



3 DRIVING-RELATED SEX STEREOTYPES

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The concepts of femininity and masculinity make it possible to distinguish between men and women socially and culturally. They play a role in the construction of the sex stereotypes that have become part of our daily lives, such as those depicting women as incompetent drivers. Researchers are examining these unfounded beliefs which have an impact on the behaviours of road users.

Stereotypes which are constructed from the earliest age...

Scientific studies provide us with a better understanding of the sex stereotypes that are linked to driving and their potential effects on behaviours. This research shows that children are aware of and absorb some stereotypes from the start of secondary school^a. These stereotypes assume greater importance until the time individuals take the driving test and then decline as drivers become older and gain in experience^b. Thus, from the age of 11 years, driving is perceived as masculine activity. Males are considered to possess innate driving skills. Their ability to control their vehicle is considered to justify their risky behaviours.

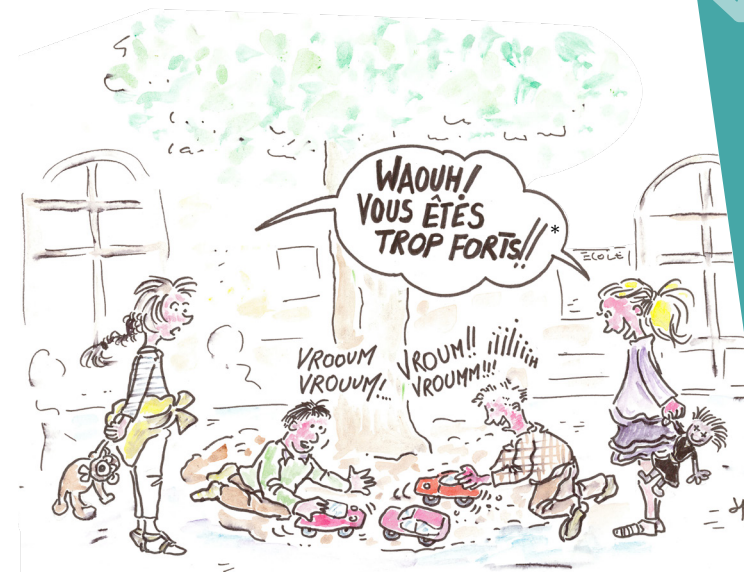
The image of female drivers is constructed in contrast to this. They are perceived as being less naturally gifted drivers than men, which means they have to be more cautious. These types of reasoning provide an explanation for actual road traffic crashes, while at the same time preserving beliefs about men being more competent at the wheel than women are.

... and which directly affect our behaviours

More in-depth research has shown how and why beliefs can affect the behaviours of male and female drivers. The more individuals believe in stereotypes of this type the more they reproduce the driving behaviours that are typical of their group^c.

Thus, researchers have noted that simply explaining the purpose of study, concerning the differences between the sexes in driving, can limit the performance of the female participants. However, in the case when women and men are assessed at the same time by means of a test of knowledge about the Highway Code, it is the men who exhibit the most anxiety. The fear of being compared to the stereotype of the male driver who disregards rules may be at work^d.

These social beliefs affect the behaviours of men and women at the wheel, but they may also explain why women are less successful than men at passing the practical driving test^e. Ongoing studies will provide us with a better understanding of this phenomenon and, later on, suggest ways of overcoming it.



* Whow! you're so smart!

1. TS2: Transport, Health, Safety Department

2. LESCOT: Laboratory Ergonomics and Cognitive Sciences applied to Transport

Further readings

- a. Granié, M.-A., & Pappafava, E., *Gender stereotypes associated with vehicle driving among French preadolescents and adolescents*. *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour*, 2011. 14(5), 341-353.
- b. Degraeve, B., Granié, M.-A., Pravossoudovitch, K., & Lo Monaco, G., *Social representations associated with men and women drivers among French adolescents and adults. Effects of perceiver's age, sex, and socioeconomic status*. *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour*, 2015. 34, 1-17.
- c. Pravossoudovitch, K., Martha, C., Cury, F., & Granié, M.-A., *Sex and age differences in the endorsement of sex stereotypes associated with driving*. *Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 2015. 18(e100), 1-8.
- d. Pravossoudovitch, K., *Hommes au volant, femmes au volant. L'influence des stéréotypes de sexe sur les comportements de conduite déclarés et effectifs*. Ph.D. thesis in Human Movement Sciences.
- e. Granié, M.-A., & Varet, F., « Passe ton permis d'abord ! » Pistes explicatives psychosociales aux différences de sexe dans la réussite au permis de conduire en France [“Pass your license first!” Psychosocial explanatory tracks to gender differences in passing the driving-license test in France]. *Recherche - Transports - Sécurité*, 2017. 33, 1-15.



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