

Identification of gender stereotypes in Compulsory Secondary Education: double analysis of animated feature films

Identificación de estereotipos de género en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria: doble análisis de largometrajes animados

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Abstract

Children's and youth animated films make up an artistic and social reality that shows, even today, sexist topics and stereotypes on a visual, linguistic and musical level. This represents an educational problem, given its relationship with the acceptance of discrimination and violence against women. To investigate the extent to which the adolescent public is capable of identifying gender stereotypical and disruptive feature, qualitative and quantitative methods were used, including the validation of a perception questionnaire, with a construct validity index of .764 and answered by a non-probabilistic sample of 84 adolescents, belonging to three natural groups enrolled in Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education. Among the 90 children's and youth animation cinematographic works that they selected for their task, the 23 that met the criteria (animated feature films released since 2009) and that were worked on by more than one team were subject to a complementary analysis through the application of the instrument

GS_5x4 validated for the analysis of gender stereotypes in audiovisual products. The results show that, among the stereotypes existing in these films, the adolescent audience was only able to identify the stereotypes present in two films, especially physical or fashion issues, followed by audiovisual issues. Likewise, it was difficult for them to identify the breaks in stereotypes in the emotional-sexual sphere. The analytical rigor and the large corpus compared to similar studies provide solidity to the results. According to the above, they are the two remaining dimensions (attitudinal/social) where there is the greatest risk that the forming society will assume gender stereotypes. Previous research relates this to social injustice, hence the importance of working on stereotypes' identification from regulated education, especially in high school classrooms given that its students are at a critical moment of forming their identity and learning about relationships between sexes.

Keywords: animated movies, teenagers, gender stereotypes, equality, educational field.

Resumen

Las películas de animación infantojuvenil conforman una realidad artística y social que muestra, aún en la actualidad, tópicos y estereotipos sexistas a nivel visual, lingüístico y musical. Esto supone un problema educativo, dada su relación con la aceptación de la discriminación y la violencia contra las mujeres. Con el objetivo de indagar hasta qué punto el público adolescente es capaz de identificar rasgos estereotípicos y rupturistas, se utilizaron métodos cualitativos y cuantitativos que incluyeron la validación de un cuestionario de percepción, con índice de validez de constructo .764 y respondido por una muestra no probabilística de 84 adolescentes, pertenecientes a tres grupos naturales escolarizados en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria en España. De entre las 90 obras cinematográficas de animación infantil y juvenil que seleccionaron para sus trabajos, las 23 que cumplían los criterios (largometrajes animados estrenados desde 2009) y que fueron trabajadas por más de un equipo fueron objeto de un análisis complementario mediante la aplicación del instrumento validado GS_5x4 para el análisis de estereotipos de género en productos audiovisuales. Los resultados muestran que, de los estereotipos existentes en dichas películas, el público adolescente solo logró identificar los estereotipos presentes en dos filmes, especialmente cuestiones físicas o de moda, seguidas de audiovisuales. Asimismo, les costó identificar las rupturas de estereotipos en el ámbito afectivo-sexual. El rigor analítico y el amplio corpus en comparación con estudios parecidos aportan solidez a los resultados. Según lo expuesto, son las dos dimensiones restantes (actitudinal/social) donde mayor riesgo existe de que la sociedad en formación asuma estereotipos de género. Dado que hay estudios que relacionan esto con actitudes de injusticia social, resulta crucial

trabajar su identificación desde la educación reglada, especialmente en las aulas de institutos, dado que su estudiantado se encuentra en un momento crítico de formación de su identidad y de aprendizaje de las relaciones entre sexos.

Palabras clave: cine de animación, adolescentes, estereotipos de género, igualdad, ámbito educativo.

Introduction

Children's animated films are part of what educate the members of our society. Since 1923, and for decades, the Disney factory has entertained children and youth with their feature films, and other production companies such as DreamWorks, Warner, and Pixar have joined them. Many generations around the globe have grown up under the influence of films like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, among others. Despite the evident fantasy of these narratives, the central characters that inhabit these imaginary lands are human or humanoid, and as such, their representations bear a considerable resemblance to the expectations and stereotypes of contemporary reality (Monleón, 2021), including gender, by giving the audience a figure they could comfortably identify with (Stover, 2012).

Furthermore, some of the songs that make up their soundtracks and imagination are more familiar to some than to others. The images and representations of men and women on the big screen, both visually and through dialogue, are often a reflection of a socially constructed ideal. This has raised growing concern about the influence that hidden stereotypes can have on the lives and self-esteem of preadolescent girls (Robinson et al., 2020; Neira-Piñeiro et al., 2021). In addition to the imagery that appears in these children's animated films, in which a large number of gender stereotypes can be identified, the dialogue and song lyrics that accompany them must also be must also be considered, as they often reinforce such conventions.

