

GRADUATE SEMINAR ASSIGNMENT

I started out this class thinking it would be possible—and fun—to construct a class in which we all explored chatGPT together, and together developed a set of acceptable uses for the tool. To that end I gave the following free-form introductory assignment:

1. Read the following [excellent guide](#) by Ethan Mollick, a Penn professor, about what AI can and can't do.
2. Read the new course AI policy.
3. Sign up for a free account with chatGPT.
4. Play around with this however you want (some ideas are below), but using the following guidelines:
 - you must use at least two different versions of the same prompt, to see how prompts affect your results
 - you must ask at least one follow-up question ("tell me why what you did fulfilled the criteria"; "please give me more details," etc)

FYI that the more information you give it, the better results you often get.

5. Then write a brief **paragraph** explaining what you did and what you noticed about the tool. This is free-form. We'll discuss in class.

Ideas

- Ask chatGPT to teach you about a subject as if you were a five-year-old.
- Ask chatGPT for paper topic ideas, then ask it to improve them according to your ideas. (This first prompt could look like: "You are a college student writing a fifteen-page paper about child stars. Your professor has asked you to avoid cause-effect questions. Please come up with six potential topics that are the right size for the paper and which use primary sources that are easily available. For each, please explain how it fits the criteria.")
- Ask chatGPT to help you edit something you've already written. Then ask it to explain its changes in detail.
- Ask chatGPT to write a test on a topic for students of a certain level.
- Ask chatGPT for a research question and sub-questions for your paper topic.
- Ask chatGPT to write you an outline for a paper.

However, this did not go as expected. The class needed more guidance than “play around; here are some ideas”; many had a hard time thinking of things to ask it. I noticed after the fact that their responses fell into three buckets: 1) test chatGPT to find the limits of its knowledge about facts, and then get frustrated; 2) test chatGPT for evidence of bias; 3) use chatGPT like a search engine. None of these produced satisfactory results. In retrospect, I should have given a more thorough explanation/demonstration of the tool in class, I should have given students a small range of tasks they could do in this initial exploratory phase, and I should have required more follow-up questions.

The ensuing class discussion also revealed that some of my students had privacy concerns about chatGPT, and some were wary of the ethics of using an LLM trained (in part) on racist texts. For these reasons I did not require the use of chatGPT in any further assignments, and instead chose to use it in class to model research question brainstorming and offer a low-stakes opportunity to evaluate research questions. Because the AI's responses became less useful the more specificity we requested, I also hope that the group activity of evaluating its answers may have contributed to a critical mindset about its usefulness.

GRADUATE SEMINAR IN-CLASS ACTIVITY: GENERATING A RESEARCH QUESTION

PROMPT: please suggest eight topics for a term paper on child stars. The topics should not involve cause-effect thinking.

CHATGPT RESPONSE:

1. How do gender stereotypes influence the selection and portrayal of child stars in the entertainment industry, and what impact does this have on their careers and long-term mental health outcomes?
2. What are the experiences of male and female child stars in terms of gender stereotypes, and how do these experiences differ across various stages of their careers?
3. How do child stars of non-binary or gender non-conforming identities navigate gender stereotypes in the entertainment industry, and what challenges do they face in terms of industry expectations and audience perceptions?
4. How does the experience of child stardom impact the development and reinforcement of gender stereotypes in society, and what role does the media play in shaping these perceptions?
5. What interventions or strategies can be implemented to mitigate the negative effects of gender stereotypes on child stars and promote a more equitable and supportive environment for their success?
6. How does the intersection of race, gender, and child stardom affect the experiences and trajectories of child stars, and what implications does this have for our understanding of the broader issues of representation and equity in the entertainment industry?

DISCUSSION: we chose to follow up on question 2. The next step, according to the research procedure I've outlined, is to generate smaller sub-questions that can be used to answer the research question.

