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**GENDER ROLES AND LEADERSHIP IN
CARTOONS:
RECESS, THE ANIMATED SERIES**

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ABSTRACT

Recess is a cartoon series that premiered in 1997. This series continued to be televised on Disney Channel for many more years, being one of the most influential series for children. The aim of this study is to analyze if leaders tend to be male or female, and to study how each leader is characterized. In order to conduct the analysis, we will outline a theoretical background where we will develop ideas concerning gender roles and stereotypes that are shaped around the position of a leader as well as the representation of women in cartoon series. The analysis will consist of four parts: the characters' group structure, the characterization of main and second leaders, and a study of the relationship between the main characters and the leaders. The findings will determine which gender is more likely to exercise leadership, and how gender is portrayed in this animated cartoon.

Keywords: stereotypes, cartoon series, leadership, gender roles, children audiences, feminism.

RESUMEN

La Banda del Patio es una serie de dibujos animados que se estrenó en 1997. Esta serie se siguió emitiendo durante muchos años más en Disney Channel, siendo una de las series más influyentes para niños. El objetivo es analizar si los líderes tienden a ser hombres o mujeres, y ver cómo se representan. Para ello, realizaremos un marco teórico en el que desarrollaremos ideas sobre los roles de género y los estereotipos que se configuran en torno a los líderes, así como la representación de la mujer en los dibujos animados. El análisis consta de cuatro partes: la estructura grupal en la que se organizan los personajes, la descripción de los líderes principales y secundarios, y un estudio de la relación entre los personajes principales y los líderes. Las conclusiones determinarán qué género tiende a ejercer el liderazgo y cómo se representa la categoría de género en esta serie.

Palabras clave: estereotipos, serie de dibujos, liderazgo, roles de género, público infantil, feminismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In modern society, the main media for communication, entertainment and information is television, whose power over people's minds signifies a huge impact on the opinions and behaviors of the population, especially of children and adolescents whose personality and ideologies are in a constant change. In such a way, television tries to capture the attention of its audience through content that entertains and distracts, influencing society. Consequently, if children and adolescents, who are more vulnerable to certain content, have access to television programs that may pose a problem to their integrity, they will grow up with destructive and erroneous beliefs that will affect the improvement of humanity. In addition, through television children learn how a society works, the way they should dress or the tasks they should perform to adapt to society. Thus, depending on the stereotypes and gender roles that cartoon TV series show, children will perceive how society works in one way or another, and how they can construct either an equal or a biased representation of women and men.

Recess premiered in 1997, that is, more than 20 years ago, and the series is still being watched today. For this reason, I have chosen this particular TV animated show to analyze the stereotypes and gender roles that it displays. Moreover, *Recess* has not only influenced one generation, but it is still watched by many children around the world. Therefore, it is timely to study it from the point of view of gender, since in 20 years society has advanced enough to determine if the show is still suited to the times we live in, in which feminism and equality are key issues. To carry out this research, an inquiry was conducted on social gender roles and stereotypes, as well as on gender-related personality traits associated with leadership. In addition, special attention has been paid to the study of female figures in different television series in order to find out which positions they are usually placed in and how they are portrayed.

The more specific objective of this research is to observe the different groups that are formed in the schoolyard and identify their leaders so as to note how they are described, and whether there is a tendency for the leaders to be male or female. Furthermore, the protagonists of each group will be examined to ascertain whether being a leader is

determinant in enacting a protagonic role or it rather depends on other factors. Children will want to imitate the leaders and main characters as they are usually the ones who show stronger personality traits and have more relevance in the plot, so it is important to analyze how they are described in order to understand how child audiences will experience identification with those characters. Therefore, three hypotheses will be tested in this research. The first is that leadership tends to be exercised mostly by male figures, while female figures tend to occupy inferior positions. The second is that gender does not have a bearing on the presentation of the several characters' personality traits. And the last one is that the protagonists, i.e., the main characters have the power to influence audiences, and are mostly male.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Gender roles and gender stereotypes: leadership in schools

In order to develop this section, it is necessary to differentiate between the terms 'gender roles' and 'gender stereotypes' so as to avoid ambiguity, as they are similar terms but with different meanings. According to Blackstone (335-336), "gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender. (...) [They] are the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex." Consequently, gender roles will vary depending on what a society asks for. Gender stereotypes, however, are described as "oversimplified understandings of males and females and the differences between them" (Blackstone 337). Therefore, gender stereotypes are ideas, usually mistaken, about what men and women are like. One example given by Blackstone herself is that "males are not emotional. Females, on the other hand, are commonly stereotyped as being irrational or overly emotional" (337). In this way, gender roles are the tasks that we are expected to perform depending on our gender, e.g. professional careers or sports specialties; while gender stereotypes are misconceptions about what we are like or how we should behave in accordance to our sex. Both gender roles and stereotypes depend on societal expectations.