The impact of gender stereotypes on student formation is a social concern, the magnitude of which has been demonstrated by many recent studies, for example regarding motivation and vocation (Martín Carrasquilla et al., 2022; Sánchez-Martín et al., 2023; Santana Vega et al., 2023).

According to many dictionaries, a stereotype is an image or idea commonly accepted by a group or society, with a certain immutable character. Specifically, gender stereotypes in specialized literature are identified with psychological, social, and cultural constructs that associate certain characteristics and attributes with masculinity, and its opposite, femininity, often adding positive and derogatory connotations respectively. Thus, agency or instrumentality is attributed to men—aggressiveness, competitiveness, action, toughness, insensitivity...—, and expressiveness and communality to women—tenderness, empathy, weakness, dependency, passivity, social sensitivity, understanding...—, often as if these qualities had a biological weight and not cultural (Ruiz-Repullo, 2016).

Therefore, stereotypes often persist in cultural and social products such as advertisements, instructions, television programs, depictions of fictional literary or film characters, etc. In a way, stereotypes help represent reality, as they serve the function of structuring and organizing it through different socializing agents. Additionally, they facilitate the identification of a character's figure or way of being. The problem is that, in doing so, they diminish complex traits that would offer us a more objective view of the characters (González-Delgado, 2019). And worse, in the case of gender, they constrain the expectations of men and women under a kind of *straitjacket*, often invisible, and always sexist.

Numerous studies have been carried out in this field, whether in the audiovisual field, in daily conversations, advertisements, or literary works, etc. These studies are included in the field of Sociolinguistics, where it is analyzed how men and women use language differently, and how stereotypes about the different linguistic uses of each gender are formed (Anugerahwati, 2020).

Despite the different gender stereotypes present in a large number of children's animated films, these remain popular among young and teenage populations. In addition, many adults consider, for example, that Disney is an honorable and respectful company towards childhood and one that can be trusted (Golden & Jacoby, 2018); in fact, the company has been established as a cultural icon and defender of the middle-class family, whose productions should be viewed. In the case of this article, the aim is to study to what extent the results of a scientific analysis coincide with the general perception of the public in a formative stage. This implies highlighting which aspects remain hidden and, therefore, susceptible to exerting a covert influence, which is difficult to combat if not made explicit.

Theoretical framework

Social changes and transformations that have taken place in recent decades have modified the existing relationships between different media outlets. In addition to these changes, audiovisual content is prevalent in cultural and artistic consumption, and even in certain social and communicative habits without artistic intention (Lorenzo-Lledó et al., 2020). Among the different social communication industries is cinema, considered as a vehicle for transmitting aesthetic and social content, and therefore, a first-rate educational tool (Bonilla et al., 2012).

Buhler et al. (2010) assert that movies are capable of adapting to fit the social patterns and trends of each era. This explains why the audience is easily able to accept a character that aligns with the trends and attitudes of the moment. As Franklin (2011) adds, movies and other forms of communication can be important for reflecting, establishing, and perpetuating norms and values.

Music has always had the ability to influence human beings through the communication of meaning and through emotional engagement (Beauchamp, 2005). The soundtrack of film productions enhances this potential for connection and expressive communication by stimulating, and even manipulating, its viewers (Kassabian, 2001). This is especially relevant in children's cinema, which has many characteristics of this musical genre, such as the fact that characters sing certain songs, where their attitudes, conceptions and concerns are evident, in addition to the fact that so many lyrics are sung in girls' games and other moments of children's free time.

In Pixar animation studios, the division of labor outside the domestic sphere has been influenced by Western gender divisions (Medialdea, 2016). Working on developing masculinity and femininity equally, Pixar has focused part of its efforts on achieving a gender representation more in line with current considerations (Cuenca-Orellana & López-Heredia, 2020).

Thus, there is growing interest in analyzing animated audiovisual content including a gender perspective, reaching even to the origins of gender. For example, there are studies that analyze, among other objectives, the historical presence in animated productions of figures such as the femme fatale (Aguilar et al., 2021); and, recently, Escalante (2020) analyzed the first appearance of Betty Boop, in a 1930 short film where she is portrayed as a humanized dog.

