Female Leadership Represented in Animation for Children and the Sociocognitive Learning of 21st-Century Girls

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Animation cinema is an entertainment platform with great potential to foster sociocognitive learning in the child audience. The stories told, the main characters, stereotypes represented, and formulas to solve conflicts provide reference social models for children. Due to the progressive evolution experienced by female characters since the last century, they have not only acquired more prominence, but also have presented examples of women empowerment. This case study qualitative research provides a content analysis about the female characters of 10 successful animation films from the last decade. Women leadership models are analyzed considering three dimensions— personal and psychological, sociological, and communicative—and using the instrument Cartoons-L, inspired by the theories on social leadership and film narrative. The prevalence of charismatic, participatory, and emotional leadership is ultimately confirmed, incarnated in professional, independent, assertive, determined, and courageous women who offer positive behavior models for girls.

Keywords: animation cinema, female leadership, social learning, stereotypes, childhood

Both social learning theory (Bandura, 2009) and cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998) explain how mass media influence audiences, warning about the risk for minors to uncritically assimilate certain messages (Barth & Ciobanu, 2017). In this regard, Rodríguez, Pando, and Berasategi (2016) highlight the hegemony of mass media in people's life and additionally stress as an educational priority acquisition of critical knowledge of the systems operating in the production and consumption of information, entertainment, and advertising. It can often be attested in this regard that animation films use attractive characters associated with beauty, kindness, or success as a psychological strategy to draw the attention of captive young audiences. Such films also appeal to these youngsters' emotions and feelings, affectively involving them in plots that recognize the merits of some characters by granting them rewards for their behavior and condemning others with various punishments. The emotional impact of cartoons is bound to

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influence the perception of minors and to determine their social learning too (Del Moral, 1995; Ghilzai, Alam, Ahmad, Shaukat, & Noor, 2017; Peruta & Powers, 2017).

Within this context, researchers agree that animation movies targeting children constitute an entertainment platform with great potential to boost sociocognitive learning among younger audiences (Del Moral, Villalustre, & Neira Piñeiro, 2010; Hentges & Case, 2013; Porto, 2014; Rajadell, Pujol, & Violant, 2005; Vicens, 2019). Nevertheless, some cartoons have received strong criticism for transmitting stereotypes and messages that might influence minors' thoughts and behaviors (Ameer & Naz, 2016; Maity, 2014; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2004). Obviously, the stories told, starring characters, stereotypes portrayed, and formulas applied to solve the conflicts posed sometimes offer children questionable reference social models.

More specifically, although the role of female characters in animated cartoons has been criticized for decades (Baker & Raney, 2007; Del Moral, 2000a; Gökçearslan, 2010), recent attacks have increasingly stressed the need for women to play more active roles far from reductionist stereotypes (Kalayci, 2015; Pila, Dobrow, Gidney, & Burton, 2018; Steyer, 2014). Special emphasis falls on providing child audiences with models better suited to empower women. Our research consequently examines the different types of leadership embodied in the female characters of the most successful children's films in the past decade. Our aim was to verify whether such films can foster unconscious repertoires that caricature or typecast women (Kalayci, 2015; Steyer, 2014), or whether they offer unconventional models that feature bright women with no complexes and endowed with a great leadership capacity (Hains, 2007).

From an educational standpoint, minors need to be given audiovisual stories that contain positive models able to favor respect for women as well as their recognition. Attention has especially been paid to the role played by female main characters as models worth imitating. We thus initially focus on what leadership means, on its types and the traits defining those types. A description of the diachronic evolution experienced by the representation of female leadership in children's movies will subsequently serve to determine the kind of representation that prevails in a selection of recent films.

Leadership and Its Types

Leadership capacity is associated with abilities and skills such as charisma, influence, and authority, among others. Lorenzo (2005) relates leadership to the ability to dynamize and promote the growth of a group or organization through its involvement in a shared mission or project. Lorenzo, Sola, and Cáceres (2007) in turn describe it as a kind of knowledge, capacity, ability, or skill acquired to reach a good performance level. However, most authors agree on highlighting the importance of owning certain personal talents linked to charisma and refer to a process of early learning focused on the assumption of female leadership.

Regarding social psychology, the theories that establish leadership types have traditionally been polarized. Thus, the personalist approaches to leadership revolve around the qualities of individuals, according to which they are classified as authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Instead, environmentalist or contingency theories and the model developed by Fiedler (1967) claim that leadership depends on contextual conditions. Leithwood (1994) and Noer (1997) subsequently propose a

mixed theory that regards leadership as a phenomenon linked both to an individual and the framework of a project shared with others. Riveros (2012) in turn refers to a distributed leadership centered on achieving shared goals that largely depend on the collective participation of subjects in decision making, as well as on the existence of leadership at various hierarchical levels.