The two categories, however, are interconnected by socio-cultural gender issues as foregrounded by feminist criticism, which Durant and Fabb claim that is “more a range of interconnected directions of work, seeking to restructure power relations with respect to discourse and social relations, than a single direction to all aspects of which all feminists are committed” (43). In other words, feminist criticism involves multiple approaches aimed at balancing such power relations, i.e., changing the social system, which is why it is ultimately political and moral. The feminist critique challenges both gender roles and stereotypes inasmuch as they underpin ultimately repressive social conceptions that prevent people from being what they want to be. Again in the words of the same authors,

social inequality between men and women can be traced to unequal power relations in particular societies [...]. The human species has binary sex division between male and female, but the society has contracted oppositions of gender that the feminist criticism seeks to change”, the reason being that gender inequality creates a society of oppositions in which men are the privileged term: "the favored in a culture are ‘MEN’, ‘MASCULINE’, ‘MALE’, while the not favored are ‘women’, ‘feminine’ or ‘female’ (43)

In the arena of fiction (including audiovisual narratives like *Recess*) stereotypes perpetuate the subaltern status of women:

Much of our literature in fact depends upon a series of fixed images of women, stereotypes. These reified forms, surprisingly few in number, are repeated over and over again through much of Western literature. The objectified images have one thing in common, however; they define the woman insofar as she relates to, serves, or thwarts the interests of men. (Donovan 212)

As readers/viewers of fiction it is not unusual for women to be aware of the narrative male gaze evaluating the female characters from a position of aloof superiority. Durant and Fabb declare that “women are widely represented as objects [...] Women are regularly attributed particular sorts of characters (silly, trivial, domestic, etc...)” (45).

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN
Objects

Silly
Trivial
Domestic

In a similar way, Rodriguez maps out a similar set of stereotypical personality traits which she correlates with social roles in her study of recurring images of women in school textbooks (262):

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN		
SCHOOL AND FAMILY	PERSONALITY TRAITS	SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ROLES
Housewives	Passive	Secretaries
Elementary school teachers	Dependent	Nurses
	Spectator	

By contrast, the same author provides the corresponding template for recurring images of men in the same sources. The result is a simple yet eloquent comparison that underlines the social differences between the two genders (262):

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEN		
SCHOOL AND FAMILY	PERSONALITY TRAITS	SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ROLES
Breadwinner	Creative	Entrepreneurs
Principals	Decisive	Doctors

Let us now explore, still against the backdrop of gender, another key concept in our study of the animated TV series *Recess*: the power-relationship known as leadership. As we have seen, there are differences in the way men and women are described and the roles they play. More specifically, a core issue is whether gender is a barrier or an advantage to reach the position of leader, or whether, on the contrary, there are no gender distinctions in this regard. According to Eagly and Johnson's meta-analysis, "the strongest evidence we obtain for a sex difference in leadership style occurred on the tendency for women to adopt a more democratic or participative style and for men to adopt a more autocratic or directive style" (247). In other words, the way of exercising leadership will often be gender-related, since women take all the participants into account, individualizing and motivating them, while "men are freer to lead in an autocratic and non-participative manner should they so desire" (Eagly & Johnson 248). These authors likewise conclude that women are more concerned about well-being and good relationships with others:

Women's social skills might enable them to perform managerial roles differently than men. Interpersonal behavior that is skillful (e.g., in terms of understanding others' feelings and intentions) should facilitate a managerial style that is democratic and participatory. Making decisions in a collaborative style requires not only the soliciting of suggestions from one's peers and subordinates, but also the preservation of good relationships with them when evaluating and perhaps rejecting their ideas (Eagly & Johnson 247-248).

Moreover, these gender differences in leadership can be observed from childhood, since leadership skills are acquired through social and cultural participation. In another study (this time on children and adolescents) conducted by Eschenbeck et al, "girls scored higher in seeking social support and problem solving, whereas boys scored higher in avoidant coping" (20). The conclusion reached by these authors is the same as that in the previous research in that it conforms that women leaders seek support from others, while men exhibit a more decisive and authoritarian leadership style. While both publications put the focus on the personality traits of leaders and their relation with gender, research conducted by Reimers et al. studies how boys and girls are differentiated in school playgrounds in terms of the activities they choose to perform. "Girls engaged more often in sedentary activities, locomotion, or activities on playground equipment, and boys are more likely to play sports or active games"

(Reimers et al. 9). Consequently, boys tend to play with boys, and girls tend to play with girls, making it quite difficult for the same group to be mixed-gendered. Moreover, the authors claim that “in a playground of primary school from South Africa, girls were excluded from playing soccer with boys” (9). In this way, gender roles and societal stereotypes make it challenging to achieve an egalitarian society, even in educational settings.

