

**Male and Female Characters
by Male and Female Authors
In British Novels of the Nineteenth Century**

- **Website questionnaire on 2,000 characters
from 202 Novels**
- **1470 protocols completed**
- **435 unique characters registered**

Joseph Carroll

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Jonathan Gottschall

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Three-Part Research Design for the Project as a Whole

Content of Character:

- Sex
- Age
- Attractiveness
- Personality
- Motives
- Mate Selection Criteria



Responses of Readers:

- Emotional responses
- Do you want the character to succeed?
- Is the character's success a main feature of the story?



Role Assignment:

Is the character:

a protagonist?

an antagonist?

or just a *minor character* (an associate of a protagonist or antagonist)?

12 Motives Reduced to Five Motive Factors

(loadings of .3 or greater)

<i>Original Motives</i>	Dominance	Constructive Effort	Romance	Subsistence	Nurture
Survival				0.80	
Routine work				0.76	
Short-term mating			0.63		-0.56
Long-term mating			0.83		
Wealth	0.70		0.38		
Power	0.89				
Prestige	0.89				
Help non-kin	-0.34	0.56			0.41
Education		0.77			
Make friends		0.62			
Building/Creating		0.73			
Help offspring/kin					0.82

Seven Long-Term Mate-Selection Criteria

Reduced to Three Factors (loadings of .3 or greater)

<i>Original Criteria</i>	Extrinsic Attributes	Intrinsic Qualities	Physical Attractiveness
Power	0.89		
Prestige	0.91		
Wealth	0.88		
Reliability		0.85	
Kindness		0.85	
Intelligence		0.78	
Physical Attractiveness			0.98

10 Emotional Responses Reduced to Three Emotional Response Factors (loadings of .3 or greater).

<i>Original Emotions</i>	Dislike	Sorrow	Interest
Anger	0.86		
Disgust	0.89		
Contempt	0.83		
Fear of character	0.72		
Admiration	-0.73		0.30
Liking	-0.78		0.42
Fear for character		0.77	
Sadness		0.83	
Amusement		-0.67	0.47
Indifference			-0.86

THE PRESENT
RESEARCH QUESTION:

**Do male and female authors depict
male and female characters
differently?**

Answer:

Out of 29 variables, there are only two statistically significant differences between scores for male and female characters by male and female authors when influences of valence and salience are controlled. Male and female authors fundamentally concur on the tendencies that distinguish male and female characters.

Nonetheless,

male and female authors

display distinct patterns of bias according to sex.

First, we'll mention the only statistically significant differences between male and female characters as depicted by male and female authors when valence and salience are controlled as covariates.

2x2 ANCOVA:

Independent Variables: *Author Sex* and *Character Sex*

Covariates: *Valence and Salience*

-----Short-term mate preferences

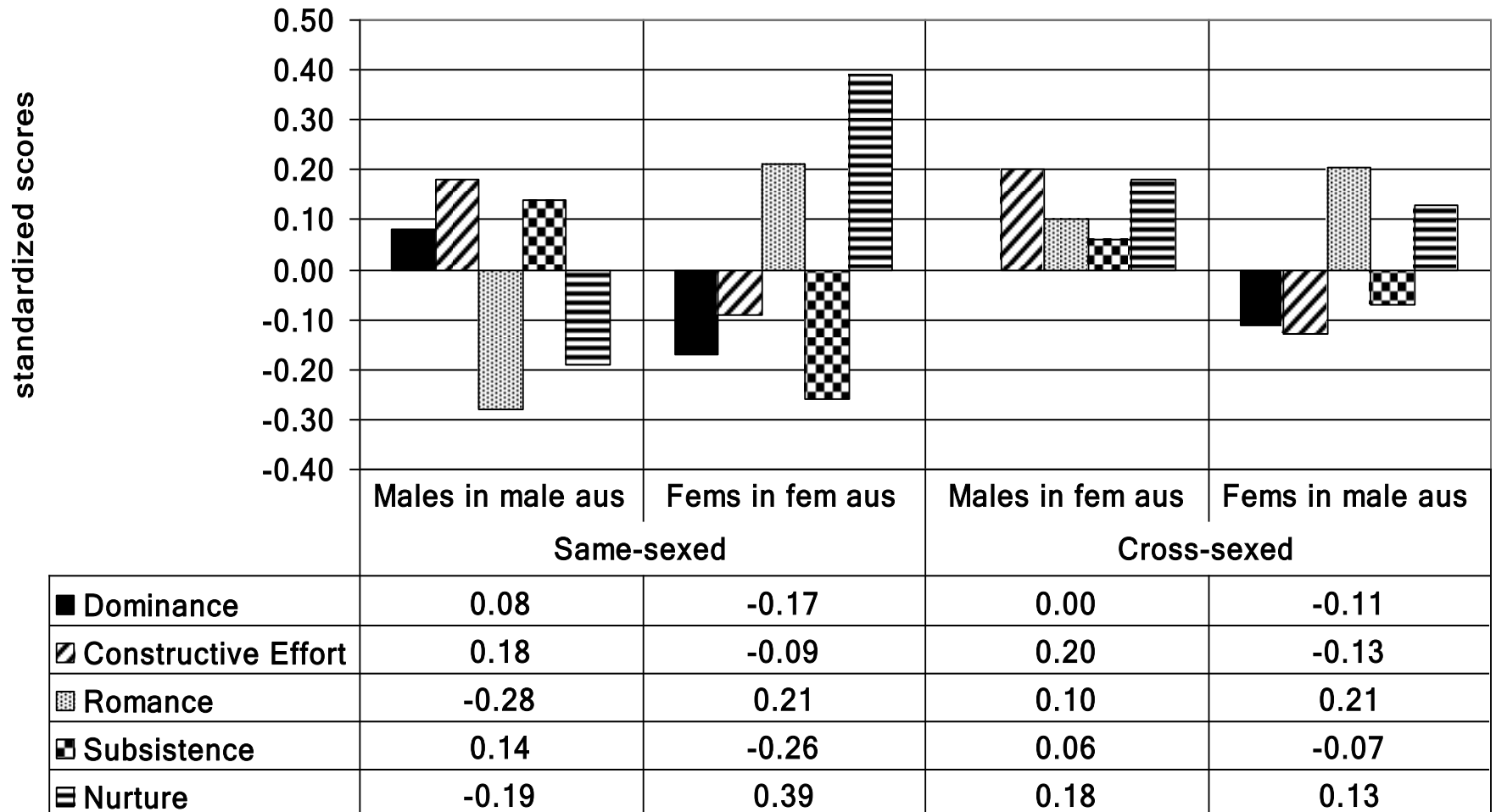
Each author sex attributes more interest in Physical Attractiveness to characters of the author's own sex—and that is especially true for male characters by male authors.

To illuminate tendencies of author-sex bias in the scoring patterns, we'll look at scores for **same-sexed** and **cross-sexed** depictions on *motives* and *long-term mating preferences*.

Same-sexed depictions =
male characters by male authors,
female characters by female authors.