The theory of contingency or effectiveness (Fiedler, 1967) stresses that accomplishments stem not only from the leader's capacity, but also from situational control, which implies trust in the leader, alongside structured, supervised, and rewarded tasks. Transactional theory (Hollander & Julian, 1974) underlines the interdependence between leaders and their subordinates who carry out tasks in return for rewards. This transactional leader or executive who acts as a result assessor and supervisor of compliance with the tasks assigned to subordinates seeks to accomplish short-term achievements, curbing any initiatives based on innovation and creativity. By contrast, according to social identity theory (Haslam, 2004), the key to leadership does not lie in the personality of leaders or in their duties, but rather in the attributions assigned to them by their followers to help the group develop. Lastly, transformational theory (Bass, 1981; Burns, 1978) envisages a kind of leadership that mainly seeks to motivate the group for a specific task. By meeting common goals, all members can achieve personal enrichment and acquire important competences.

Based on postulates close to transformational theory, Gardner (1995) argues that leadership closely relates to the message transmitted by the leaders and the profile of those who are willing to follow them, insisting on the social dimension of leaders from the change that they propose and the influence that they exert on others. This social kind of leadership becomes consolidated through a mutual interaction of subjects and is largely influenced by the setting where social action originates. From this perspective, leaders act as catalysts of social change.

This evolution in the aforementioned theories has often become visible in how leadership is understood by different institutions or organizations, mostly led by men until relatively recently. The adoption of a specific leadership style (Weber, 1978) has depended on both the historical moment and the specific context. Thus, an excessively managerial *authoritarian* leadership that makes the leader's authority prevail over the other organization members is the most common in certain contexts. Instead, others assign more relevance to a *charismatic* leader capable of building extraordinary social ties, of promoting unconditional adherence to her or him, even though this is not always possible, insofar as leaders need to be endowed with special talents to captivate their potential followers. In smaller environments, the preferred option is *affective* leadership supported by empathetic relationships and friendly atmospheres. When it comes to politics, organizations tend to choose *inspiring* leaders able to offer suggestive and attractive messages. Finally, democratic organizations usually advocate *participatory* leadership aimed at fostering collective initiatives that bring together the community's efforts.

In addition to being less hierarchical and more closely interconnected, present-day organizations have women in their management positions who are transforming power structures by adopting leaderships based on collaboration, empathy, sensibility, and consensus. For Rama (2015), female leadership prioritizes the personal side. Women's higher levels of sociability, expressiveness, and closeness usually generate work climates that can make it easier to attain commitments linked either to the organization's objectives or to specific projects. Female leadership promotes cooperative work by including and involving people in well-

organized, healthy processes. It moves in many directions and covers different areas simultaneously, which allow female leaders to make more effective decisions and cope with crises. Being inclusive, women's leadership not only encourages horizontal participation but also shares power and information with those guided by it, thus building and strengthening group identities. Female leaders additionally pay attention to emotional aspects through the generation of high empathy levels and are better predisposed to change because of their innovative style and their sense of quality, along with their person-centered, flexible, communicative, and persuasive approach.

Similarly, Sánchez (2009) points out that female leadership provides more democratic, participatory alternatives and proposals that outplay the traditional male schemes associated with managerialism, ambition, and search for power. The research works undertaken by Andruskiw and Howes (1980), Cubillo and Brown (2003), and Lorenzo et al. (2007) likewise conclude that women holding positions of power have the potential to develop more creative and alternative responses to problems because they analyze those problems from multiple perspectives and with foresight. As additionally highlighted by Oplatka (2006), the singularity of female leadership stems from a combination of female and male features: It internalizes the dominant masculine values to exercise leadership without losing women's style and personal skills. Lorenzo et al. (2007) also stress the social dimension of female leadership that adopts more open and flexible management styles oriented toward social change.

Despite being associated with business or organizational contexts, many of these female leadership characteristics materialize in the models represented in mass media, whether it is advertising (Del Moral, 2000b), cinema (Jimeno, 2017), or particularly cartoons, and provide evidence of the dominant values during each period, hence, our decision to observe the evolution of female characters in animation movies targeted to children that serve as witnesses and vehicles of the specific social values that dominate Western culture.

Diachronic Study of Female Leadership in Children's Animation

For decades, the prevailing representation of female leadership in cartoons had an affective nature and was closely related to the context, often limited to the household, which featured either mothers dedicated to domestic chores such as Betty and Wilma in *The Flintstones* and Marge in *The Simpsons* or male heroes' unconditional partners like Olive Oyl in *Popeye* and Jane in *Tarzan*. There were simultaneously more authoritarian leaderships embodied in wicked stepmothers, witches, or fairies who controlled their subordinates and threatened them with punishments or curses from strongly hierarchical stances.

