

# New approaches to economics research are reshaping how we understand and respond to gender stereotypes

*New ways of analysing data from images and text are being used by economists to study discrimination in the labour market. A recent workshop, hosted by the Centre for Economic Performance and the Department of Social Policy at LSE, discussed cutting-edge research on discrimination and gender stereotypes in the field of economics. Conference organiser [Almudena Sevilla](#) speaks to [Myung Jin](#) about researching the impact of gender stereotypes and how this field is evolving.*

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## **Q: What is a gender stereotype – are they always negative?**

A gender stereotype is a generalised belief or assumption about the characteristics, roles, and behaviours associated with a specific gender. While stereotypes may not always be inherently negative, they have the potential to be harmful for children and individuals because they can restrict their choices and limit their opportunities.

Stereotypes do not necessarily entail conscious ill feelings directed at people outside one's own group. Yet, stereotypes can create collective expectations that confine individuals to predefined roles, hindering their personal growth and potential. Therefore, even if stereotypes are not universally negative, their presence can have detrimental effects on children and people by constraining their choices and perpetuating societal biases.

## **Q: How do gender stereotypes impact women's working lives?**

Gender stereotypes have a significant impact on women's working lives, often holding them back and subjecting them to unfair disadvantages. Notably, they contribute to occupational segregation, with women being steered towards traditionally 'feminine' fields while men are encouraged to pursue higher-paying industries like engineering and finance. Women face a motherhood penalty due to societal expectations of prioritising

caregiving. Gender stereotypes also create biases that hinder women from attaining leadership positions, perpetuating gender imbalances in decision-making roles.

Stereotypes start early. [In a paper](#) with Cheti Nicoletti and Valentina Tonei we look at data on parents' beliefs about their children's skills and find that, whereas parents think that boys are much better at mathematics than they really are, they do not think the same for girls in any subject, even in subjects where girls excel. We can now show that this parental bias has implications for gender gaps in student performance later in life.

**Q: You recently held a [workshop](#) on the economics of gender stereotypes: why was it important to have the workshop now?**

New ways of collecting, storing, and analysing rich data from images, text, and other forms of media has recently revealed that systematic discriminating behaviour may be more widespread than previously thought, and that it may arise not from animus but from explicit or implicit gender stereotyping.

This has led to a vibrant recent line of theoretical and empirical research that attempts to model the formation and evolution of stereotypical beliefs, as well as to quantify the impact of gender stereotypes on economic outcomes. It is now the perfect time to focus on the economics of gender stereotypes.

**Q: What do insights from economics and social psychology add to research on gender stereotypes?**

In a [recent article](#) surveying the status of the gender economics literature I argue that, while the acceptance of explicit social norms and gender roles and its influence on economic behaviour is increasingly accepted in economics, the recognition and exploration of implicit biases is a relatively recent development that has enriched the field by offering insights into the impact of unconscious biases on economic behaviour and outcomes.



Borrowing from the social psychology literature, one [line of research](#) in gender economics embraces the notion that stereotyping does not need to be the result of a conscious ‘slow’ thought process (explicit stereotyping), but rather a ‘fast’ implicit and unconscious process (implicit stereotyping). Discrimination, as a result of unconscious mental associations, may have [remained undetected](#), even by discriminatory actors themselves who cannot control automatic thought processes. Marina Della Giusta and Steven Bosworth offer an [excellent review](#) of this new line of research, currently pushing the frontier of knowledge in gender economics.

**Q: You mention that it is not just the usual data, but text and images that can be analysed. Can you give an example of this kind of research, and what it has uncovered?**

An example of this type of research is the paper [‘Gender and the Dynamics of Economics Seminars’](#) by Pascaline Dupas, Alicia Sasser Modestino, Muriel Niederle, Justin Wolfers and The Seminar Dynamics Collective that looks at interactions in economics seminars. The paper encompassed data from hundreds of research

seminars, job talks, and summer conferences across leading economics departments, revealing that women presenters faced more, often patronizing or hostile, questions than their male counterparts. Notably, these differences persisted regardless of the field, seminar series, or topics presented, and gender differences were not consistently reduced by more structured seminar formats. This data provides an unprecedented exploration into the dynamics of seminar culture within the field of economics suggesting a more pervasive bias than initially assumed, perhaps as a reactionary (conscious or unconscious) response to the distributive disruption within established power dynamics and societal norms.

**Q: How can this new knowledge help us mitigate the negative impact of gender stereotypes?**

This kind of research can be instrumental in mitigating the negative impact of gender stereotypes by providing a sense of the magnitude of the problem. By quantitatively assessing and understanding the extent of gender stereotyping, we can develop targeted interventions to address and counteract these biases effectively.

**Q: And how can this new knowledge help economists mitigate the negative impact of gender stereotypes in their own profession?**

In an [interview](#) with Esther Duflo, Nobel laureate in Economics, she said "... the culture itself in economics is not very friendly. It is a very aggressive culture, very in-your-face culture which many women don't particularly like. There I think the profession can improve by being mindful of having a somewhat more civil way of engaging with each other. And I do think that actually this is already changing, that in the last few years there has been a realization that it is not okay to be aggressive and rude etcetera, one has to ... the whole field has to become more gentle."

Until recently, the toxic culture in Economics was dismissed as anecdotal. New ways of collecting all sorts of data and powerful tools to analyse it have made it clear that this culture is more widespread than originally thought. It is the necessary (but not sufficient) condition for change. At the Royal Economic Society, I am chairing a newly founded initiative, the Royal Economics Society **UK Women in Economics Network**, and have joined up with a wonderful group of women and men economists who are working toward changing the culture in Economics and increasing women representation in the

discipline. You can join us [here](#).

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