2.2. Stereotypes of women in cartoon TV series

Thanks to the pervasive social influence of television and the digital platforms, accessing movies, both live-action and animation, is today within everyone’s reach, adults and children alike. Children’s exposure to the audiovisual media has its pros and cons. According to Hapkiewicz, “cartoons are of particular interest because they are the preferred program format for children starting at the age of 18 months to 2 years” (qtd. in Thompson & Zerbinos 652). This means that a large part of children’s learning input comes from cartoons. Kalayci states that “mass media have a strong effect on the formation of stereotypes (...), on sustaining these stereotypes (...) [and], in manipulating people in line with these stereotypes” (245). Thus, children learning through the media can be a barrier to a gender-balanced education and further consolidate wrong stereotypes, as they will grow up imitating biased models that they have seen on television. Giroux elaborates on the same idea when he argues that “cartoons play an important role in teaching the social values to children and are more influential than family, schools, and religious institutions” (qtd. in Kalayci 245). In this way, if a family wants to raise their children with certain values and what the latter see on TV shows the opposite, the children will preferentially be guided by what they see in their favorite animated series. Signorielli also supports this idea that “gender portrayals in the media are cause for concern because of the importance of the media in the socialization process for children and adults” (qtd. in Thompson & Zerbinos 652).

England and collaborators conducted a study on Disney Princesses so as to determine which stereotypes were associated with men and women. To do so, they divided the films into three categories: those released between 1937 and 1959; those released

between 1989 and 1998, and one single film released in 2009. The first category includes *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The second group is formed by *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998). The last category features the film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). This three-part sample was meant to facilitate observation as to whether or not stereotypes changed over time. The following table shows the gender stereotypes—in the form of binary oppositions—portrayed by Disney Princess films according to this study (England et al. 558-560):

MASCULINE CHARACTERISTICS	FEMININE CHARACTERISTICS
Curious about princess	Tends to physical appearance
Wants to explore	Physically weak
Physically strong	Submissive
Assertive	Shows emotion
Unemotional	Affectionate
Independent	Nurturing
Athletic	Sensitive
Engaging in intellectual activity	Tentative
Inspires fear	Helpful
Brave	Troublesome
Described as physically attractive	Fearful
Gives advice	Collapses crying
Leader	Asks for or accepts advice or help
	Victim

The study concludes that “the first three Disney Princess movies, produced in the 1930s and 50s, depicted in general more gendered attributes for both the princesses and the princes, and employed more traditional gender roles than did the five films produced in and after the 1980s, including the film produced in 2009” (562). In other words, there has been a positive evolution in the display of gender stereotypes. However, there are many authors who still observe a noticeable difference in the way in which the two genders are described and portrayed. Williams et al. argue that “television portrayals of men and women often stereotype the personality traits of both sexes. Male characters are dominant, aggressive, autonomous, and active while female characters are passive and deferent” (qtd. in Calvert & Huston 78). This same idea is also supported by Barcus, Levinson, McArthur and Eisen, Sternglanz and Serbin, Streicher, and Thompson and Zerbinos: “male characters are more likely to demonstrate physical aggression and leadership roles than are female characters; whereas female characters are more apt to demonstrate affection, romance, and supportive roles than are male characters” (qtd. in Leaper et al. 1653-1654). In short, it can be concluded that television shows stereotypes not only about women but also men. As previously indicated, children spend much of their time watching movies and cartoon series, so that they are exposed to continuous learning about the roles and stereotypes that each gender is expected to fulfill in society. “Cartoon messages can have a tremendous effect on young children who cannot yet distinguish dreams from reality and, as a result, they create much of their world through what they observe” (Kalayci 245). Therefore, television can help society to advance, but if inappropriate content is available for children, the consequences can be disastrous for society. According to Balkır, “one of the most fundamental responsibilities of democracy in a country, where citizens are equal to each other in all the areas and live under equal conditions, is the prevention of gender discrimination, as well as ensuring the equality between women and men” (qtd. in Kalayci 244). The Council of Europe speaks of the importance of equality in creating a fair and real society:

One of the immutable elements of society is, it is formed by men and women. Women together with men should have the right to determine the organization and functioning of the society in which they live, as well as to pursue the interests of the community. Even though having equal value and dignity of human beings is mentioned in the main international documents and

constitutions of many European countries for protecting human rights, de facto inequality of women continuing in diverse structures and processes in society precludes the establishment of a truly pluralistic democracy. Women and men having equal responsibilities regarding the functioning of society should be considered as a prerequisite for achieving a real democracy and a fairer society (qtd. in Kalayci, 244).

In general, television, and particularly cartoons, are a large part of children's leisure time, making it one of the means of information through which they learn the most. In this way, their attitudes, thoughts and prejudices tend to be shaped by imitation of what they have learned from their favorite TV series. Besides, most of the aforementioned studies have pointed out that there is a noticeable inequality when it comes to describing regular masculine and feminine characteristics, i.e., mistaken stereotypes for both men and women. Women are usually portrayed as weak, emotional and victimized, while men are portrayed as emotionless, courageous and dominant. If we want to achieve equality, stereotypes in animated series or films (as well as in live action cinema) have to change for both male and female genders, so that future citizens grow up from a young age with a fairer mind and fewer prejudices.