Therefore, Disney classics present stereotyped representations of passive women who play secondary roles as weak, vulnerable, or submissive heroines (Maity, 2014; Towbin et al., 2004) where leadership is practically nonexistent. A change began during the 1990s, however: Disney adapted tales and books in which the starring characters were women, most of them of royal descent, educated in a patriarchal environment, and motherless. Examples include Ariel, daughter of the Sea King in *The Little Mermaid* (1989); Belle, daughter of an eccentric inventor in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991); Yasmine, daughter of the sultan in *Aladdin* (1992); Pocahontas, daughter of an Indian chief in movie of the same name (1995); Esmeralda, a Parisian gypsy woman in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996); or Mulan, a young Chinese female warrior in *Mulan* (1998), among others. All of these heroines show a rebellious attitude toward the

social conventionalisms of their time and break with the prevailing rules (Del Moral, 2000a) while maintaining the emotional side of their leadership. They all strive to find a true love through which they can improve their status or, at least, keep the one they already have: Ariel looks for a prince; Esmeralda looks for her captain; and Belle looks for the Beast, who turns out to be another prince. They use qualities such as their beauty and youth to achieve their aims, even though increasing relevance is gradually assigned to features such as Belle's intellectual curiosity and taste for reading or the bravery and strength of Esmeralda or Mulan to fight and face their enemies similarly to men, albeit not forgetting qualities such as sweetness, sympathy, or sensibility. Their leadership acquires a social value because their achievements usually benefit others instead of pursuing an individual interest.

This gradual transformation of the female models reflected in Disney movies becomes even more obvious from 2010 onward, with independent brave heroines playing an active role and able to manage their own lives (Maity, 2014; Towbin et al., 2004). Examples can be found in movies with highly empowered female characters: Rapunzel in *Tangled* (2010), Merida in *Brave* (2012), Moana in the film of the same title (2016), Vanellope in *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018), or Elsa in *Frozen 2* (2019). It is worth highlighting the qualitative progress reflected in the image of an active, independent, brave, and assertive woman (Hine, England, Lopreore, Horgan, & Hartwell, 2018) who exercises leadership in various ways, ranging from the pursuit of personal objectives to the accomplishment of goals that redound to the benefit of society.

Nonetheless, all of these efforts to underline the potential of women's leadership in animated cartoons are undermined by the incorporation of male characters who represent stereotyped masculinity tropes, including the bragger, the clown, or the foolhardy younger brother, to list but a few (McCoy, 2018). Furthermore, analyzing the prevalence of female characters in Hollywood's animation movies between 2017 and 2018, we found that women accounted for only 31.5% of the total cast in 2018, with an increase of about 0.5% compared with 2017 (Statista, 2019).

It deserves to be highlighted that, although numerous studies have dealt with the presence of female characters in animation movies, hardly any attention has been paid to the female leadership models portrayed in them.

Method

Our research had the twofold objective of (a) studying the representation of leadership in a selection of 10 successful animation films aimed at child audiences from the last decade (2010–2020) and (b) identifying the possible implications for girls' sociocognitive learning at present. We adopted the qualitative methodology of case studies and content analyses (Krippendorff, 1980; Mostyn, 1985) to examine the leadership of the female characters starring in the selected films from an ad hoc instrument designed for these purposes. References were found in different theories on leadership formulated from social psychology (Almirón, Tikhomirova, Trejo, & García-Ramírez, 2015; Gardner, 1995; Weber, 1978) in an attempt to categorize the features that define these main characters. Likewise, the description of the characters and elements present in visual stories rely on narrative cinema theory (Chatman, 1980; Vanoye, 1998) and screenwriting theory (McKee, 1999). We adopted the patterns to analyze female characters in animation films from Ameer and Naz (2016), Pila and colleagues (2018), and Towbin and associates (2004).

Identification of Cases

We selected 10 U.S. animation films with female protagonists that premiered between 2010 and 2020, all of which earned international awards or nominations in their category, except for one, which was chosen because of its recognition by the public and its considerable box office takings (see Table 1). In some cases, the analysis of the main female character was complemented with that of a second female character who served as a counterpoint to the protagonist.

Table 1. Identification of the Films Analyzed and the Female Characters Highlighted.