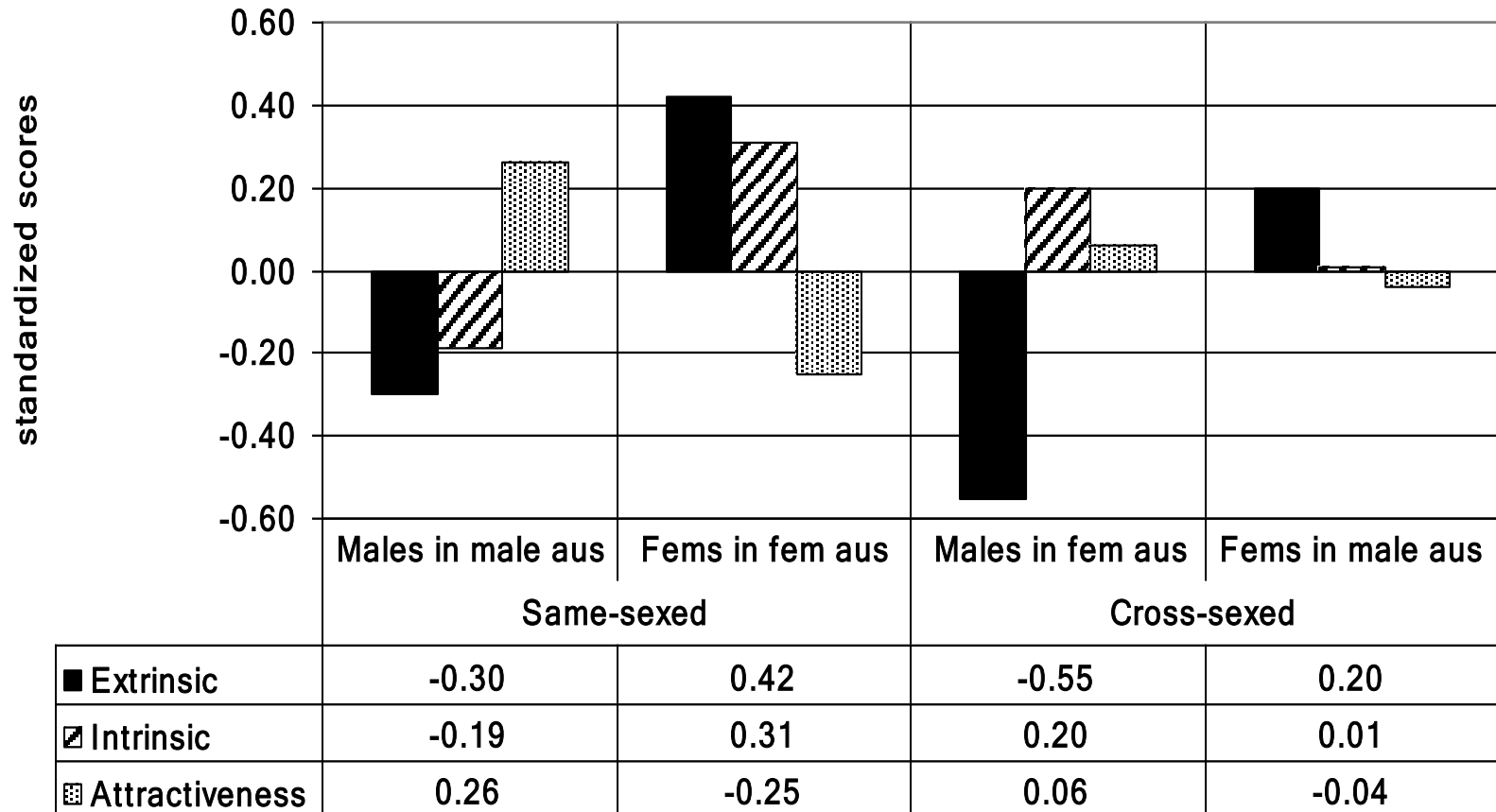
Cross-Sexed depictions =
male characters by female authors,
female characters by male authors.

Scores on Motive Factors in Male and Female Characters by Same-Sexed and Cross-Sexed Authors



Romance and Nurture are higher in male characters by female authors than in male characters by male authors.

Scores on Long-Term Mate Selection Criteria in Male and Female Characters by Same-Sexed and Cross-Sexed Authors



As with motives, sex differences are muted in the cross-sexed depictions.

Question:

Which is more realistic—
Same-sexed or cross-sexed depictions?

In the cross-sexed depictions, males are more nurturing than females, and **ALL** the characters score above average on Nurture and Romance. (As in *Lake Woebegone*, all the children are above average.) That can't be right.

We infer that same sexed depictions—pushing male and female scores further apart—are more realistic than cross-sexed depictions.

If that inference is correct, male authors depict male characters more realistically, and female authors depict female characters more realistically.

