

Agentic Storytelling: What We Tell Children and Who They See Succeed

Authors

Lauren Aris Richardson, Aastha Mittal,
Professor Juliana Schroeder

Affiliations

University of California, Berkeley

Poster 163 Zoom link:

<https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/91481624877>

Abstract: In children's literature, there is a long history of stories having male protagonists more frequently than non-male main characters. This is one example of androcentric bias, the bias that centers the experiences of men over the consideration of other genders. The present study aims to understand how androcentric bias functions at an interpersonal, individual-level during storytelling. Across 2 studies, we ask participants to tell stories and we investigate whether there is a difference between the number of Male Protagonists that participants make in different storytelling conditions (N= 550).

Study 1

Study 1 compares distributions of male protagonists when the agency of a story's protagonist is manipulated by giving participants different story prompts in a survey (n=269). Participants were asked to create a short story with a human protagonist for a 4th-grade audience. They were given one of the three following prompts:

- Control: No specifications about what the protagonist should be doing.
- Agentic: Specification that the protagonist must be **accomplishing** something.
- Supportive: Specification that the protagonist must be **supporting someone** accomplishing something

65%

Total Percent of
Male Protagonists

By Condition and Sex

Male
Participants

87%

Control

75%

Agentic

70%

Supportive

Female
Participants

58%

47%

46%

Percent of Male Protagonists

Study 2

Study 2 compares distributions of male protagonists for participants who create stories for audiences of different ages (n=281).

Participants took a survey and were asked to create a short story for either a general audience or a child audience with an age range 6-8.

General Audience

73%

Male
Participants

Child Audience

89%

Female
Participants

22%

34%

Percent of Male Protagonists

Results/Findings

We did not find a significant difference in male protagonist distributions between child and general audiences or between agentic, supportive, and control conditions.

But, participant sex significantly predicts male protagonists in all conditions of both studies, with males creating male protagonists at a much higher rate than females. Androcentric bias does contribute to storytelling tendencies, but most noticeably depends on the sex of the person telling a story rather than the conditions of the story.

Main References

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