Animation movie	Award	Female character
Tangled (2010). Walt Disney Feature Animation. Directors: Nathan Greno & Byron Howard.	Nominated for the Oscar for the best theme song. Eighth film in box office takings of 2010 and sixth in ticket sales of all Disney classics.	•Rapunzel (princess) •Mother Gothel (witch)
Brave (2012). Walt Disney Pictures & Pixar. Directors: Mark Andrews & Brenda Chapman.	Won the Oscar, the British Academy Film Award, and the Golden Globe for the best full-length animated feature film.	•Merida (Irish princess) •Elinor (mother)
Inside Out (2015). Pixar Animation Studios. Directors: Pete Docter & Ronnie Del Carmen.	Won the Golden Globe, the Critics' Choice Award, the Annie Award, and the Oscar for the best animation movie. Included by the BBC among the 21st-century top-100 films.	•Riley (teenager) •Joy
Moana (2016). Walt Disney Animation Studios. Directors: Ron Clements & John Musker.	Despite not having any outstanding awards, 12th film with the highest box office takings in 2016 and fifth in ticket sales of all Disney classics.	•Moana (daughter of a Polynesian chief) •Te Fiti (vengeful goddess)
Zootopia (2016). Walt Disney Animation Studios. Directors: Byron Howard, Rich Moore, & Jared Bush.	Won Oscar for the best animation movie in 2017 and Golden Globe, Critics' Choice Award, and Annie Award for the best full-length animated feature film.	•Judy Hopps (bunny cop)
Trolls (2016). DreamWorks Animation. Directors: Mike Mitchell & Walt Dohrn.	Nominated for the Oscar and Golden Globe Awards for the best theme song, four nominations for the Annie Awards. Nominated for the Critics' Choice Awards and Satellite Awards for best animation film and theme song.	•Poppy (troll doll) •Bergen (wicked chef)

Sing! (2016). Illumination Entertainment. Director: Garth Jennings. Codirector: Christophe Lourdelet	Nominated for the Golden Globe Awards. It collected US$634 million worldwide.	•Rosita (pig mother of 25 piglets)
The Incredibles 2 (2018). Walt Disney Pictures & Pixar Animation Studios. Director: Brad Bird.	Won the Teen Choice Awards and Golden Trailer Awards. Nominated for the Oscars and the Golden Globe Awards.	•Helen (heroine mother of three children) •Evelyn (wicked engineer)
Ralph Breaks the Internet (2018). Walt Disney Animation Studios. Directors: Rich Moore & Phil Johnston.	Nominated for the Oscars, Golden Globe, and Golden Trailer Awards, with ticket sales of US$529,221,154.	•Vanellope (race car driver)
Frozen 2 (2019). Walt Disney Animation Studios. Directors: Chris Buck & Jennifer Lee.	Won the Annie Awards and Visual Effects Society Awards, the Advanced Imaging Society Lumiere Awards (Best Immersive Animated Feature Film, Best Original Song, and Best Use of High Dynamic Range). Nominated for the Oscars, Golden Globe, British Academy Film Award, Alliance of Women Film Journalists Awards, and Art Directors Guild Excellence in Production Design Award.	•Elsa (princess) •Anna (princess, Elsa's sister)

Analysis Procedure and Instrument

Seeking to systematize the examination of these films, we created an instrument that allowed us to identify the dimensions that define leadership, specifying the aspects that could prove useful to carry out a homogeneous description of the female characters and the models adopted. The Cartoons-L (Cartoons-Leadership) instrument, supported by theoretical postulates about leadership (Bass, 1981; Caldevila, 2010; Fiedler, 1967; Gardner, 1995; Haslam, 2004; Hollander & Julian, 1974; Weber, 1978), audiovisual narrative (Chatman, 1980; Vanoye, 1998), and screenwriting theory (McKee, 1999), envisages three dimensions: personal and psychological, sociological, and communicative (see the Appendix).

The personal and psychological dimension consists of two types of features specific to the character, namely (a) personal and physical attributes related to her identity as a human being or an animal, her family context, or provenance; her external appearance (i.e., physical traits); and the magical or supernatural powers that she owns; and (b) psychological attributes such as character, attitude when faced with problems, actions that reveal her personality, and motivations.

The sociological dimension covers (a) the character's social features, roles, and occupation performed in her social context, together with stereotypes (Caldevila, 2010); (b) social conditions that favor leadership building, both context and type of society; (c) predominant leadership model; and (d) leadership characteristics.

The communicative dimension includes (a) the type of language used (verbal, musical, sign language); (b) the capacity for dialogue and negotiation; and (c) communicative skills, such as active listening, predominant discourse, and so on.

Results

The examination of female characters with the instrument designed is followed by the collection of outcomes referred to the categories that define the suggested dimensions.

Personal and Psychological Dimension

Regarding personal and physical attributes, they are mostly human characters: Moana, Riley, and Vanellope are preteens, and the others are young adult women, except for Mother Gothel, who is an old woman performing an antagonistic role. There are also two humanized animals, a bunny and a pig; the mythological goddess Te Fiti; the troll doll Poppy; Chef Bergen; and a personified emotion, Joy. Nearly all of them show beauty and an appearance suited to the context. Whereas Vanellope, Helen, Evelyn, Joy, Riley, Judy, and Rosita wear comfortable, modern clothes and short hair in films with an up-to-date ambiance, Elsa, Anna, Rapunzel, Merida, Elinor, and Mother Gothel are featured in medieval clothing with long, elegant dresses and long hair in stories that remind us of fairy tales. Likewise, Moana is dressed in ethnic garments, and Anna and Elsa wear trousers in action scenes.

