dilemmas.

Toys are probably just the tip of the iceberg. Underneath, it is common to find unconscious behaviors that reinforce historical stereotypes. For example, the controversy over the book "Marry and be submissive" made me think of Miley Cyrus and what is it that people find most scandalous about her recent behavior. Given that she had previously already made videos and dances with erotic content, it seems that what might have shocked people the most is her sudden distance from the standard female stereotype. For instance, her male haircut, the gestures with her tongue and her defiant attitude such as when smoking cannabis in stage. This behavior could be a strategy to promote herself but if, as some claim, she is putting her career above everything else, this could also break the standard female stereotype.

Such male and female roles seem to have long-term implications. Among teenagers, researchers have found differences between boys and girls in indicators of self-determination, for example, when assessing the control one has over his/her own life compared to the influence of external factors (Heckman et al., 2006). It is also noted that teenage boys give more importance to money and their careers than teenage girls, while girls give more importance to family and friends (Fortin, 2008). These differences help explain part of the gender gap in wages later on in life. And this is also the case among individuals who later on pursue high-skill careers. In our research using evidence from young lawyers in the U.S., we find that aspirations to move up the company play a major role in the differences in the annual performance and, consequently, in earnings (Azmat and Ferrer, 2013).

Is it possible to break the gender gap in career aspirations? The publication of the book "[Lean In](#)" by Sheryl Sandberg (Facebook Chief Operating Officer) generated a debate on how to increase women's leadership in the professional and political world. On one side, the book argues that a key element to reduce the gap between men and women is for women to break self-imposed barriers and take the will to lead. On the other, Anne-Marie Slaughter (a Princeton professor to whom difficulties with her teenage sons made her leave a prestigious and influential position in the US government working for Hillary Clinton) responded with "[Why Women Still Can't Have It All](#)" arguing that those women who manage to be mothers, remain attractive, and have a successful career are superhuman or rich, and it is unfair to blame those who do not manage to do it. In Spain, a similar debate took place when the current vice-president, Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, gave up her maternity leave after childbirth. Her decision was interpreted by some as a commitment to her professional duties, while others considered it to be a betrayal to mothers' rights.

It is undeniable the progress in gender equality over the last decades. However, there has been a slowdown in the convergence with respect to certain dimensions, such as salary differences.

In addition, writer Jean Kilbourne argues that sexism in advertising is getting worse and worse by imposing unrealistic ideals of female beauty that are manipulated with Photoshop and that enslave women. According to her, Cindy Crawford actually said that she wished she looked like Cindy Crawford does in the media. This stereotype on the importance of female beauty was also brought up recently by a graffiti in Barcelona's metro. The metropolitan transportation authority (TMB) justified construction work in the metro using a picture of women from the 50s in a hair salon under the sentence "we are making ourselves look prettier for you" (see picture). It was probably a campaign without the conscious intention to offend but with an unconscious stereotype that led to the following graffiti: "Sexist advertisements are also violence against women."

To conclude, I would like to claim that sexism should no longer be an issue that fundamentally interests just women. It is crucial that men take greater awareness of their role as victims and actors of sexist stereotypes. As a reward for male readers who have reached this paragraph, let me conclude with two references from sociologist Michael Kimmel: "The major emotion of American masculinity is anxiety. Why? Because you have to prove your masculinity all the time." "Gender equality is not a loss for men. It might be the best thing that has ever happened for us."



Azmat, G. and Ferrer, R. (2013) "Gender Gaps in Performance: Evidence from Young Lawyers." Barcelona GSE Working Paper No. 604.

Fortin, N. M. (2008). "The Gender Wage Gap among Young Adults in the United States. The Importance of Money versus People," *Journal of Human Resources*, vol. 43(4), 884-918.

Heckman, J. J., Stixrud, J., and Urzua, S. (2006). "The Effects of Cognitive and Noncognitive Abilities on Labor Market Outcomes and Social Behavior," *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 24(3), 411-482.