Author as Character and Narrator: Deconstructing Personal Narratives from the r/AmITheAsshole Reddit Community

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Am I the Asshole?
r/AmItheAsshole

- A forum where users can anonymously share their personal experiences
- Events they have been blamed for or believe they should be blamed for
- Readers (the Commenters) vote on who is the asshole and leave comments explaining their reasoning

About Community

A catharsis for the frustrated moral philosopher in all of us, and a place to finally find out if you were wrong in an argument that's been bothering you. Tell us about any non-violent conflict you have experienced; give us both sides of the story, and find out if you're right, or you're the asshole. See our ~~*Best Of*~~ "Most Controversial" at /r/AITAFiltered!

Created Jun 8, 2013

8.1m
Potential Assholes

● 49.4k
Judging you right now

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AITA Example

r/AmItheAsshole • 19 hr. ago

Join ···

AITA for forcing my daughter to gut a fish

I 38 have two daughters 13 and 10. They are wonderful and when I was growing up I had to learn a lot of life skills. My wife and I have been teaching them life skills such as cooking, cleaning, and car maintenance. My oldest is older so she gets much more hands on experience.

This summer we went camping and she had to make the fire and tent. Get the feel for it, we went fishing but didn't catch anything. I went to port and I bought a few whole fish not gutted.

We live on the ocean this is a life skill, it's common to buy fish whole. If she want to eat fish she needs to know how to gut them

Took it home and was going to teach her how to process a whole fish. I think this is important to do and understanding. It's a fish and she was grossed out, but I made her do it and then we cooked it. She went to my wife telling her I forced her to gut a fish.

This resulting in an argument about forcing the kids to do stuff but it's a life skill and we forced them to learn how to cook and do laundry so I don't see the difference. She is mad at me and so is my oldest

⬆ 4.2K ⬇   💬 3.2K   ⬆ Share

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Personal Narratives

Follow characters in a sequence of events

Lived experiences → bias, perspective, opinion, emotion

Separating the author's role

What makes an asshole character?

What makes an asshole narrator?

Operationalizing Author Representations

Author as *Character*
(Content & Information about Author)

- Demographics (age and gender)
- Power (Sap et al. 2017)
- Agency (Sap et al. 2017)
- Emotional story arc (Antoniak et al. 2019)
- Chain of events (Tambwekar et al. 2019)

Author as *Narrator*
(Style & Word Usage)

- Pronoun usage
- Dominant tone (VAD)
- Concreteness (Paetzold and Specia 2016)
- Familiarity (Paetzold and Specia 2016)
- LIWC
- Unigrams

G. Paetzold and L. Specia, "Inferring Psycholinguistic Properties of Words," in *NAACL-HLT,* 2016.
M. Sap, M. C. Prasetio, A. Holtzman, H. Rashkin, and Y. Choi, "Connotation Frames of Power and Agency in Modern Films," in *EMNLP,* 2017.
M. Antoniak, D. Mimno, and K. Levy, "Narrative Paths and Negotiation of Power in Birth Stories," *ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 3, CSCW, 2019.
P. Tambwekar, M. Dhuliawala, L. J. Martin, A. Mehta, B. Harrison, and M. O. Riedl, "Controllable Neural Story Plot Generation via Reward Shaping," in *IJCAI,* 2019.

Data

- Data collected via the Pushshift Reddit API
- June 2013 to June 2021
- Cleaning:
  - Bots and moderators were removed
  - Use submissions with at least 500 words and 20 comments
  - Remove judgements such as "No assholes here", "Everybody Sucks Here", etc.
- Final data set consists 38,060 submissions
  - 29,111 Not The Asshole (NTA; 76.5%)
  - 8,949 Yes The Asshole (YTA; 23.5%)

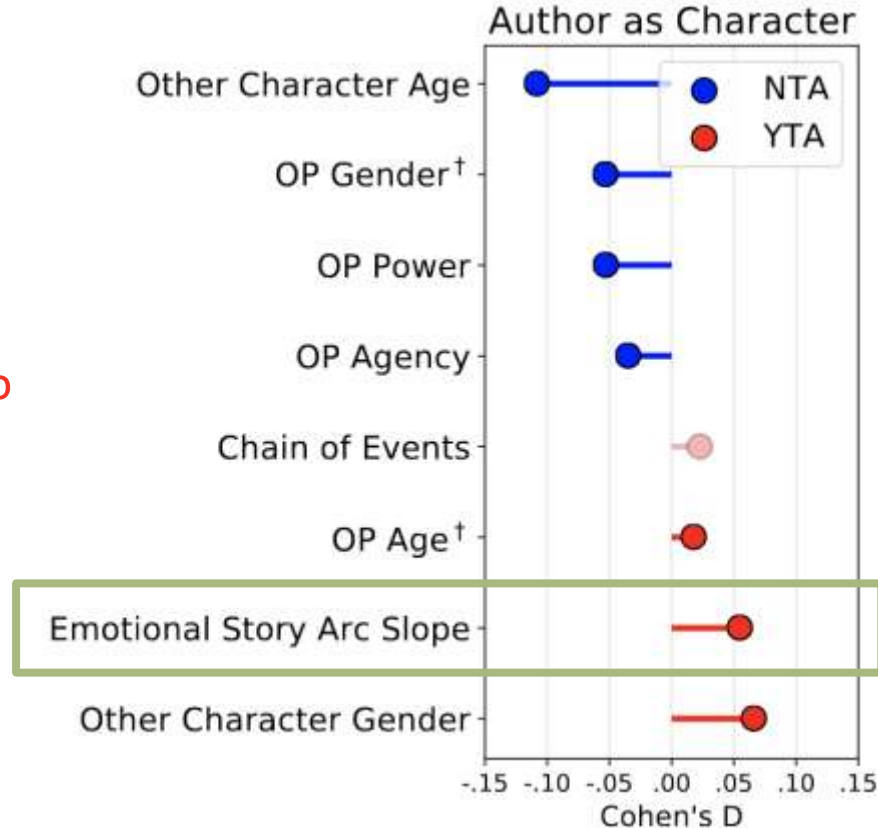Data: https://github.com/sjgiorgi/moral_judgements_in_aita