The fact that cartoons contain a large number of references to real life sometimes makes consumers understand the stories and actions as true (Sánchez-Labela-Martín, 2015). Hence it is important, highlighted by specialists, to identify and raise awareness in society regarding the different stereotyped situations and characters that still appear and perpetuate themselves on the big screen in the 21st century (Jaijo-Llorens, 2019; Mérida-Serrano & Heras-Peinado, 2021). Animated fantasy produces a large number of exotic villains, and conventional heroes and heroines, accompanied by cheerful themes and inspiring melodies that emulate themes and stereotypes in animated films that are part of children's culture. Female rebellion against rigid patriarchal structures is a rich fuel that drives the engine of current female children's narratives, through images, but also through the language of dialogues and songs, essential in the social impact of these and other cultural products (López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Saneleuterio & Soler-Campo, 2022). Some heroines assume identities or attributes traditionally masculine; for example, Mérida, the protagonist of *Brave*, is impulsive and skilled as an archer, to the dismay of her mother (Schiele et al., 2020). This has been analyzed by being crossed with other variables, such as functional diversity, where, interestingly, females would have gained a certain advantage (Del Moral Pérez & López-Bouzas, 2021).

The importance of how artistic and cinematographic works represent relationships between genders is crucial, especially in the construction of the image of the youth. Authors like De la Concha (2010) indeed demonstrate the failure of laws against sexist violence because they do not address this point: although they may be fiction, although they may be art, there can be no other explanation for the persistence of abuse and violence against women than social permissiveness in the naturalization of certain behaviors and stereotypes in so many cultural products. Experts point out the need to socialize in a different way (Ruiz-Repullo, 2016). In fact, some studies that have addressed these issues have shown that identifying and fighting cultural stereotypes contributes to the eradication of sexist ideas and violent behaviors related to race, religion... and specifically gender (Arenas, 2013; Cantera & Blanch, 2010), to the extent that distorted beliefs about women are related to a certain tolerance towards macho violence (Rivas-Rivero et al., 2022). This is a priority social goal that cannot be achieved without the role of all social and cultural agents, including formal education, but also film and television, given the amount of hours that, on

average, people of formative age spend in front of the screen (Díaz et al., 2019), especially in adolescence, a crucial stage in identity development, where the most determinative educational challenges arise.

This reality highlights the need for pedagogical interventions that promote equality through coeducation, including emotional education (Ferrer, 2013), but also the need to understand the perception of adolescent society and to analyze from this perspective cultural products targeted at this audience, especially those of audiovisual basis, given their high consumption rate, as well as the impact they have on consciousness.

Objectives and methodology

This article aims to identify the gender stereotypes that are still present in current children's animated films and may unconsciously influence the audience in a formative stage; this is the General Objective (GO). Specifically—Specific Objectives (SO)—, they will be categorized into five dimensions (SO1) and analyzed how these are perceived by current society; in particular, among teenage audiences (SO2) and distinguishing between stereotypical traits (SO2.1) and groundbreaking traits (SO2.2).

This is a study that incorporates both a qualitative and a quantitative phase. On one hand, a method based on a descriptive research design has been used to analyze a previously filtered sample, where 23 relatively recent children's animated films were chosen (Analysis A); on the other hand, the perception of gender stereotypes by a young, impressionable audience, specifically 84 14-15-year-old participants organized into teams of 5-6 students, was analyzed (Analysis B), recruited through natural groups (academic grouping from 3rd course of Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education [ESO, in Spanish] where the study was conducted; consisting of three classes with 28 students each). The choice of year group takes into account that third year high school students show a greater acceptance of romantic myths than fourth year high school students (Bonilla-Algovia et al., 2021). Regarding the selection of film samples, it was done after triangulating the following data: each group of students had to select ten films in which to analyze their identified stereotypes. The only condition was that they had to be animated and released in the past ten years. For the final selection, animated films chosen by two or more groups were considered, as they were deemed

the most well-known by the subjects who would later participate in the questionnaire.

The analysis of A has been conducted using the analysis template called GS_5x4 (Saneleuterio & Soler-Campo, 2022). This research instrument was selected because it is the only one that offers the reliability and validity required, having passed a three-phase validation process: design (Ph1), validation by expert judges (Ph2), and final revision (Ph3). In summary, in Ph1, the pros and cons of various previous contributions were considered to determine whether to adopt or avoid them. In Ph2, the Tristán-López (2008) model was applied to the provisional design in an interjudge process, after which the instrument was revealed to be very well constructed, with a construct validity index (IVC) of .709. Finally, in Ph3, the clarity of each item was qualitatively reviewed and the wording was finalized. The final analysis table is composed of twenty pairs of items, grouped into five dimensions: bodily, attitudinal, social, affective-sexual, and audiovisual (Saneleuterio & Soler-Campo, 2022). Therefore, the GS_5x4 items were applied to all characters, both main and supporting, in a sample of 23 films whose selection process has been explained above and whose titles are provided in the following section.