Suggestive Cross-Sexed Tendencies

Male Characters by Female Authors

- Higher on Romance
- Higher on Nurture
- Lower on preferring Physical Attractiveness in a mate

---Kinder, gentler, more giving

Female Characters by male Authors

- Lower on Nurture
- Lower on preferring Extrinsic Attributes in a long-term mate
- Lower on preferring Intrinsic Qualities in a long-term mate

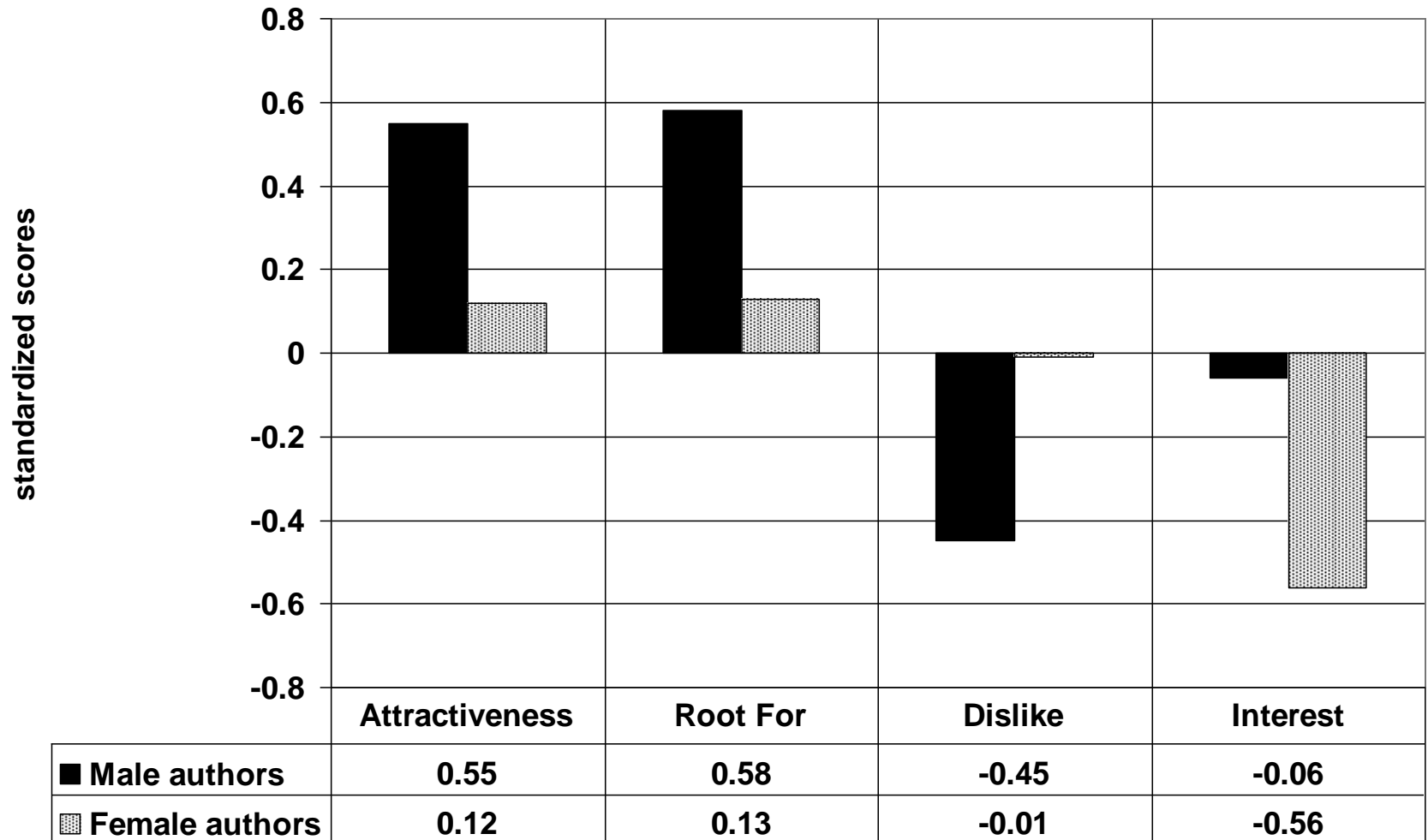
---More time for men, less demanding

**Some Chief Differences
in Male and Female**

Protagonists

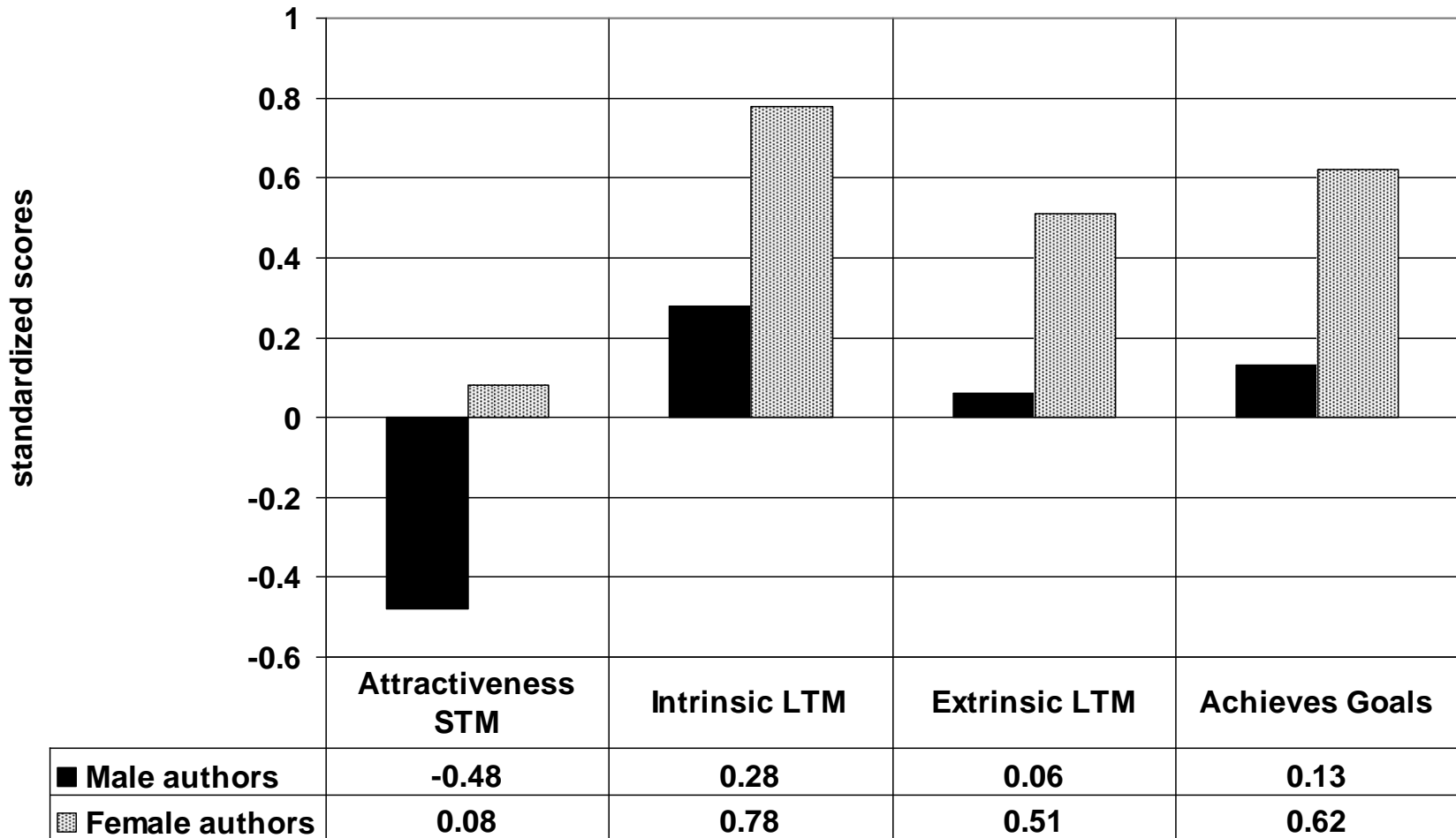
**by Male and Female Authors
(differences of .3 or greater)**

Male Protagonists



Male protagonists by male authors are more appealing than male protagonists by female authors