Methods

- Extract *author-as-character* and *author-as-narrator* features

- Correlate each feature (logistic regression) with binary NTA/YTA labels

- Correct for multiple comparisons (false discovery correction)

- Report Cohen's D, which measures the difference between two group means
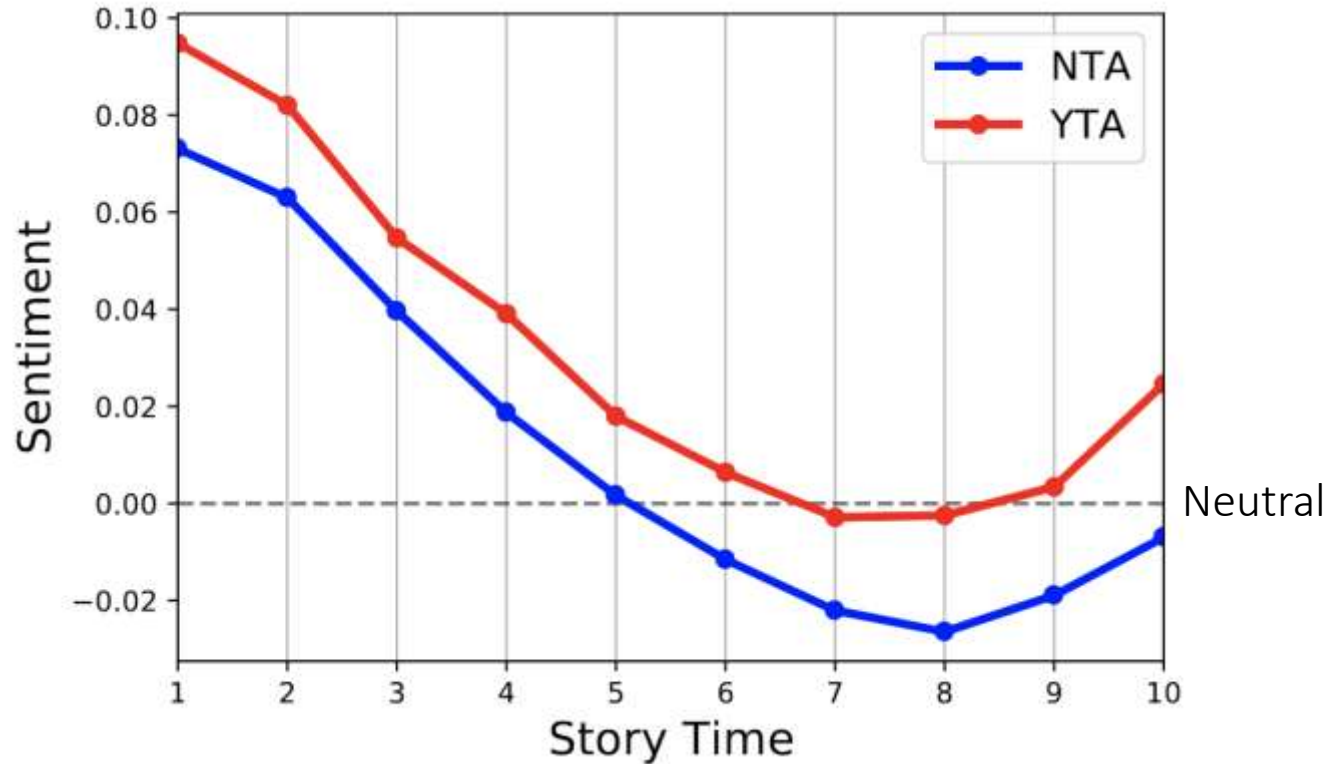
Author as Character

Assholes are
- Older
- Male
- Talk about people who are younger, female
- Lack agency & power (passive)

Author as Character

	NTA
	YTA

Other Character Age
OP Gender[†]
OP Power
OP Agency
Chain of Events
OP Age[†]
Emotional Story Arc Slope
Other Character Gender