To measure perceptions and the ability to identify stereotypes among adolescents (analysis B), a second research instrument ad hoc for this research was designed, called MIEG_3ESO (in Spanish, *Música, Imagen y Estereotipos de Género. Cuestionario 3.º ESO* [Music, Image, and Gender Stereotypes. Questionnaire 3rd ESO]). For its validation, in Ph1, a provisional design was developed based on the simplification of the previous instrument, along with the necessary questions for individual identification and film selection. In Ph2, the evaluation of 35 panelists from universities around the world¹ was collected; unlike methods like Delphi, this one only requires one round, as it does not seek consensus but the identification of items that can be eliminated or improved (Tristán-López, 2008). After applying the Tristán-López (2008)

¹ This is about 8 male doctors and 27 female ones associated with the following research centers, who were selected as specialists in the subject or in the study methodology: University of Calgary, Canada; Catholic University of Chile; in Spain: UNED, University Carlos III at Madrid, Complutense University of Madrid, University of Alcalá, Alicante, Barcelona, Burgos, Córdoba, Granada, Lleida, Málaga, Oviedo, Salamanca, Valladolid, Vigo and Jaume I University; from the United States: Arizona State University, Berklee College of Music, California State University, Bakersfield, Colorado State University, Tulane University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Virginia Tech and Washington State University; from Italy: Istituto Comprensivo Viviani di Napoli and University of Udine; from the United Kingdom: London College of Communication; and from France: University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne.

formulas for interjudge validation, this instrument obtained an IVC of .764 (Ph2), being acceptable from .58, according to the methodological model followed. To achieve this, one item had to be removed, along with another item that didn't make sense without it, in a process (Ph3) that included revising the clarity of the wording, thanks to the contributions of experts, resulting in an eight-question questionnaire (Table I).

TABLE I. MIEG_3ESO instrument [English version]

Music, Image, and Gender Stereotypes Questionnaire 3 rd ESO	
1. Which is your 3rd ESO group?	
2. Which is your student's number?	
3. I am... (male/female)	
4. Check whether or not your group has considered the following movies: <i>[List of 23 movies: those chosen by two or more groups]</i>	Yes, we chose it for analysis. We talked about it, but in the end we didn't choose it. No.
5. What types of gender stereotypes do you identify in each movie? You can see the description of each category in the table above. ² <i>[List of 23 movies]</i>	Physical/fashion Attitude/personality Social relevance Emotional relationships Audiovisual representation Does not contain gender stereotypes I have not seen or do not remember this movie
6. Indicate if you consider that the movies break the gender stereotypes related to each category: You can see the description of each category in the table above: if they present the opposite, it is a breakup (for example: boy dressed in pink, girl who plays soccer...) <i>[List of 23 movies]</i>	Physical/fashion Attitude/personality Social relevance Emotional relationships Audiovisual representation Does not break gender stereotypes I have not seen or do not remember this movie
7. Mark the 10 cartoon movies you would choose now if you did the task again: If they are not on the list you can add them in "Others".	<i>[List of 23 movies]</i>
8. If they are not the same as those chosen by your group, indicate why you changed your mind:	

Source: Compiled by the authors.

²The items worked on in class were reminded. Specifically, the content that is shown later in Table II.

The questionnaire is aimed at students in 3rd ESO who had previously participated in an activity on the identification of gender stereotypes in animated films—dialogues, songs, and images—from the subject of Music. The didactic intervention was divided into two sessions. In the first one, a debate was established among students about what gender stereotypes are and in which areas of their daily life they could identify them. Subsequently, they were asked to, in groups of 5-6 students, select ten children’s animated films that had been released in the last decade, with the aim of identifying visually and textually different gender stereotypes related to the five areas described above. For this reason, during the process they were provided with an adapted version of the GS_5x4 analysis tool (Table II), which was also reminded to them in the MIEG_3ESO questionnaire.