3. METHODOLOGY AND WORK PLAN

This research focuses on the Disney animated television series *Recess*, which ran between 1997 and 2001. In order to carry out the analysis, I will first define the selection of chapters and/or seasons that constitute the target of my study. The show consisted of six seasons with a total of 127 episodes—a sample far too large for the purpose of this graduation thesis. This is why I will concentrate on the first thirteen episodes of season one, which comprises 26 episodes. The series was released on Disney +, a premium TV platform which mainly programs films and television series, including animated shows, produced by The Walt Disney Studios and Walt Disney Television. The series, whose original language is American English, revolves around half a dozen elementary school students and their social relations in the school environment, which is in turn a microcosm that showcases society at large. In fact, the element of social critique and satire is prominent in the show.

Once the sample has been established, I will define and justify the several parts that make up the analysis. I will first describe the different groups that appear in the series and conform to the target of this study by means of a quantitative analysis around the characters' distribution by gender. In this way, I will assess whether or not the groups are segregated by gender — i.e. girls are with girls, and boys are with boys— and whether in the case of mixed groups there is gender parity or, on the contrary, one gender is numerically prevalent. In order to single out which specific groups among all those that interact in the series will be examined, I have not considered any kind of hierarchy. The groups could belong to any of the different collectives that constitute the school setting and may therefore be formed by both children in the recess period or adults who are part of the school's teaching staff, since the focus is not only on the protagonists but also on secondary characters.

Following the quantitative analysis, the second part of this Bachelor's thesis zooms in on each group leader or person with the highest rank. I will provide a description of each group leader in terms of personality traits, behavioral features and, if relevant and available, occupational/career background.

In the third part of the analysis, the focal point shifts towards the second leader of each group. As in the previous section, I will be including tables so as to schematically characterize these characters and ascertain whether or not the second positions in the group hierarchy are dominated by female or male characters, and also to guide a comparison between this class of characters and the one represented by the several main leaders.

For the last part of the analysis, I have focused on the main characters of the groups in order to see if there is any correlation between the position of leader and the list of main characters.

The selection criteria for the groups under scrutiny must comply with two requirements. In the first place, all the groups have to be formed by more than two people. Secondly,

the groups must appear in most of the series episodes in order to enable a comprehensive and accurate characterological analysis.

In attempting to analyze the several groups as well as the individual characters, I have come up against a number of obstacles since in some of the groups the collective behavior is quite homogeneous and does not exhibit idiosyncratic differences, nor is there at all times a clear leader. In such cases, I have put the focus on such characters as taking the initiative and obtaining the agreement and support of the rest of the group.

4. GENDER AND LEADERSHIP IN ANIMATION SERIES *RECESS*

Recess is an American cartoon series created by Paul Germain and Joe Ansolabehere, both writers and producers. *Recess* premiered for the first time in 1997, and new episodes were released until 2001. It was aired on Disney Channel, one of the largest channels dedicated to children and teenagers, owned by Walt Disney Television. *Recess* consists of six seasons comprising a total of 127 and an animated movie based on the series was also released when the series ended. Although *Recess* premiered in the 90s, it not only marked this decade, but also the 2000's as it continued to be televised on Disney Channel for many more years. Today, it can be seen on Disney +, a premium TV platform.

Recess takes place in a school where the six main characters —TJ, Spinelli, Mikey, Vince, Gretchen and Gus— face day-to-day experiences with their teachers and fellow students. At recess, several groups of children are formed which represent different social classes as depicted through their personality traits, clothing, people they hang out with and the way they talk. Behind the different groups of children, there is a government with rules that must be followed. Therefore, there is a hierarchy in the playground led by King Bob, a sixth-grade student, who has all the power in the playground and to whom everyone must obey; then there are the older ones, that is, sixth graders who are superior to other students, so they belong to a "privileged" social class; then the rest who belong to the middle class, that is, children who are younger

than sixth graders; and finally, preschoolers who are described as savage. Furthermore, the students have to cope with the problems they may have with the higher rank: the teachers, in particular, Miss Finster.

4.1. Average number of girls and boys in each group: Quantitative analysis

Our study starts from a quantitative analysis carried out in order to determine how many male and female characters there are in each group so as to obtain the overall group average figures by gender, i.e., whether boys or girls consistently predominate in the total estimate or whether the distribution pattern varies across groups. More specifically the composition of each group has been broken down by gender and once the individual group counts were completed, a numerical data table was constructed including the total count of males and females per group so as to work out the final average values. In selecting the several groups to be analyzed, we have used the following criteria: each group should consist of at least three members with a clearly defined status; additionally, the groups under examination should play an important role in the development of the plot, which would in turn afford the opportunity for the characters to exhibit their personality traits. In other words, I put the focus on groups that appear in most of the chapters and very frequently. As a result, five groups were chosen that included the series main protagonists and excluded characters that tend to appear as individuals rather than as group members or do not appear continually.

