The Influence of Gender and Ethnicity in Latino and non-Latino Preschoolers’ Learning from Fantasy Characters

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Introduction

- Children are less likely to learn information from fantastical characters. Children are less likely to transfer information from fantastical stories to real life scenarios.
- It is hypothesized children often quarantine information from fantastical stories or characters, because they do not believe information presented in fantasy worlds is relevant to real world problems.
- Young children typically have stronger parasocial relationships with characters they physically resemble (e.g. gender, ethnicity). Parasocial relationships predict learning from characters.

Methods

Participants:
- 20 Children
- Gender: 66.7% Female, 33.3% Male
- Age: 3 to 5 years (M = 3.857, SD = .478)
- Ethnicity (as reported by parents): 19.1% Latino, 4.8% reported multiple ethnicities, 76.2% did not report
- Interview Language: 61.6% English, 38.1% Spanish
- Combined Reported Ethnicity and Interview Language Composite Variable: 42.9% Latino, 57.1% non-Latino

Procedure:
- Participants were read a picture book with Dora the Explorer solving a problem.
- Participants were presented with an analogically similar problem to solve.
- Problem solving responses were coded to represent whether participants produce the analogical solution immediately or after several hints, and whether children produce the full analogical solution or only some portion of the analogical solution.
- Participants were also interviewed about Dora’s reality status and parasocial relationships with Dora.

Results

Analysis.
- Independent Samples t-tests of ethnicity composite variable and gender for Parasocial Relationships.

Results.
- There were significant differences by gender and ethnicity for Parasocial Relationships
  - Female participants (M=2.679, SD=.579) had significantly greater parasocial relationship scores than male (M=2.048, SD=.780), t(19)=-2.099, p=.049, r=.434.
  - Non-Latino participants (M=2.764, SD=.505) had significantly greater parasocial relationship scores than Latino (M=2.074, SD=.760), t(19)=2.503, p=.022, r=.498.

Analysis.
- Correlations of Reality Status and Possibility measures predicting test trial responses.

Results.
- Ratings of Dora’s Physical and Biological Reality Status significantly predicted transfer scores.
  - Ratings of Dora’s Biological Reality Status negatively predicts transfer scores, r=-.507, p=.027
  - Ratings of Dora’s Physical Reality Status negatively predicts transfer scores, r=-.399, p=.091

Summary of Results

- Girls are more likely to have stronger parasocial relationships with Dora than boys.
- Latinos are more likely to have lower parasocial relationships with Dora than non-Latinos.
- Stronger belief that Dora does not have biological properties predicts correct trial responses.
- Stronger belief that Dora does not have physical properties predicts correct trial responses.

Discussion

- Gender is a key factor in parasocial relationships.
- Though results reveal non-Latinos have stronger parasocial relationships with Dora than Latinos, this is likely due to the lack of parental report of ethnicity, and the composite variable not accounting for Latino participants comfortable interviewing in English.
- As children are more sure Dora does not have biological and physical properties, their transfer scores increase. This is inconsistent with the literature.
- Typically, transfer rates are lower from characters rated as less real, because fantastical characters have less useful information.
- These findings are likely a proxy for intelligence, as participants understood 1) how to solve the problems, and 2) Dora is a fantastical character.

References