TABLE II. Didactic Adaptation of the model GS_5x4 for 3rd ESO

Stereotypes related to...	Description
1. <i>The physique or fashion</i>	Greater female than male concern to take care of oneself and follow fashion; association of beauty and skills with delicacy for women and with physical strength for men...
2. <i>Attitude and personality</i>	Active, rude, rational and simple tendency for men and passive, discreet, passionate and complex for women
3. <i>Social relevance</i>	Occupation of public space and independence in decisions and economy for men, domestic space and dependence for women
4. <i>Emotional relationships</i>	Tendency to use others and not commit by men; to submission and commitment by women
5. <i>Audiovisual representation</i>	Association of the masculine with sober, cold or bluish environments, thick textures, energetic music; association of the feminine with decorated, warm or pink environments, fine textures, sweet melodies

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Regarding the results obtained through the MIEG_3ESO instrument, due to its appropriateness to the objectives, only the data related to Table II are considered in this article, which correspond to questions 5 and 6 of the questionnaire (see Table I).

As mentioned, the sample obtained with MIEG_3ESO consists of a total of 84 students, all of them in 3rd of ESO of a state-funded

independent school in the city of Barcelona (Spain). The response rate to the questionnaire in relation to participation in the workshop is 100% (all students enrolled in the Music subject). Of the total sample, 42.9% are women and 57.9% are men. It is worth mentioning that ethics in research were always respected: students answered the questionnaire voluntarily; they were informed that there would be no consequence if they chose not to participate; and they were assured maximum confidentiality with the data they provided; in fact, the responses were later anonymized to preserve the identity of each minor.

In summary, if children's animated films, still in the 21st century, display sexist stereotypes visually, linguistically, and musically, this study aims to investigate to what extent teenage audiences are able to identify them. For this, a qualitative approach has been taken using an analysis sheet, where the key features of the films under investigation were included, comparing them with the knowledge and perception of a non-probabilistic sample of 14–15-year-olds, whose results were quantitatively analyzed, allowing for a comparison of the results of analysis A and B regarding the same 23 animated films. Therefore, given that this type of sample, and qualitative research in general, is used to understand a social phenomenon holistically intact, this method allows for an approach to understand current society, triangulating qualitative with quantitative data.

Results

After collecting data with the two instruments mentioned in the previous section, the results of both analyses were crossed and the results for each category were observed, summarized in Table III, where the first columns of each dimension correspond to analysis A (GS_5x4) and the second columns to analysis B (MIEG_3ESO). Regarding the A columns, a total of 16 points per dimension could be obtained (distributed between stereotypes [S] and ruptures [R]). Therefore, to establish a visual comparison, the corrective factor 0.190475 is applied in the B columns of Table III. For a more agile interpretation of the data, Table III highlights the boxes where stereotypes stand out and illuminates the most disruptive ones in green. A difference of three or more points has been considered significant, but nuances can also be seen in all

TABLE III. Global results of the analysis of 23 movies (MIEG_3ESO and GS_5x4)

