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
Childhood in Literature, Arts and Medicine
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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

Numerous studies

Contrastive approach

Gender influences Topic selection

Matthew Jockers Macroanalysis. 2014
## Author’s Gender and Fiction’s Content

Author’s personal background influence on literary content

### Conventional approach

**Gender influences Representation\(^a\)**

\(^a\)Numerous studies

### Contrastive approach

**Gender influences Topic selection\(^a\)**

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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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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...
Illustration: gendered periphery

Summary

LDA

Seeking Life’s Bare (Genetic) Necessities

Cold Spring Harbor, New York—

Human genome data are beginning to

arrive. Last week at the genome meeting

here, two groups of researchers, with radically

different approaches, presented complementary

topics of the basic gene pool.

One research team, using computer simula-
tions to compute known amino acids, concluded

that, to sustain a population of just 100

organisms, the allele pool required a mere 128

alleles. The other researcher mapped genes

in a single potato, and esti-

mated that for this organism,

800 genes are plenty to do the

job—but that anything short

of 100 wouldn’t be enough.

Although the numbers don’t

match precisely, those predictions

1 Genome Mapping and Sequenc-
ing, Cold Spring Harbor, New York,

May 8 to 12.

ScienCe • Vol. 272 • 24 May 1996

Image by David Blei

Kirill Maslinsky

A gendered view of Soviet schoolchild
## Sample Topic: Fishing and swimming

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<td>to swim</td>
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<td>spring</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stream</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>to lay</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>rod</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>to drown</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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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
1 Genre and Gender

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3 Illustration: gendered periphery
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
Outline

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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
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)
Summary

- Author’s gender is relevant for the content of the Soviet school novel.
- Gender affects the likelihood of the choice of more gender appropriate topics matching author’s gender.
- But author’s gender only affects the genre’s thematic periphery.
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