

QZ: After studying high school students in 3 of your papers, do you think that the gender gap is caused by social conditioning or is there a “girls’ nature”?

NI: “Nature versus nurture. Very interesting, but very hard question to answer, because if you think of an experiment it would not be implementable. There are a few studies that try to get there, not my own. For example, John List from University of Chicago. There are studies that look at gender differences in performances between matriarchical and patriarchal societies. This would be the closest to studying whether [the gender gap] more of a social problem or something biological. The evidence is suggesting that it is more social than [biological]...I think that it must be a lot of socialising issue, and more culture than nature.”

The paper by John List is linked here: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/43554837.pdf>

QZ: Do women’s higher risk aversion hinder them, or can it be beneficial to them in their careers?

NI: “[In the particular setting of “[Brave boys and play-it-safe girls](#)”] yes, women actually tend to leave more [answers] omitted [in a maths competition]. This could be because they are less confident of their abilities, or they are more risk-averse.... In this particular setting [the gender gap] doesn’t help them.”

QZ: Do you think women and girls have internalised their gender roles?

NI: “It is hard to answer but I think we are all social animals. We don’t live in isolation. We live in societies where we know what is proper and what is not. I think that stereotypes are very hard to change, or that they are changed with a lot of education...very slowly. I think we all are affected by these roles that society tells us. However, I think they definitely can be changed, and one important thing is to be aware of these stereotypes. The way to change stereotypes is by changing what we associate with [job positions in our minds]. There are more and more women in STEM fields and in higher responsibility positions, but sometimes they lack visibility, and I think it’s important to put the spotlight on them.”

QZ: A lot of your studies are in Spain. Do you think that gender roles are perceived in different ways in different countries, therefore, do you plan on researching in different countries?

NI: “This is actually very interesting. We usually do things in Spain because I tend to get better access to good data. This is the main reason. For these studies, it is important to have good sources of data, and usually you get good contact when the institutions are around you, so you have better access to them. Keeping the language, I am sure there are big gender differences between countries in South America and Spain. There are some studies comparing gender differences across different countries, and [researchers] do find differences... Every country, depending on their income, the level of education, safety, or how much people believe in institutions, [show specific gender trends due to] all these [factors].”

QZ: Earlier economics started off focusing more on the macro, the theoretical. Your studies - behavioral economics, experimental economics - lean more towards the natural sciences. Do you see that general trend across the whole of economics?

NI: “Experimental economics started to be used in the 60s. Vernon L. Smith, a Nobel Laureate was one of the big promoters for [experimental economics], and he actually got the Nobel prize just for bringing the experimental methods, and using the experimental methods actively in their research in economics. Nowadays, it is an established method. No one is questioning whether it is right or wrong... But lately we are moving from lab experiments, things that we do in front of a computer to more natural environments and manipulations...in natural settings.

Overall, economics [has experienced] a shift to empiricism. [There is] more and more data. Empirical methods are very fashionable, and they make a big impact in economic literature. Without disrespecting all the theoretical contributions, I would say that it is true that empirical economics is becoming more fashionable and making a bigger impact. I think that with experimental methods (randomised controlled trials, a proper control group and a proper treatment groups), you can compare them and identify causal impact. This is a big innovation.”

QZ: So do you think that the knowledge created by empirical methods is more reliable than the knowledge constructed by theoretical modelling?

NI: “One of the issues of experiments is that they should be replicable. Whatever study I do, if I explain the design to somebody, they can use the same [method] and comparable sample, and they should be able to replicate [the experiment]. This is one of the big advantages of science.”