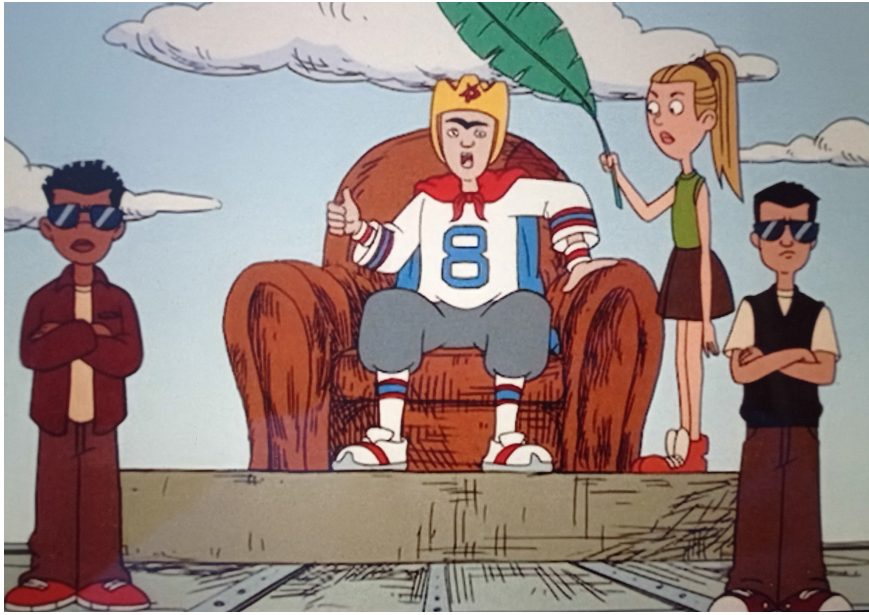
The first group is formed by the school's teaching staff among which I have highlighted the three main characters: Miss Finster, Principal Prickly and Miss Alordayne Grotkey. Nevertheless, there are more staff working in the school: Miss Lemon, Miss Salamone and Lunchlady Harriet. This group therefore consists of five females and one male.



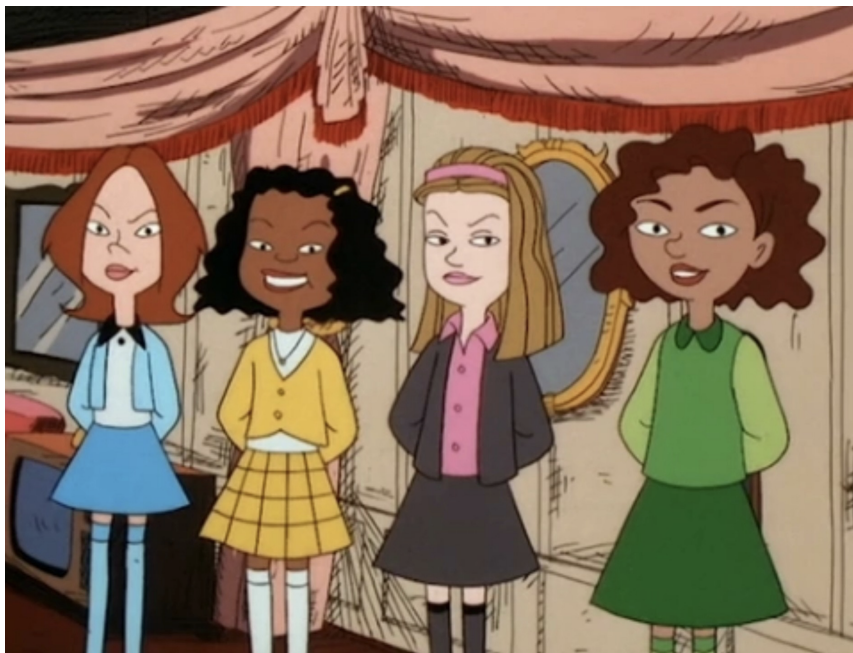
For the second group, I have selected six students that are Ashley Spinelli, T.J. Detweiler, Mikey, Gus, Vince LaSalle and Gretchen. This group is formed by two females and four males.



The third group is composed of four students: King Bob, Jordan, Jerome and the girl who fans and serves King Bob. They are three males and one female.



The fourth and last group is also formed by students, in this case, the four “Ashleys”: Ashley Armbruster, Ashley Tomassian, Ashley Quinlan and Ashley Boulet.