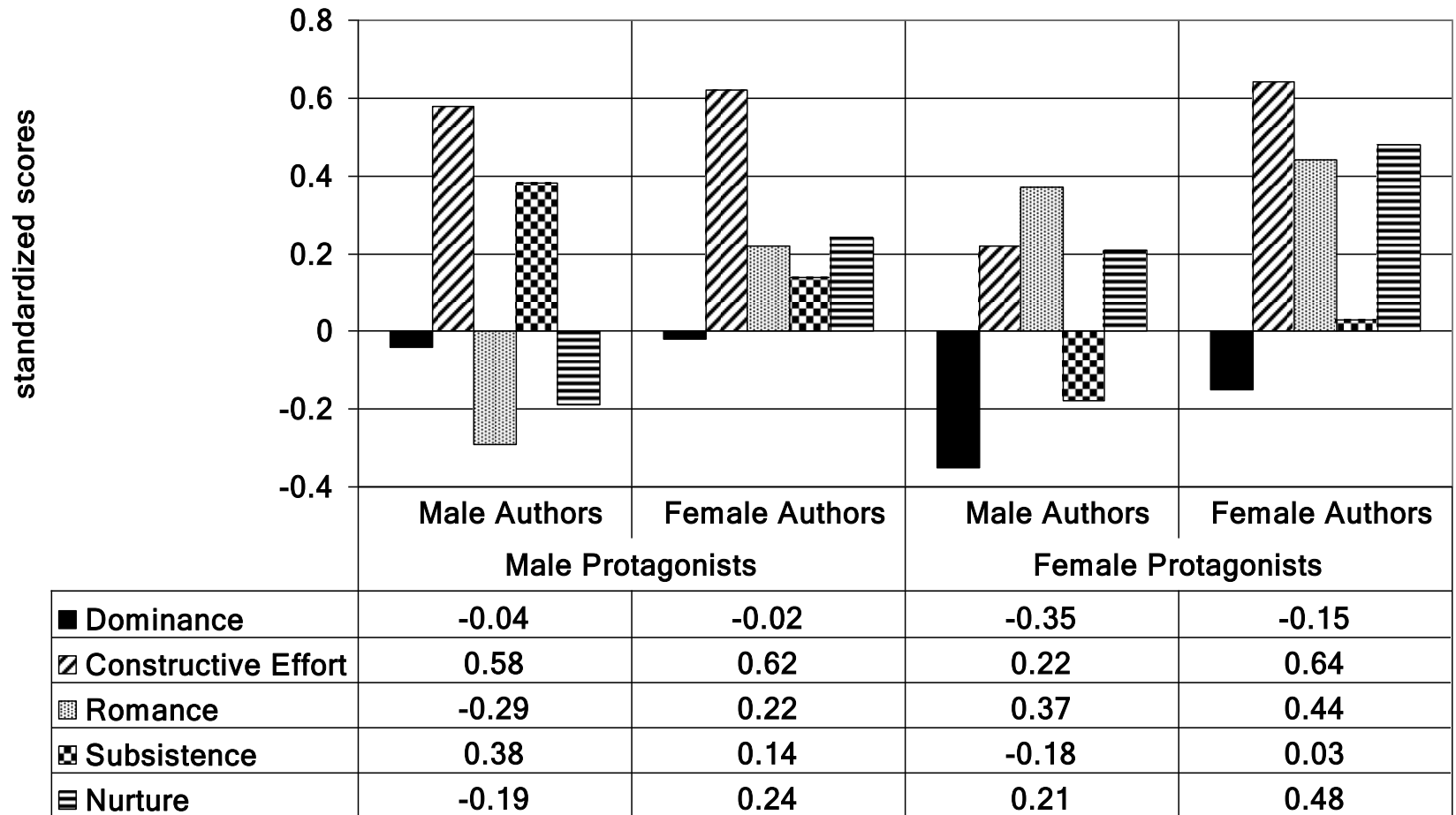
Female Protagonists



Female protagonists by female authors demand more from mates than female protagonists by male authors.

They are also generally more successful in getting what they want.