-.15 -.10 -.05 .00 .05 .10 .15
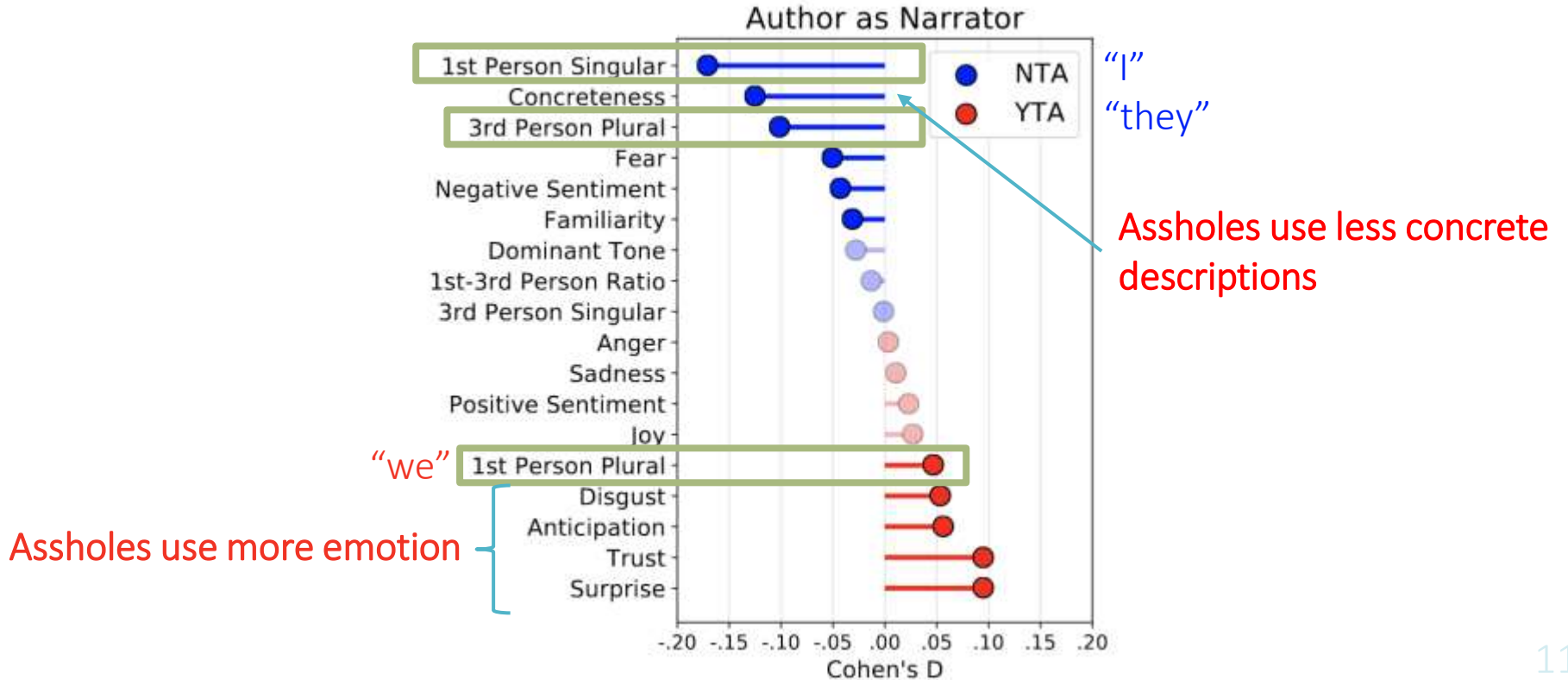Cohen's D

Author as Character: Emotional Arc

Assholes have a more positive emotional arc

Author as Narrator

Author as Narrator: Word Categories

	Category	Most Frequent Words	D
NTA	Family	mom, family, dad, mother, son	-.24
	I	i, my, me, i'm, i've	-.17
	Home	family, home, house, room, bed	-.17
	Pers. pronouns	i, my, she, me, her	-.16
	Male	he, him, his, dad, he's	-.14
YTA	Insight	know, feel, think, thought, decided	.22
	Cognitive Proc.	but, not, if, because, all	.22
	Differentiation	but, not, if, or, really	.19
	Tentative	if, or, some, any, anything	.18
	Impers. pronouns	that, it, this, what, other	.17

Opinions

Comparisons & Explanations

Author as Narrator: Word Choice

NTA-Correlated Unigrams

YTA-Correlated Unigrams

So what makes an asshole? (On average)

What makes an asshole *character*?

- Poster is older and male
- Other characters are younger and more female
- Poster lacks agency and power (events happen to them)

What makes an asshole *narrator*?

- Emotional and opinionated stories
- More abstract language
- Focus on relationships with women (instead of family or stressful events)

Takeaways

- New framework for looking at personal narratives by separating "content" from "style"

  - With plenty of room to grow and add new features!

- There's many ways to be an asshole, but some are more common than others.

Questions?

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Paper

https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/ICWSM/article/view/22141

Data

https://github.com/sjgiorgi/moral_judgements_in_aita

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