Some antagonists, such as Chef Bergen and Goddess Te Fiti prior to her transformation, are characterized by their ugliness. With the exception of Evelyn, who is depicted in neutral colors, these characters' plastic representation prioritizes dark, red, and maroon hues, as in Goddess Te Fiti and Mother Gothel, or purple, as in Chef Bergen. Some of them reveal a dichotomy in their appearance: Mother Gothel is old and young, thus symbolizing the falsehood of this character, who pretends to be what she is not. Likewise, Goddess Te Fiti is a lava monster or woman-island, a symbol of the duality that exists in nature: as a destructive force or deity-mother and a source of life. As for Helen, the contrast between her normal woman clothes and the attire of a superheroine expresses the balance between the private and family context and her professional life. Rapunzel, Elsa, and Helen have magical or superhuman powers through which they can exercise their leadership to save the life of their loved ones or to protect the group they belong to; in contrast, Mother Gothel uses the magical powers usurped for her own benefit.

Concerning psychological attributes, a majority of protagonists appear happy, affectionate, extroverted, upright, persevering, generous, and trustworthy. Joy and Poppy especially stand out from the rest for their contagious vitality and optimism, which heighten everyone else's mood in adverse circumstances. Merida, characterized by her rebelliousness and impulsiveness, makes wrong decisions with serious consequences. Elsa has an introverted, melancholic, and even tormented personality at the beginning of the story, although she ends up achieving an emotional balance. Practically all of them adopt

a determined attitude when they face problems, despite experiencing periods of indecision. As an exception, Riley withdraws into herself and reacts aggressively toward characters who might help her, making wrong decisions and fleeing from conflicts instead of facing them. She eventually learns from her mistakes and manages to solve the situation, however. In fact, all of these protagonists finally cope with their difficulties and show bravery and self-assuredness. They manage to save other people and defeat their enemies, as Elsa and Anna, Rapunzel, Helen, Poppy, and Moana do, and leave their fears behind to mature as individuals, in the case of Riley. All of them realize their dreams: Rosita has a career as a singer, Jody becomes a police officer, and Vanellope becomes a racecar driver. As for Merida, she simply takes control of her life. They additionally consider different perspectives, reflect, and seek creative solutions, finding responses to seemingly unsolvable problems.

These heroines travel, fight their antagonists, carry out professional activities that they combine with domestic tasks, and take care of their family, as exemplified by Helen and Rosita. Many of them star in action scenes linked to the development of the plot and to the accomplishment of their objectives. None of them adopts passive or submissive attitudes, even if Rapunzel goes from submissiveness to rebelliousness when she disobeys the woman she believes to be her mother. In the end, they all feel satisfied with their achievements and happy about their personal situation. The denouement often implies a remarkable change in their lives, which also represents the end of a transformation and maturing process. The happy ending does not necessarily include marriage: Some protagonists, like Anna and Rapunzel, get married, whereas others such as Helen and Rosita reinforce family ties, or friendship, like Poppy. However, this does not happen with Moana, Judy, or Vanellope, whose decisions to prioritize their professional goals lead them to pursue paths other than those chosen by their adventure partners. The same applies to Merida, who rejects all of her suitors and rebels against an imposed marriage, and to Elsa, who feels fulfilled and satisfied without needing a partner.

The antagonists are generally deceitful and distant and often show feigned affection, as Mother Gothel and Evelyn do. Chef Bergen is ambitious and perseveres in her search for trolls to annihilate them; she is competitive and a real cheat when she manages to snatch the position of royal chef from her opponent. These antagonists, who are driven by selfishness and lack of empathy, pursue their own benefit, and despise, ridicule, or eliminate others. For instance, Mother Gothel yearns for eternal beauty and youth, and Evelyn is guided by hatred and a desire for vengeance. All of them end up being destroyed or punished, except for Goddess Te Fiti, who changes after healing her wounds at the end of the film.

Sociological Dimension

The protagonists perform an active function and assume different functions: Helen, Rosita, and Elinor play the role of a good mother, whereas Mother Gothel acts as a bad and fraudulent mother. Riley and Merida behave as daughters who rebel against their parents, even though the ties inherent in parent–child relationships are finally restored. *Frozen 2* highlights the importance of a fraternal, protective, and collaborative relationship when it comes to solving conflicts. Some of these female main characters enjoy a consolidated couple relationship: Helen is married to another superhero, and the pig Rosita also has a husband and is the mother of 25 piglets. Others start or consolidate such a relationship through the story: Anna does so with Kristoff, and Rapunzel goes with Flynn, in both cases partners belonging to a lower class. Finally, several of

them are simply friends with other characters who help them accomplish their objectives. By contrast, the antagonists lack true friendship, love, or family relationships. Only Evelyn has a brother, but their relationship is not based on trust given that she hides her evil machinations and her real thoughts from him.