Dimensions Phases Movies	D1		D2		D3		D4		D5	
	A S/R	B S/R	A S/R	B S/R	A S/R	B S/R	A S/R	B S/R	A S/R	B S/R
Brave (2012)	7/6	2.86/6.48	7/4	2.67/8.95	6/5	4.57/5.33	3/5	3.43/4.38	7/4	2.1/4.38
Cars 2 (2011)	6/2	3.81/0.19	5/2	4.95/1.9	7/2	3.81/2.1	2/0	1.33/1.71	5/3	4.76/1.9
Cars 3 (2017)	6/8	1.9/0.19	3/5	4.38/1.9	6/5	2.29/2.29	1/2	0.76/1.71	2/4	4/1.71
Coco (2017)	3/3	2.1/1.33	6/2	1.71/3.43	3/2	3.05/1.33	0/2	2.1/2.1	4/1	2.1/1.52
Finding Dory (2016)	2/3	0.57/1.14	6/3	2.67/3.05	2/3	1.33/1.14	1/2	1.52/1.52	2/6	1.9/2.29
Frozen (2013)	6/2	8.19/1.52	6/4	5.33/6.67	2/3	3.62/5.14	4/3	4.57/1.71	6/2	6.1/2.48
Frozen 2 (2019)	8/4	5.52/0.95	6/7	3.43/4.95	4/3	2.29/3.43	1/4	2.1/2.67	6/1	4.95/2.67
Gru 3 (2017)	3/2	2.67/1.14	2/4	3.05/2.67	7/2	1.52/1.33	3/1	0.95/1.52	2/4	3.43/0.76
How to Train your Dragon (2010)	6/6	1.52/1.71	5/5	2.29/4.57	6/4	2.29/2.29	4/2	2.67/2.1	6/3	2.29/1.52
How to Train your Dragon 3 (2019)	8/6	1.52/0.95	4/9	1.52/2.86	9/5	1.9/1.14	3/6	1.14/1.52	6/4	2.1/1.33
Inside Out (2015)	3/4	3.62/1.33	4/2	4.38/4.76	5/5	1.14/2.86	4/3	2.29/3.24	3/5	4.19/2.29
Moana (2016)	3/5	2.86/3.24	5/3	3.05/5.9	5/3	3.43/3.05	1/0	2.48/2.67	2/4	3.05/2.29
Monsters University (2013)	4/0	2.67/1.33	3/1	3.62/2.29	5/0	2.1/2.86	2/2	1.9/1.14	7/1	3.43/2.29
Planes (2013)	5/2	1.52/0.57	6/2	1.33/1.9	7/3	1.33/1.52	1/2	0.38/0.76	7/1	3.05/1.14
Ralph Breaks the Internet (2018)	6/5	2.1/1.33	5/9	2.29/2.48	8/6	1.14/1.33	2/6	1.9/0.95	6/1	3.24/1.52
Shrek 4 Forever After (2010)	4/4	3.81/2.48	3/8	2.48/3.81	9/0	1.33/1.52	5/2	1.52/2.1	5/1	1.14/2.29
Sing (2016)	3/2	3.62/1.33	3/4	2.86/1.9	7/2	3.43/0.95	2/0	1.71/0.76	4/2	3.24/0.95
Tangled (2010)	2/3	8.38/0.95	7/3	6.67/4	5/4	5.33/2.29	6/1	5.9/1.33	5/2	7.05/0.95
The Princess and the Frog (2009)	2/3	5.52/0.76	8/6	4.19/1.52	4/3	2.48/2.1	3/4	2.86/0.95	8/5	4/0.57
Toy Story 3 (2010)	1/1	2.86/0.76	6/3	2.29/3.24	4/3	2.48/1.33	3/1	1.33/2.29	2/3	4.38/1.33
Toy Story 4 (2019)	5/3	2.29/1.14	6/6	1.14/3.05	6/5	1.33/2.1	6/3	1.52/1.52	7/1	2.86/1.9
Wreck-it Ralph (2012)	5/6	3.24/1.71	7/8	4/3.62	7/7	1.52/0.95	2/6	2.86/2.48	6/1	3.43/1.9
Zootopia (2016)	9/3	1.9/2.48	4/4	2.1/3.62	9/3	2.48/1.9	6/0	1.9/2.67	6/4	2.67/1.71

Source: Compiled by the authors

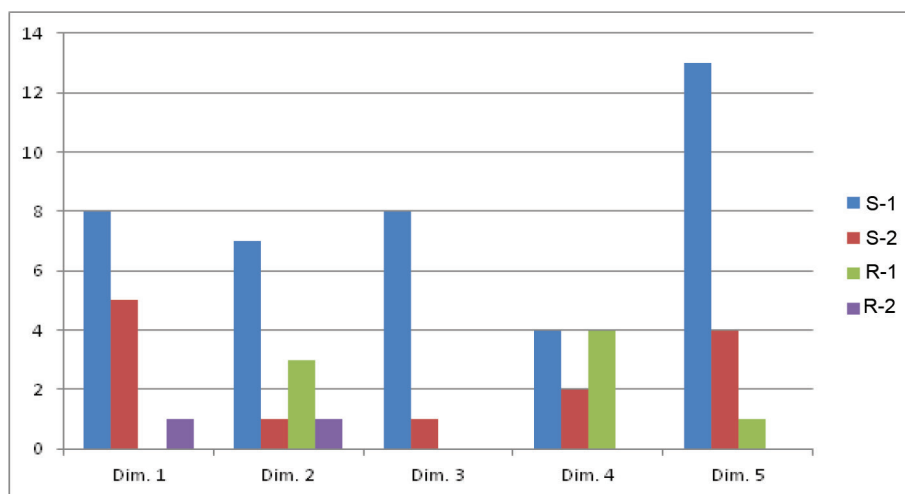
pairs of data. The most relevant aspect is the low proportion of students who identified the issues they were asked about in general. As seen, the results of phase A, obtained with the GS_5x4 instrument, show that the films that contain stereotypes in a larger number of dimensions without being neutralized by reverse characterizations are *Planes* (2013), *Cars 2* (2011), *Tangled* (2010), *Monsters University* (2013), *Shrek 4 Forever After* (2010), *Toy Story 4* (2019) and *Zootopia* (2016). It is noteworthy that the stereotypes of five of them—*Planes*, *Monsters University*, *Shrek 4 Forever After*, *Toy Story 4*, and *Zootopia*—have gone quite unnoticed by teenagers.

