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Rates of gender representation in children's literature across cultures: A comparison of US vs. Chinese children's books

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Abstract

Male-protagonist overrepresentation exists in US children's books and varies as a function of author-gender and target audience age (Casey et al., 2021). We investigate whether these patterns appear across cultures by coding 437 bestselling children's books from China and comparing them to the US dataset. Mixed-effects and chi-square models revealed cross-cultural male-overrepresentation. Effects of author-gender showed that books written by American male authors and Chinese female authors were associated with greater male-overrepresentation. Effects of target audience age showed that books written for 3-8-year-olds in the US and 3-5-year-olds in China exhibited the most male-overrepresentation, suggesting that children in these age groups may be particularly vulnerable to inequitable gender representation in print media. This is the first study to examine gender representation in Chinese children's books on a large scale and to directly compare rates of gender representation across cultures. Implications for educational practices and literacy development will be discussed.