The following table shows the average number of males and females in the different groups:

	NUMBER OF CHARACTERS PER GROUP	
GROUPS	MALE	FEMALE
1	1	5
2	4	2
3	3	1
4	0	4
TOTAL	8	12
AVERAGE	2	3

The results show that on the whole there are more girls than boys in *Recess*, with an average of 3 females and 2 males per group. Furthermore, the findings show that three out of four groups are mixed, formed by males and females. In the first group, the school's teaching staff, there is a clear predominance of women since there is one male and five females. However, Miss Lemon, Miss Salamone and Lunchlady have a limited participation in the show's scenes, although at this stage we are only concerned with a purely quantitative assessment. For the next group (group 2), it can be seen that it is also a mixed group made up of 4 boys and 2 girls, so that the male gender predominates. Moreover, in group 3, males predominate, as there is only one girl. Finally, group 4 is unique in that it is only composed of four girls.

These overall results reveal a more or less balanced situation in which there appears to be no particularly significant difference in the *average* number of females and males per group. Nonetheless, when the groups are analyzed individually the gender split-up is clearly more unbalanced as in some groups the male figures (groups 2 and 3) stand out while in others the female characters constitute an absolute majority (groups 1 and 4). Finally, no group exhibits an equal or even similar number of males and females, although in global terms the quantitative gender differences offset one another.

On the other hand, the results for group 1 (i.e., the teaching staff) can be said to be predictable, since

According to the most recent population survey released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor, the teaching gender gap is still alive and well. Male educators constitute just 2.3% of pre-K and kindergarten teachers, 18.3% of the elementary and middle school teacher population, and 42% of the high school level teaching staff (AAE Staff, para. 1).

Equally or even more foreseeable are the figures for group 4, since the social construction of gender makes boys and girls play separately. There is a greater predilection for boys to play more active games or sports in playgrounds, while girls are expected to conform to the stereotype according to which they prefer quieter games and walking (Rimers, Anne K. Et al. 9).

4.2. Analysis of the leader of each group¹

Gender and leadership are recurring themes in cartoon TV series as they reflect the realities and perceptions of gender roles in society. While the male gender has traditionally been associated with specific leadership traits, such as confidence, Eagly and Johnson argue that both men and women possess a range of leadership qualities (242). However, male characters in popular culture are often portrayed as strong, determined leaders, while female characters are depicted as emotional: a gender cliché that can already be traced in Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal protofeminist treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792):

[women's] thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion; and feeling, when they should reason, their conduct is unstable, and their opinions are wavering—not the wavering produced by deliberation or progressive views, but by contradictory emotions.(64)

¹ For sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4, I have followed two websites: "TV Tropes Recess TV series" and "Fandom Recess" so as to analyze the personality traits of the different characters mentioned. While it may be argued that such sources are not conventionally academic, it has been customary since the 1990s for students of popular culture products in areas like cultural and audience studies to draw upon fan media and their online outputs. For an overview of the so-called Fan Studies, see for example Morimoto.

More particularly as regards the representation of gender and leadership in TV series, the latter reflects today's broader societal discussions around gender roles and equality. As seen in the previous analysis, there are different groups on the playground. In this section, we will put the focus on the leaders of each group so as to assess the role played by gender in the exercise of leadership within the several groups, and thus, to observe the differences regarding personality traits among the leaders and ascertain whether or not these attributes are gender-related.

The above results point out that there are three groups including both female and male characters: groups 1, 2 and 3; whereas in group 4, there are only female characters. We consequently need now to analyze the leaders' personality traits in order to understand how these groups function as social units.

The first group is formed by the school's teaching staff, who are educators and adult professionals working at an elementary school. Although they are not part of the student collective, teachers and school's staff are also organized at different levels. Moreover, they play an essential and active role in resolving conflicts and promoting positive behavior among the students during recess. This first group is formed by five women and one man, and the leader of the group is Principal Prickly, the only male in the group. Prickly is the director of Third Street Elementary School, and the one to whom everyone, teachers and students alike, must obey. Prickly manages and controls the school, and hence, he is the leader of the group. His personality traits are easily identified throughout the series as he always behaves the same way, and everyone treats him in the same way. Thus, he can be described as a stern principal, but at the same time, he is a leader who is always concerned about the welfare of students. For example, the student T.J. in episode "The Great Jungle Gym Standoff" of season 1, refuses to come down from Old Rusty's that is going to be thrown down, and Principal Prickly decides to talk the student down to a negotiation instead of punishing him. In addition, it is also evident that he is the leader by the clothes he wears as he always wears a dark suit and a tie which gives him elegance and a sense of superiority. Despite

his superior status, Principal Prickly does not take advantage of his position to be selfish and not think about the rest since he always cares about improving the school.



PRINCIPAL PRICKLY PERSONALITY TRAITS
STRICT
RESPECTFUL
CONSIDERATE
SENSIBLE
RESPONSIBLE

Briefly, in group 1, the figure of Principal Prickly, the only man who belongs to the school's teaching staff, is the one who has the greatest power of command over the teachers and students. He is the leader of this group and acts as such, being strict but not taking advantage of his position of power, as he is always considerate to everyone and takes all opinions into account. Therefore, Principal Prickly is a leader portrayed with positive personality traits.

