Lost in a story book world : The effects of self-created vs. pre-created characters on experience-taking

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Abstract

When a person engages in experience-taking with a narrative's protagonist, their attitudes/behaviors tend to become more in line with those of the protagonist (Libby & Kaufman, 2007). However, research has yet to examine if receiving a pre-created character or creating one's own character impacts this relationship. Participants in the self-created group were asked to create a character's backstory and traits while the pre-created group read about a character that had already been created. All participants then read the same short story in which they imagined the previous character as the main protagonist. Finally, participants completed an experience-taking measure (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) and demographics. Results showed no significant difference in experience-taking between the two conditions.

Introduction

- Kaufman and Libby (2012) is one of the first psychological studies to investigate experience-taking.
  - Experience-taking is defined as occurring when, "…readers simulate the events of a narrative as though they were a particular character in the story world, adopting the character's mindset and perspective as the story progresses rather than orienting themselves as an observer or evaluator of the character" (Kaufman & Libby, 2012).
- Prior research indicates that when an individual engages in experiences-taking…
  - They can experience great pleasure through the exploration of possible selves (Green et al., 2004).
  - Their attitudes/behaviors tend to become more in line with those of the protagonist (Libby & Kaufman, 2007).
- Various constructs can impact experience-taking.
  - $\uparrow$ character-self similarity = $\uparrow$ experience-taking (Cohen, 2001; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Kaufman & Libby, 2012; Votch & Marez, 2012)

## Materials & Methods

Participants

- A total of 60 students participated for course credit using the psychological science research pool at LaGrange College.
- 23 participants were male and 37 were female

Methods

- Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions.
  - In the self-created character condition, participants were asked to create their own character backstory along with character traits.
  - In the pre-created character condition, participants were asked to read a pre-created character backstory and pre-assigned character traits.
- Participants read a short narrative where the theme of the story was a murder mystery in which the main character is a telepath who is helping her friends solve a murder.
  - Participants were asked to imagine that the character they created or were assigned was the main character (the telepath) in the narrative.
- Participants completed a short questionnaire which contained the experience-taking measure created by Kaufman & Libby (2012) as well as several demographic questions.
- After the study all participants were debriefed, thanked for their participation, and asked to not discuss their experience with others until all data was collected.

Results

- I conducted a reliability analysis on the experience-taking measure and results showed it was a reliable measure, $\alpha = .883$.
- Results showed no significant difference in experience-taking between the two conditions
  - Pre-created vs Self-created independent sample t-test, $t(58) = -.669, p = .506$.

Average Experience-Taking by Condition
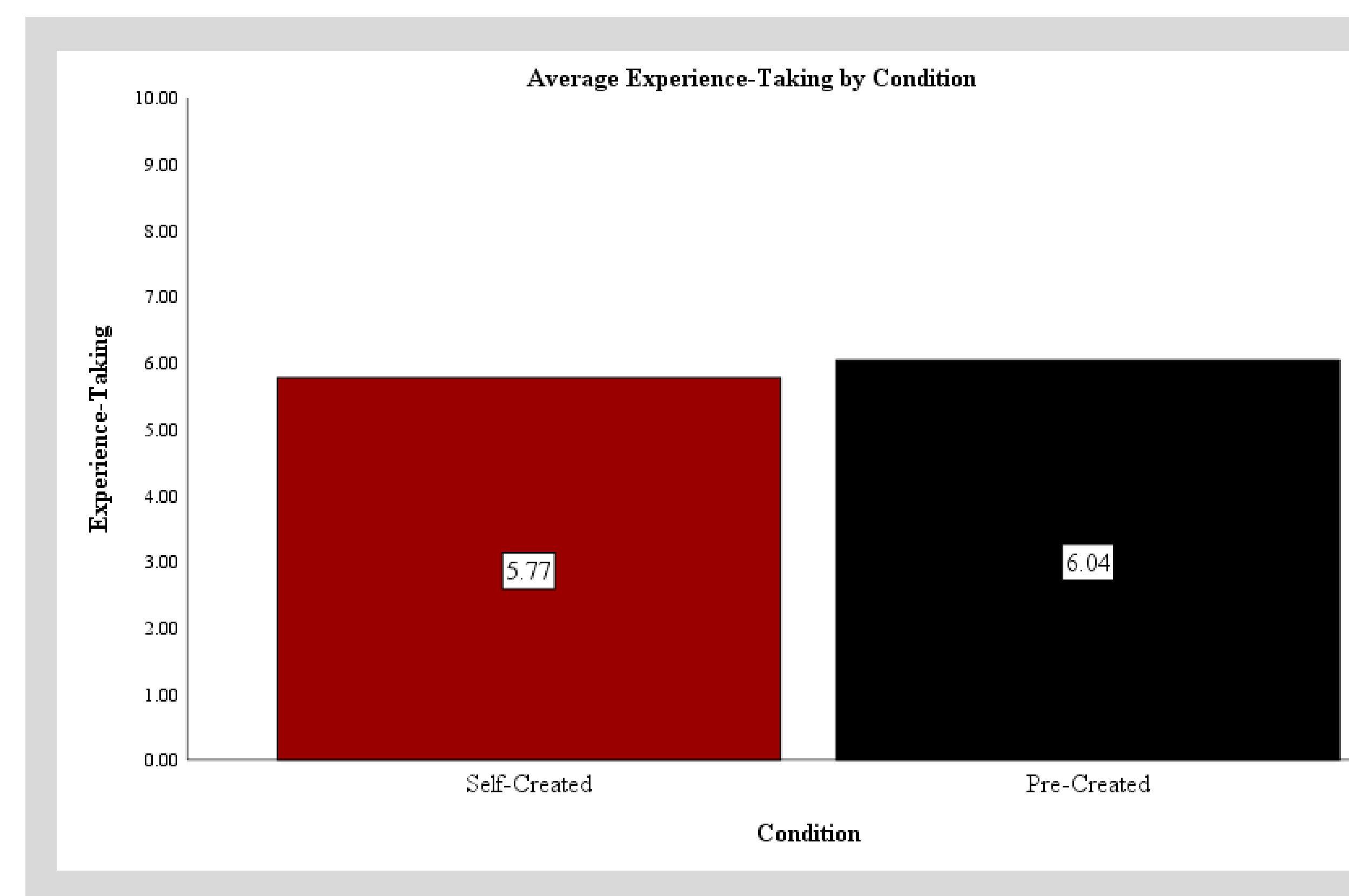
- Exploratory analyses between experience-taking and demographic variables
  - Gender, $t(58) = .131, p = .897$
  - Class rank, $F(3, 56) = .424, p = .737$
  - Ethnicity, $F(4,55) = .439, p = .780$
  - Age, $r(59) = .183, p = .164$

Conclusion

- We found no significant difference in experience-taking between the self-created and pre-created conditions.
  - Thus, results indicate that it does not matter if participants create their own character or if the character is already created, they will still engage in experience-taking.
- Limitations
  - Population size (n = 60)
  - Length of the narrative
    - The narrative may have been too long. It was a total of 10 pages long and this may have led to a lack of interest/boredom/fatigue among participants.
- Future research
  - I would like to analyze different aspects such as depth, detail, and imagination of the participant-created characters' back story and character traits.
  - I hypothesize that there will be a positive correlation between detail, depth, and imagination and experience-taking, such that as detail, depth, and imagination goes up experiencing-taking increases.

References

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