The characters have different occupations (e.g., princess, queen, police officer, singer, racecar driver, computer designer) and sometimes have to reconcile their role as housewives with their professional life, as Helen and Rosita do. Several stereotypes stand out: Merida is represented as a female warrior, Elsa and Anna are heroines, Helen is both a superheroine and a housewife, and Rosita represents the housewife–professional. As for Poppy, she is the ideal partner, and Evelyn, Judy, and Vanellope represent independent professionals, as opposed to Mother Gothel and Chef Bergen, whose roles are a bad mother and a witch, respectively.

Regarding the predominant type of leadership, the protagonists represent different models, sometimes combined with one another. Elsa holds a charismatic leadership; she obtains unconditional adherence, both of the people from Arendelle and Northuldra, which allows her to achieve the reconciliation between both groups. Despite counting on the help offered by others, she leads the salvation mission that makes her undertake a journey in solitude. Rapunzel, Vanellope, and Poppy exercise an affective or empathetic type of leadership based on interpersonal relationships. Helen embodies a participatory kind of leadership; she initially acts on her own and later seeks the cooperation of her children and husband. Judy likewise requests her fox partner's support to arrest criminals. Moana seeks help in the demigod Maui to save her people from disappearance and is essentially a charismatic leader. Joy stands for a hybrid model: empathetic but also charismatic, insofar as she is spontaneously recognized as a leader by the other characters. For their part, Merida and her mother Elinor also portray a hybrid model, which changes a great extent throughout the film in both cases. They both initially adopt authoritarian attitudes and never yield, trying to impose their will and ignoring other views, but eventually evolve toward an affective and participatory kind of leadership and admit their mistakes.

Most of these female main characters are additionally leaders oriented to achieving certain goals, some of a personal nature, such as those targeted by Vanellope, Rapunzel, and Merida, and others referred to collective interests (e.g., saving a village, finding out the truth, defeating villains, or soothing the destructive forces of nature). However, both types of goals converge very often as well. Prevailing is achieved by mixed leadership, which combines the pursuit of a goal and a focus on social interactions, such as personal knowledge, the search for happiness, freedom, emotional balance, the protection of their loved ones, or the defense of innocent people.

The scope of these protagonists' leadership extends over a relatively large human group: In *The Incredibles 2*, the beneficiary is society as a whole; in *Zootopia*, that role corresponds to a city inhabited by animals. For their part, Elsa and Anna extend their leadership over a village; Moana over a kingdom in Polynesia; and Rapunzel, Merida, and Elinor over a medieval kingdom. Some of these female main characters are represented as "saviors" of their people or community, or "superheroines," like Helen. On other occasions, the scope of leadership is narrower: In the case of Vanellope and Rosita, it comprises a small circle of friends or relatives, and it can even be confined to the inner world of emotions, as happens in *Inside Out*.

Communicative Dimension

The protagonists use verbal language as well as sign language to communicate, alongside music and dance in some cases. Five of the films—*Trolls*, *Tangled*, *Sing!*, *Frozen 2*, and *Moana*—are musicals in which music, and particularly songs, acquire great relevance in the audiovisual discourse. The other films occasionally introduce songs, as illustrated by *Brave*, *Zootopia*, and *Ralph Breaks the Internet*. In *Inside Out* and *The Incredibles 2*, some musical pieces form part of the soundtrack. Likewise, Elsa, Anna, and Rapunzel resort to songs, complemented by dancing, to express their emotions and reflections in key moments of the film, as do Moana and Merida, which is usual in Disney movies. These female main characters sing to express themselves, to release tension, or to communicate with other people, which helps them reinforce their identity. A special case is that of Rapunzel, who also uses drawing as a means of self-expression.

In line with the leadership model they portray, the protagonists use not only verbal and musical language, but also sign language in a conciliatory and friendly manner. As for their capacity for dialogue and negotiation, most of them adopt a tone that suggests that they are open to dialogue so that they can persuade both their allies and their opponents; they show an honest attitude as well. Nevertheless, Elsa, Vanellope, Rapunzel, Merida, and Riley occasionally conceal their intentions to achieve their purposes when faced with dissenting opinions or for fear of other people's reactions. Furthermore, in critical moments of the plot, they clash and argue with characters who are their allies, even though they eventually make up. All of them have an active listening attitude and show empathy. As an exception, Merida and Elinor cannot talk to each other, which results in an emotional rupture between mother and daughter, even though they finally restore the broken ties as well as their ability to communicate and listen. Similarly, Riley experiences problems of communication with her parents. Nonetheless, most of them own communicative skills and know how to make their feelings and emotions, such as fear, sadness, anger, or joy, known to the people they trust. An exception can be found in Elsa, whose introversion often leads her to hide her emotions and concerns. So does Riley when she goes through periods of personal crisis.