On the one hand, the most groundbreaking films according to GS_5x4 (first columns, corresponding to phase A) are two of the most recent among those analyzed, *How to Train Your Dragon 3* (2019) and *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018). On the contrary, according to MIEG_3ESO (phase B), the film that stands out for contradicting stereotypes would be *Brave* (2013). In this regard, while it cannot be denied that the protagonist, Merida, contravenes in many aspects the established order and what is expected of her according to her gender, it should be considered that many secondary characters parade through the plot who are stereotypical (see the results of Table III, where in four out of five dimensions the detected stereotypes exceed the breakthroughs) something that the participating students do not seem to be aware of.

Regarding the dimensions where their ability to identify gender stereotypes is evident, they only handle it with some fluency in relation to physical appearance and fashion (D1). On the other hand, it is striking that they have hardly alluded to D2 and D3 (attitude/personality and social relevance), a comparison that is clearly seen in Graph I.

According to S-1 (stereotype analysis in phase A, obtained through GS_5x4), the dimension that most frequently captures traditional traits, or in which these significantly surpass ruptures, is the fifth (audiovisual): in the sample of perception of teenage audience, collected with the questionnaire MIEG_3ESO (stereotype analysis in phase B, S-2 in Graph I), although they perceive a lot of stereotypes regarding this category, they do not reach a third. Finally, regarding breaks, although the majority are concentrated in relation to affective relationships (D4) according to analysis A (R-1), participants in MIEG_3ESO do not seem to be aware of it (R-2).

GRAPH I. Number of items with a difference >3 between the analysis of phase A (stereotypes [S-1] and ruptures [R-1], according to GS_5x4) and the analysis of phase B (stereotypes [S-2] and ruptures [R-2], according to MIEG_3ESO).



Source: Compiled by the authors.

Discussion

Compared to previous studies on gender stereotypes in audiovisual narratives, there are quite a few who are addressing the issue, as shown by some monographs elaborated and published in recent years (Saneleuterio & López-García-Torres, 2019; Vera Balanza et al., 2021). Among those specifically focused on children's animation, we can mention the study by Mérida-Serrano & Heras-Peinado (2021), whose results reveal the perpetuation of sexist behaviors, although their sample is relatively small: only eleven films, of which only four were released in the last decade. However, it is curious that two new stereotypes have been identified in this study as ruptures—gender rebellion and exceptionalism display—a fact that may just show that stereotypical traits are changing, reflecting the evolution of times.

Male and female protagonists have also been analyzed based on specific parameters, whether it be the level of dependence (López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2021) or the “Cinderella Complex” (Xu et al., 2019), or the diversity of abilities; in the latter case, a recent study conducted by Del Moral Pérez & López-Bouzas (2021) showed that boys are more determined by their physical and intellectual limitations, while girls with disabilities are more likely to overcome their limitations and conflicts, something that would show a certain break from stereotypes.

However, the object of study of these investigations are the cultural products themselves; that is, they are limited to observing and categorizing them, but they do not investigate their impact on society. Nevertheless, it is possible to compare some published results with ours regarding the categorization of gender stereotypes. Sánchez-Labela-Martín et al. (2022) recently presented, applied to animation but focused on advertising spots, a very comprehensive analysis table, with 25 indicators divided into three blocks, although it was not validated by scientific means nor specifically aimed at analyzing stereotypes.

Regarding animated feature films, Porto (2010) selects eight gender stereotypes and establishes that communication and stereotypical representation respond to traditional assignment. Their content analysis demonstrates that, up to the decade prior to the present study—their analysis covers 1998-2008 and the present 2009-2019—, the stereotyped traits that construct the conventional gender typology continued to be reproduced, where masculinity is linked to violence, dominance, risk, skill, intelligence, while femininity is more associated with weakness, recklessness, kindness, passivity, and aesthetic values (Porto, 2010).

A more recent study is that by Cuenca-Orellana & López-Heredia (2020), focused on Pixar releases between 1998 and 2015. Their results indicate that, although ruptures of stereotypes are detected, 81.25% of female characters hold positions with little decision-making power, or in areas that have always been traditionally associated with women. However, Neira-Piñeiro et al. (2021), regarding ten films from various production companies released between 2010 and 2019, conclude the opposite: there is thus a growing concern for female leadership.

Animated films mostly addressed by studies of this kind are those from Disney. Míguez (2015) analyses a sample, but only addresses female roles—and identifies a decrease in stereotypes, it must be said. In this

sense, the academic tendency to mainly focus on heroines has become widespread, and the verdicts circulate in both directions: a few years earlier, Henry A. Giroux, a great specialist in the stereotypical analysis of Disney, stated about their female characters that they subordinate to the male ones and define their power and desires almost exclusively in terms of the dominant male narrative (Giroux, 2010).