The second group is made up of six fourth-graders who are the starring gang of *Recess*. As noted in the previous section, the group is mixed-gender, i.e., including girls and boys, more particularly four boys and two girls. Initially, the group only consisted of five students, T.J. Detweiler, Spinelli, Gretchen, Mikey and Vince, but in the first episode, the sixth member is introduced, Gus, who is new to Third Street Elementary School. Around these six characters, the different games and adventures of the series are developed. Thus, they do not only share adventures with their classmates, but also they have to face the school and its rules. The leader of the second group is Theodore Jasper, better known as T.J. He is portrayed as a smart guy with a lot of creativity to devise new plans to solve problems in the playground and have fun. Furthermore, he is an outgoing kid who is able to talk to anyone to create new anecdotes. Despite showing himself as a rebellious and impulsive child, he always helps his friends to overcome any problem. In this way, he is committed to a fair and true friendship. For example, in episode “Officer Mikey” in season 1, he joins King Bob to convince him to help his friend Mikey to become an officer. Therefore, we can see how he is able to socialize with other groups, and he also knows how to establish a dialogue with the rest of the students to save his friends from trouble.



T.J. DETWEILER PERSONALITY TRAITS
CLEVER

EXTROVERTED
REBEL
IMPULSIVE
FRIENDLY

In short, group 2 is led by one of the four boys, T.J. Detweiler, who is a great leader and an excellent friend. Despite getting into a lot of trouble for going against the school's rules, he is a character with very positive traits because his natural physical appearance and his behavior transmit a sense of friendliness. His clothing is casual, with jeans, a baseball jacket and his characteristic red cap. In general, he is a very respected leader, not only in his group of friends, but also in the whole school.

The third group is also mixed-gender, that is to say, it is formed by boys and girls although there is only one female and she hardly plays a leading role. This group includes a monarch, King Bob; his two best friends, Jordan and Jerome; and a servant, the girl. They are sixth-grade students in Third Street Elementary School, i.e., they belong to the group of older children. The leader of the group is King Bob, one of the males of the group. He is known as the self-proclaimed king of the playground. Furthermore, his physical appearance makes his position stronger, as he wears a crown and he holds a scepter. King Bob is admired by many of the other students as they see him as a fair leader. In addition, he always relies on his advisors to resolve conflicts among his fellow students in a just manner. Nevertheless, he is also seen as an egocentric, demanding and intimidating character, since if a student is unaware of his statements or challenges him in any way, his reputation is jeopardized. An example of his authoritarian and controlling personality is when Gus arrives at school and he scorns him for being the new kid ("The New Kid", season 1). This attitude is characteristic of a bully insofar as in order for him to feel superior to the rest, he has to make someone else feel lonely. The same happens with the only girl in the group, who has no say or vote since she is only dedicated to serving him and she is never expected to advise the king ("The Break In" season1).



KING BOB PERSONALITY TRAITS
AUTHORITARIAN
CONTROLLING
DEMANDING
INTIMIDATING
FAIR

The figure of King Bob causes contradictory feelings, as he treats the rest of the students with contempt from his superior position. Nonetheless, he is also a person who strives for the well-being of his playground fellows and is willing to have a conversation with the other children to reach agreements. In this way, he is a leader who makes himself respected and to whom everyone knows they have to obey if they do not want to bear the consequences of his punishments. Therefore, it can be stated that he is both respected and feared. On the other hand, King Bob has worked on his looks so as to make his presence stronger, which is why he wears “regalia” such as the crown and the scepter.

The fourth group is formed by four girls: “The Ashleys.” They are a group of girls from well-off families who attend Third Street School. They are the most popular girls in school, but are likewise often seen as mean-spirited and exclusive. They are obsessed with fashion, popularity and their social status. Throughout the series, the Ashleys often clash with T.J. and his band because both groups are focused on very different interests. The Ashleys represent the power of social popularity, which prevents them from being bullied. By contrast, they themselves have fun bullying and intimidating students from a lower social status, as they did to Gus when they deprived him of his power to express himself in episode 5 “Jinxed” of season 1. The leader of the group is Ashley Armbruster, a blonde girl dressed in pink. She is the one who decides who to mistreat at any moment. Ashley Armbruster is a wealthy girl who is narcissistic and arrogant. She takes fashion and physical appearance very seriously. As a result, she is very proud of her family’s wealth and status. In this way, she adds an interesting dimension to the show’s portrayal of schoolyard social hierarchies. However, she sometimes shows a sensitive side when she has to join T.J. and his band to face common enemies.



ASHLEY ARMBRUSTER PERSONALITY TRAITS
ELITIST
ARROGANT

WEALTHY
STYLISH
BULLY

Ashley Armbruster is a suitable leader for her friends since they need someone who can lead them, and she always has many ideas of what to do in the playground. The other three girls in the group listen to Ashley A. on everything as they tend to agree to all kinds of proposals. The four members of the group have very similar values, but Ashley Armbruster stands out for her bossiness. She is seen as a great enemy of the main band, and therefore, she is described with negative traits. Besides, her lack of spontaneity and exaggerated concern for physical appearance convey unfriendly feelings. Her negative characteristics outweigh her positive ones by a wide margin.