By contrast, the antagonists are authoritarian and unempathetic leaders who use their communicative skills in a dishonest manner. Chef Bergen often appears aggressive and threatening, but Mother Gothel and Evelyn fluctuate, depending on the moment, between an intimidating aggressive discourse and a falsely kind language to gain other people's trust and deceive them. Chef Bergen lacks any capacity for negotiation; she strives to impose her will against other people's wishes. In contrast, Mother Gothel and Evelyn hide their inflexible and authoritarian attitude, pretending to be open to dialogue so that they can persuade others by means of lies, thus concealing their true intentions. In turn, Goddess Te Fiti varies in the ways she expresses herself: She changes from showing a violent and destructive attitude portrayed through a volcanic eruption to adopting a conciliatory language, transmitted by kind gestures and look of a smiling woman-island.

Discussion and Conclusions

In keeping with other studies (Aguado & Martínez, 2015; Hine et al., 2018; Maity, 2014; Towbin et al., 2004), our analysis highlights that the most recent animation films have incorporated active, assertive, and independent protagonists who take control of their lives, even if that entails a clash with

traditions. Thus, films such as *Brave*, *Zootopia, Ralph Breaks the Internet*, and *Trolls* do not present a story of dependent love; neither are their young female protagonists relegated to passiveness. Instead, they fight for their dreams and aspirations, leaving conventionalisms behind.

Although the protagonists of the movies under study have diverse occupations (e.g., police officer, singer, superheroine, and racecar driver), one can attest a clear predominance of princesses, with five of 17 characters, and only a very small representation of women from scientific professions. Although an engineer, Evelyn belongs to the circle of villains and does not provide young girl audiences with an acceptable model. In this respect, Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian (2017) stress that the scarce representation of women scientists consolidates stereotypes that lead girls to avoid activities they consider to be for boys, convinced that the latter are smarter.

As for female leadership, opposing models become visible in the characters analyzed. The figures embodying more participatory and empathetic leadership models reach their personal goals, whereas those who follow authoritarian models based on manipulative strategies are punished and fail to accomplish their objectives. Likewise, when our female protagonists adopt unempathetic attitudes and reject dialogue, serious problems arise that they end up solving themselves after admitting their mistake. All this reveals an educational intention given that the female main characters' behaviors serve not only to highlight values such as honesty, loyalty, bravery, responsibility, and empathy, but also criticize others such as selfishness, lack of empathy, lies, rancor, and envy.

Broadly speaking, the common features shared by the protagonists allow us to outline a positive leadership model assumed by women who are independent, determined, brave, and capable of making decisions. They have an active attitude and initiative to solve their own problems after reflecting and considering different strategies. These women neither delegate their responsibility to others nor avoid difficulties, decisively facing them instead. They do what they consider to be the right thing, even if that implies a personal risk and, despite occasional moments of doubts or discouragement, they eventually manage to overcome their fears and hesitations. These female main characters help boost socioemotional changes that prove beneficial to everyone and everything around them, thus placing the emphasis on a transformational kind of leadership (Gardner, 1995).

These female protagonists prioritize friendly and close personal relationships. Being honest, open to dialogue, empathetic, and ready for active listening, their communicative skills help them cheer up or persuade their allies, ultimately seeking the common good. If they make a mistake or misbehave, they rectify and are reconciled. They care about other people and ponder the impact of their actions. In addition to expressing their emotions and feelings assertively, they rely on allies to solve conflicts by means of teamwork.

Such features seem to match the aspects that Rama (2015) and Sánchez (2009) identify with female leadership, including the importance of the social dimension, communicative talents, support for cooperative work, adoption of democratic attitudes, and search for creative responses to problems. From an educational point of view, the model becomes relevant for child audiences because it offers them a model of woman-leader suited to the needs of the current labor market: Today's conception of a professional

requires those competencies that women are able to provide such as flexibility, innovation, creativity, mutual collaboration, and the integration of diverse resources, among others. We neither can nor must do without their valuable contribution (Barberá, Ramos, & Candela, 2011).

Instead, the antagonists supply a negative female leadership model that encourages people's rejection. These unempathetic women look down on other people or simply ignore them. Their only concern is to pursue their own interest, without considering the effects that their actions have on others. They are intransigent and never talk to anyone; they neither yield nor know how to listen. Apart from being cunning and deceitful, they resort to persuasion strategies based on deception, concealing their true intentions to accomplish their goals. Furthermore, the permanent lack of real friends or allies, or anyone they can trust, makes them act on their own.

