

Study shows stories written by children are more likely to have male characters

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A trio of researchers at the University of Oxford has found that in stories by children of either gender, male characters appear more often than female characters. In their paper published in the journal *Society for*

Research in Child Development, Yaling Hsiao, Nilanjana Banerji and Kate Nation describe their analysis of short stories written by thousands of British children for a BBC story writing competition.

The work began as the researchers wondered whether gender plays a role in how children write stories. They obtained digital copies of the stories written by children for the BBC contest and analyzed them to find trends. To determine if one gender was more or less likely to appear in the children's stories, the researchers scanned more than 100,000 stories using software to count [character](#) names. Notably, they first used cross-referenced names in birth registries for England and Wales to determine which names were used for males and which for females. Names were defined as traditionally male or female if 60% of those listed in the registries were given to a boy or a girl.

They found that both boys and girls tend to write mostly about [male characters](#), but there were some differences. Young boys featured males in their stories approximately 75% of the time and kept close to that average as they aged. Young girls did the same approximately 70% of the time, but things changed as they grew older—[female characters](#) began appearing more often. By the time they reached age 13, the percentage of male to female characters had dropped to 50%.

To find out why male characters appeared in children's stories so much more often than females, the researchers also conducted a search and analysis of characters appearing in books written by adults for children from 1813 to the present. In so doing, they found that only 38% of the characters in them were female—and it was not due to undue influence of older books. Modern books written for children still feature predominantly male characters.

More information: Yaling Hsiao et al, Boys Write About Boys: Androcentrism in Children's Reading Experience and Its Emergence in

Children's Own Writing, *Child Development* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/cdev.13623](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13623)

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