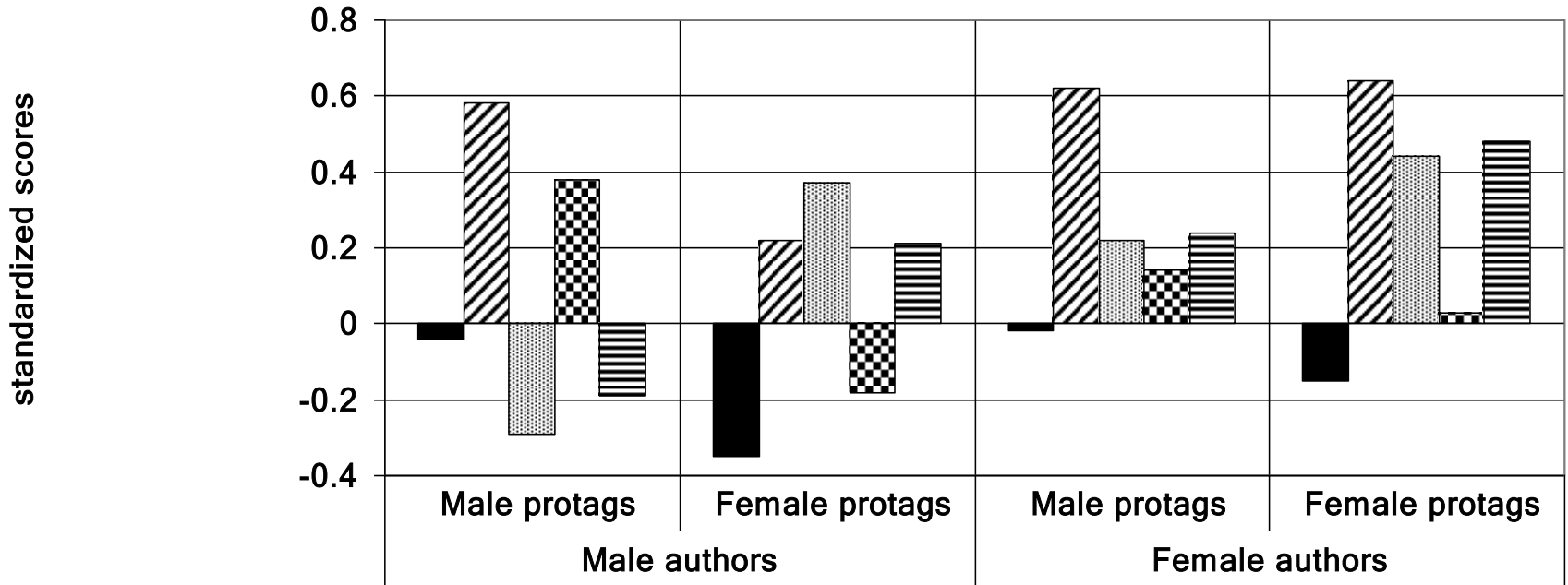
Motive Factors in Male and Female Protagonists by Male and Female Authors



**Male protagonists in female authors score higher on Romance and Nurture.
Female protagonists in female authors score higher
on Constructive Effort *and* Nurture. They are mega heroines.**

The Same Scores Sorted by Author Sex--

Motive Factors in Male and Female Protagonists
by Male and Female Authors



Motive Factor	Male authors		Female authors	
	Male protags	Female protags	Male protags	Female protags
■ Dominance	-0.04	-0.35	-0.02	-0.15
▨ Constructive Effort	0.58	0.22	0.62	0.64
▩ Romance	-0.29	0.37	0.22	0.44
▣ Subsistence	0.38	-0.18	0.14	0.03
▤ Nurture	-0.19	0.21	0.24	0.48

Protagonistic sex roles in male authors are more polarized.

Look especially at Constructive Effort in female authors.

Conclusions

- **Male and female authors agree on almost all the central tendencies distinguishing male and female characters,**
- **but each author sex also tends to minimize sex differences in characters of the other sex.**
- **The bias in each author sex seems to reflect ways in which each sex preferentially envisions both its own sex and the other sex.**

Conclusions--*continued*

- Female authors tend to feminize male characters in ways that bring the males into alignment with female norms of Romance and Nurture.
- Male authors depict female characters who are more exclusively domestic than the female characters depicted by female authors.
- Female protagonists in female authors are the most emphatically protagonistic characters—combining distinctively female norms of Romance and Nurture with the public concerns of Constructive Effort.

Conclusions--concluded

- Valence bulks much larger than Sex in distinguishing characters—being good or bad matters more than being male or female.
- The primacy of Valence suggests that the competing interests of males and females have coalesced into a functional ethos.
- But the differences in scores in male and female authors, especially for protagonists, point toward socio-sexual conflicts stirring uneasily beneath the surface of that functional ethos.

END