What has barely been investigated so far is the perception and evaluation of adolescents regarding these items, that is to what extent they are able to identify stereotypical thought patterns in audiovisual products commonly consumed at these ages. One of the few studies that has addressed this, specifically the influence of Disney Princesses, is that of Robinson et al. (2020), who found four types of interests among teenagers, which explain the sense of attraction that these characters exert on them. Although it is not directly comparable to the results of the present article—types have not been addressed here, but stereotypes have—it is noteworthy that while some identify with virtuous or beautiful/rich figures, others advocate for dreamlike or warrior traits. Perhaps this is the explanation for why many stereotypes have not been identified, according to the results of MIEG_3ESO.

Conclusions

The heterogeneous representations of gender in the films selected in this study allow children and teenagers to be influenced by a great diversity of characters, although this manifests as an unconscious process. Especially in the case of women, perhaps female representations can help preadolescent and adolescent consumers to challenge the dominant social order and to exercise their own identity; by breaking the gender boundaries, these female characters transcend both the expectations and limitations imposed by patriarchy. However, according to the analysis, and given that a large number of stereotypes are still being maintained, the opposite can also happen, since not enough critical capacity has been detected in these age groups.

It has been seen that the literature published on the subject is limited to highlighting, often with validated instruments, the stereotypes present in different cultural products and often focuses on known aspects. On the contrary, this study compares the stereotypical and disruptive traits

obtained through a scientific analysis with those perceived by teenage audiences, an approach that is crucial and innovative, since the presence of these traits is paramount especially when they are not detected. At the same time, the educational implications derived from this show that it is necessary to educate perception and interpretation: we cannot combat or change what is assumed to be normal. Only if teenage students are able to detect sexist attitudes and microaggressions can we expect them to react to combat them and build a fairer society.

Indeed, as Mérida-Serrano & Heras-Peinado (2021) state, films with a high stereotypical content are not “educational resources that promote that gender equality values that characterize any coeducational experience at the school unless both teachers and children undertake a critical analysis with a gender perspective during the film screening in the classroom” (p. 183), something that has been precisely considered in the design of this dual research, whose conclusions are presented below.

Thus, in response to the GO (General Objective) that was raised in the formulation of purposes, the gender stereotypes of 23 children’s animated films released between 2009 and 2019 have been identified, both in the dialogues and lyrics of the songs as well as in the images, music, and sound interventions shown to the viewer, and therefore reinforce them visually and auditorily. According to the data obtained in analysis A, the films with the most variety of gender stereotypes are *Planes*, *Cars 2*, *Tangled*, *Monsters University*, *Shrek Forever After*, *Toy Story 4*, and *Zootopia*. Among them, only *Cars 2* and *Tangled* were considered stereotypical by the teenage audience, to which *Frozen* must be added, a film to which more sexism is attributed than it actually has. Jaijo-Llorens (2019) also affirms, focusing on Disney, the great influence that animated films have on children and adolescents. The content, accompanied by successful music and presented through fun animations, reaches a large number of viewers, exposed to values and stereotypes that will perpetuate more inadvertently than it seems.

Regarding the Specific Objectives, gender identifications have been classified into five dimensions (SO1): physical (issues related to physical appearance or fashion), attitudinal (aspects related to attitude or personality), social (traits related to the social relevance of characters), affective-sexual (especially the representation of affective relationships), and audiovisual (that is, visual and auditory representation).

Additionally, it has been analyzed how these identifications are perceived by current society during their formative stage; specifically, among teenage audiences (SO2). Thus, starting from the analysis of a sample of 84 students in 3rd ESO (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*, Compulsory Secondary Education in Spain), it has been shown that the stereotypical traits that are most identified are those related to physical appearance/fashion, while they go unnoticed if stereotypes refer to attitude/personality or social relevance (SO2.1). Lastly, the most difficult disruptive traits for them to identify are those related to affective relationships (SO2.2), which could be related to a certain naturalization effect, that is, progress towards the establishment of new, more egalitarian models.

The limitations of this research recommend its replication with larger sample sizes and more recent films. The prospective can also be expanded by addressing the educational implications of the study, as including the perception and analysis of traditional and boundary-breaking gender traits in audiovisual media is crucial for the development of educational programs that promote gender equality. Based on the above, it can be concluded that working on the identification of gender stereotypes is essential in formal education, especially in high school classrooms, as students are at a critical moment in forming their identity and learning about gender relations.

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