All in all, the female leadership model transmitted in these highly successful animated productions that are so popular among children and young people materializes in practices and discourses that attest to the evolution of women's role in present-day society. The multifaceted analysis about female leadership permits us to discern the idiosyncratic features of these female figures, not only in terms of their personal attributes, but also regarding the social influence that they exert on other people. The female leaders portrayed in animation films undoubtedly constitute social models for child audiences, especially for girls, because they are somehow encouraged to imitate these leaders' way of dressing or speaking, as well as their attitudes and behaviors in the hope that they will help these girls cope with the challenges and problems that they face in life.

Theories of sociocognitive learning developed by Miller and Dollard (1941), social learning postulated by Bandura (2009), and sociocultural learning proposed by Vygotsky (1978) agree on the conviction that individuals learn from one another by resorting to concepts such as observation, imitation, and modeling. From this perspective, observation and context, together with grown-ups and the symbolic models present in the fictitious characters of books or films, become mediators of minors' social learning (Hoppitt & Laland, 2013). Therefore, the leadership represented in the female characters of animation movies impacts the sociocognitive learning of today's young girls, and can also contribute to their moral education, as pointed out by Marín and Solís (2017).

The leadership model assumed by female characters in animated movies plays a key role when it comes to generating referents that can inspire girls to define a more egalitarian model for society. Both personal and contextual factors must become catalysts of change so that minors can exercise their own leadership style, hence the importance of examining the female referents that appear in animated films as symbolic models that can favor the learning of leadership.

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Appendix

Cartoons-L Instrument: Analysis of Female Leadership in Animation Films

1. Personal and psychological dimension

1.1 Personal and physical attributes
- *Identity:* name, human/nonhuman character, age (woman/young girl), family context (orphan, without a family, known/unknown family roots, etc.), ethnic and/or geographical provenance
- *Physical qualities:* hair (color, long/short, hairstyle), skin, eyes, height, etc., beauty/ugliness, clothes and accessories. Child or adult features (make-up)
- Magical or supernatural powers: curative, superhuman

1.2 Psychological attributes (abilities, skills, character)
- *Character:* serious/fun, sincere/deceitful, affectionate/distant, passionate/indolent, extrovert/introvert, submissive/rebellious, creative, adaptable, self-assured/insecure, reliable, upright, persevering, responsible/irresponsible
- *Attitude before problems:* avoids/faces them, brave/cowardly, determined/indecisive
- *Emotional state:* joyful, sad, furious, sympathetic, disappointed, irritated, calm, proud, vengeful, misunderstood, melancholic, hopeful, optimistic, pessimistic, envious, grateful, ashamed, frustrated, satisfied, fearful, resentful
- *Actions that determine their characterization:* protecting/encouraging others, carrying out domestic chores (cooking, cleaning), traveling, driving, fighting, rescuing/being rescued
- *Character's evolution:* positive/negative changes experienced
- *Motivations:* ambition, social recognition, power, eternal beauty/youth, social commitment, altruistic vocation, love

2. Sociological dimension

2.1. Social features
- *Assumption of roles:* active/passive
- *Relationship features:* mother, daughter, partner, friend
- *Occupation:* housewife, superheroine, princess/subject, queen, boss, police officer
- *Stereotypes:* angelic, warlike, ideal, superwoman, professional, witch, bad mother or stepmother
2.2. Social conditions favoring leadership building
- *Context:* space associated with the character (palace, castle, household) and social group that they belong to (family, neighborhood, village, digital community, complex society)
- *Context hierarchization level:* rigid and vertical (monarchy, tyranny), or flexible and horizontal (democratic society/community, open to changes)
2.3. Predominant leadership models

- *Personal features:* authoritarian or dictatorial, charismatic, affective or empathetic, inspiring, participatory, hybrid (combines several types)
- *Objective:* focused on a goal or on interpersonal relationships
- *Social interactions:* transactional or managerial, identity or representation-centered, transformational

2.4. Social characteristics of leadership
- *Transmitted message:* salvation, restoring stability and order
- *Leadership scope:* family, friends, couple, fellow citizens, subjects
- *Symbol that identifies the female leader:* savior-heroine, avenger-heroine

3. Communicative dimension

3.1. Type of language used while exercising leadership
- Verbal and sign language: assertive, affable, friendly, intimidating, threatening
- Musical (songs as a vehicle to transmit the message)

3.2. Capacity for dialogue and negotiation
- Conciliatory/troublemaking, persuasive/deterrent, flexible/inflexible, tolerant/intolerant, open to dialogue/domineering, honest/manipulative

3.3. Communicative skills
- Active listening (with respect to the interlocutor)
- Argumentative capacity (clarity and precision)
- Ways to express her feelings and emotions: verbally, by means of signs, laughs, cries, sings, draws, writes, dances, changes color, isolates herself, does not communicate with other people
- Way to empathize: becomes happy/sad with others, shows coldness, remains impassive
- Prevailing discourse: rational/emotional