PROMPT: Please ask some sub-questions that can be used to answer this research question: "What are the experiences of male and female child stars in terms of gender stereotypes, and how do these experiences differ across various stages of their careers?"

1. What are the most common gender stereotypes that male and female child stars encounter in the entertainment industry, and how do these stereotypes differ based on the genre of the project or the child's age and appearance?
2. How do male and female child stars respond to gender stereotypes, and what strategies do they use to cope with negative or limiting portrayals?
3. What are the differences in the types and frequency of media coverage received by male and female child stars, and how do these differences affect their public image and future career opportunities?
4. How do gender stereotypes impact the types of roles that male and female child stars are offered, and how does this affect their career trajectories in the short and long term?
5. What are the long-term effects of gender stereotypes on the personal lives and mental health of male and female child stars, and how do these effects differ between the genders?
6. How do societal attitudes towards gender and child stardom intersect to shape the experiences and opportunities of male and female child stars, and what implications does this have for promoting gender equity and representation in the entertainment industry?

IN-CLASS DISCUSSION: We discussed how each of these sub-questions contributed to the larger question. Then, we evaluated each in terms of our class's definition of a good research question. We determined that each of these questions would be suitable for a 15-page term paper, but that using all of them (as "sub-questions" for the first question) would be too much.

PROMPT: Please first define what makes a good research question. Then, explain whether and how the question "How do societal attitudes towards gender and child stardom intersect to shape the experiences and opportunities of male and female child stars, and what implications does this have for promoting gender equity and representation in the entertainment industry?" fits the criteria for a good research question.

CHATGPT RESPONSE

Definition of a good research question: A good research question is a well-structured inquiry that guides the research process. It should possess the following characteristics:

- **Relevance:** The question should address a significant problem or gap in knowledge within the field of study.
- **Clarity:** The question should be clear and unambiguous, avoiding vague or overly broad language.
- **Feasibility:** The question should be answerable within the available resources, time frame, and research methods.
- **Specificity:** The question should have a focused scope and be specific enough to guide the research process effectively.
- **Originality:** The question should offer a unique perspective or contribute new insights to the existing body of knowledge.
- **Open-endedness:** The question should allow for multiple interpretations and potential for unexpected findings, promoting critical thinking and exploration.

- Testability: The question should be formulated in a way that allows for empirical investigation and the collection of evidence.

Now, let's evaluate the provided question: "How do societal attitudes towards gender and child stardom intersect to shape the experiences and opportunities of male and female child stars, and what implications does this have for promoting gender equity and representation in the entertainment industry?"

- Relevance: The question addresses the intersection of societal attitudes towards gender and child stardom, which is a relevant and significant topic within the field of gender studies, media studies, or sociology.
- Clarity: The question is clearly articulated and unambiguous, with a specific focus on understanding the impact of societal attitudes on the experiences and opportunities of male and female child stars.
- Feasibility: The question is answerable with available research methods such as qualitative interviews, surveys, or content analysis of media representations.
- Specificity: The question has a focused scope on the intersection of gender attitudes and child stardom, providing a clear direction for the research.
- Originality: The question explores a unique perspective by examining the specific influence of societal attitudes on gender equity and representation within the entertainment industry.
- Open-endedness: The question allows for multiple interpretations and potential for unexpected findings as it investigates the complex relationship between gender attitudes, child stardom, and the implications for gender equity.
- Testability: The question can be tested through empirical investigation, gathering evidence from interviews, surveys, or media analysis to understand how societal attitudes shape the experiences and opportunities of child stars.

Based on these criteria, the question "How do societal attitudes towards gender and child stardom intersect to shape the experiences and opportunities of male and female child stars, and what implications does this have for promoting gender equity and representation in the entertainment industry?" aligns well with the characteristics of a good research question. It is relevant, clear, feasible, specific, original, open-ended, and testable.

CLASS DISCUSSION: At this point, we all noticed that chatGPT's responses were becoming more general and redundant, and therefore less useful. This emboldened students to evaluate the questions themselves.