

A gendered view of Soviet schoolchild

Children's world in the Soviet school stories by female and male authors

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Fragile Subjects

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Outline

- 1 Genre and Gender
- 2 Results
 - Female topics
 - Male topics
 - Gender-neutral topics
- 3 Illustration: gendered periphery

Author's Gender and Fiction's Content

Author's personal background influence on literary content

Conventional approach

Gender influences Representation^a

^aNumerous studies

Contrastive approach

Gender influences Topic selection^a

^a*Matthew Jockers* Macroanalysis. 2014

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Genre and Gender

Problem

Space for variation by gender given genre constraints

Genre

Soviet School Novel

Method

- **Corpus study:** use a representative collection of works in a given genre
- Quantitative methods: *distant reading*
- Topic extraction with Probabilistic topic modelling (LDA — Latent Dirichlet Allocation) [Blei, 2003]
- Statistical tests: find topics significantly more common in works by female or male authors

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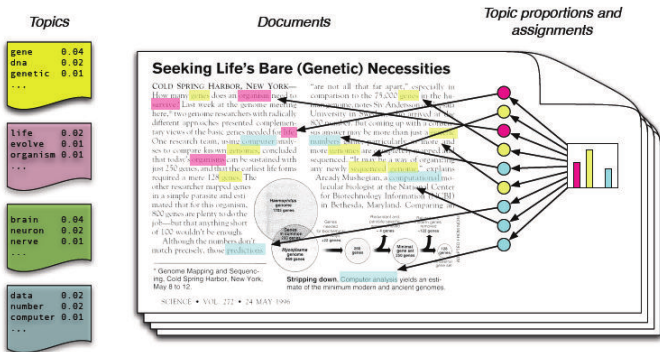
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The Corpus: Soviet School Novels

1940s — 1980s

- 58 works by 41 authors
- 25 male, 16 female authors
- 5946 episodes: text fragments sized 500—1000 words
- *N. Nosov "Vitia Maleev v shkole i doma" (1951)*
- *F. Vigdorova "Moj klass" (1951)*
- *L. Davydychev "Mnogotrudnaja, polnaja nevzgod i opasnostej zhizn' Ivana Semenova" (1961)*
- *G. Polonskij "Dozhivem do ponedelnika" (1966)*
- *G. Scherbakova "Vam i ne snilos" (1979)*
- *V. Zheleznikov "Chuchelo" (1981)*
- *and others...*

LDA



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¹Image by David Blei

Sample Topic: Fishing and swimming

	words	weights
1	water	0.10
2	river	0.06
3	shore	0.05
4	boat	0.03
5	sand	0.02
6	lake	0.02
7	to swim	0.01
8	stream	0.01
9	fish	0.01
10	far	0.01

	words	weights
11	leg	0.01
12	to bath	0.01
13	to swim	0.01
14	place	0.01
15	bridge	0.01
16	like	0.01
17	spring	0.01
18	to lay	0.01
19	rod	0.01
20	to drown	0.01

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Female topic preferences

- Female chores:
 - Working in the farm
 - Fruit garden
 - House cleaning
- Nature and out-of-school activity:
 - Pioneer camp
 - Pioneer hiking
 - Forest
- General topics:
 - Sleeping
 - Crying
 - Writing letters
 - Collecting stamps
 - Doctors

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Male topic preferences I

- Activities:
 - Fighting
 - Money and shopping
 - Playing (football etc.)
 - Drinking and alcohol
 - Smoking
 - Hunting
- Boys' interests:
 - Cowboys and horses (cinema)
 - Sea and sailing
 - Cars and driving
 - Planes and pilots
- Technologies:
 - Telephone

Male topic preferences II

- Photography
- Spaces and places:
 - the city
 - the court
 - the workshop
 - the staircase

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Gender-neutral topics

- Schooling:
 - Classroom and lessons
 - Teachers and headmasters
 - Marks
 - Reading and writing
- Home:
 - Family
 - Meals and eating
 - Home setting: room
 - New Year feast
- General topics:
 - Winter
 - Travelling by train
 - Weather; water; fire

Smoking

Number of episodes: 42 male / 3 female

- Scene of an encounter of a (positive) character with (negative) lads while they're smoking in the street (*Bremener, Tebe posviaschaetsa*)
- Father's smoking during hard conversation with his daughter, while she's remembering how he was trying to quit smoking (*Kiselev, Devochka i pticelet*)
- The character recalls being "on guard" during school breaks while his classmates were smoking in the toilet (*Likhanov*)
- A schoolchild is making excuses to his teacher that he's not smoking (*Simonova, Krug*)

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- Gender affects the likelihood of the choice of more gender appropriate topics matching author's gender.
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