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# Walking in her shoes: Pretending to be a woman role model increases young girls' persistence in science

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## Abstract

Pretend play is a ubiquitous learning tool in early childhood, enabling children to explore possibilities outside of their current reality. Here we demonstrate how pretend play can be leveraged to empower girls in scientific domains. Four- to seven-year-old children ( $N = 240$ ) played a challenging science activity in one of three conditions. Children in the Exposure condition heard about a successful gender-matched scientist; children in the Roleplay condition pretended to be that scientist; children in the Baseline condition did not receive information about the scientist. Girls in the Roleplay condition, but not in the Exposure condition, persisted longer in the science activity than girls in the Baseline condition. Furthermore, pretending to be the scientist equated girls' persistence to that of boys. These findings suggest that pretend play of role models is an effective strategy to motivate young girls in science and may help reduce gender gaps from their roots.