Having seen and analyzed the four leaders of the different groups, it should be noted that all the leaders in the groups in which there are females and males are themselves male. The only exception is in group 4, since the group consists of females only. In addition, we can see how male leaders, despite their shortcomings, always foreground their positive side. This is very noticeable in the third group, King Bob's, as he behaves with elitism and superiority over the rest, but he is not perceived as an enemy. On the contrary, Ashley Armbruster, the leader of group 4, has very few positive aspects like King Bob, but she is portrayed only as a superficial and narcissistic person.

We may therefore conclude that there is a gender imbalance in the case of leaders, since most of them are male and they are perceived as nice leaders and comrades. However, when the leader is a female, she is seen as the enemy of the protagonists without hardly any indication of her positive traits.

4.3. Analysis of the second leader of each group

This part of the analysis focuses on the second leaders of each group, i.e., the second most relevant person in the group. Just as we established which gender predominates in the leadership of the several groups, we must also analyze the personality traits and degree of *auctoritas* of the second leaders to comprehend which gender rules each band, and how this leadership is perceived by the audience.

Our preliminary results showed that the first group consisted mostly of women (5 versus 1 man). Despite this female majority, Principal Prickly is the unquestionable leader, as he is in charge of the school, i.e., all teachers and students alike are expected to follow his orders. The six figures in group 1 belong to the school teaching staff, where different levels of prominence can be easily observed. More particularly, a second group leader has a great presence during the whole series. She is Miss Finster, the administrative secretary and a teacher of Third Street Elementary School. Miss Finster holds a lower position than the main leader, Mister Prickly, but during the whole series she also plays a very crucial role in the development of the activities and the resolution of conflicts of the students in recess. Miss Finster is described as a strict and no-nonsense school teacher. She is also portrayed as a grumpy and intimidating figure who is feared by many of the students because of her harsh punishments. Throughout the series, Miss Finster is often at odds with the main characters, the band, who frequently find themselves in trouble for breaking the school's rules. In spite of being a stern and severe person, she can show a softer side, although this is rather uncommon with her, since she is always keen on preventing the children from having fun. For this reason, she is hated by the students and in turn tries to spy on them with the help of Randall, who is presented as an antagonist of the gang. For example, in episode 8 of season 1 "To Finster with Love," Mss. Finster stops a game to hinder children from enjoying themselves, but at the same time, she shows a caring side to the handyman.



MISS FINSTER PERSONALITY TRAITS
SEVERE
INTIMIDATING
AUTHORITARIAN
PARTY POOPER
RESPONSIBLE

In short, although Miss Finster holds an inferior position to Principal Prickly, her figure comes through as she is very demanding and is always in the children’s midst to spoil their games. Miss Finster is seen as an enemy of the protagonists and of the students in the playground as she is too grumpy and bossy. Moreover, her physical appearance underscores her personality traits as her hands-on-hips posture and her whistle project an image of control and power.

In group two, there is also a male leader, T.J. Detweiler, who is seen as a great leader as he has social skills to converse with all kinds of people and is always standing up for his friends. Nevertheless, as in group one, the second leader is also a female, Ashley Spinelli. She is part of the group “Recess Gang,” and she is particularly close with T.J. Detweiler. She is a tough and confident fourth-grade student. Spinelli stands out for her

street smarts, tomboyish athletic prowess and ability to defend herself and her friends. Although she is stubborn, she has a sensitive side, and she values her friendships deeply. Spinelli rejects the idea of belonging to a group like the Ashley's where beauty and selfishness take center stage. One of her negative features is that she is aggressive and does not hesitate to use her strength if she feels attacked physically or mentally. For example in episode 7 of season 1 "First Name Ashley," she catches Randall eavesdropping on a conversation with his friends to later tell Miss Finster, and Spinelli does not hesitate to resort to physical force.



ASHLEY SPINELLI PERSONALITY TRAITS
NONCONFORMIST
FRIENDLY
STUBBORN
COMBATIVE
HUMBLE

Spinelli is a very important figure in group 2 as she is the second leader. Her strength and self- confidence ensure that her group is always protected. Her relationship with the main leader, T.J. Detweiler, is special as they understand each other very well and they have many traits in common. Although she sometimes acts impulsively and aggressively, she is a very good person as she always tries to get the best for her friends. Consequently, this character is received in a very positive way. Furthermore, her clothing is very peculiar as she always wears an orange hat with two pigtails, military boots and a red dress in an idiosyncratic combination of kids and adults dressing styles.

Group 3 is also led by a male, King Bob, just like groups 1 and 2. King Bob is a good leader as he manages to get the whole school yard to respect and obey him despite being intimidating and arrogant. Unlike groups 1 and 2, the second leader here is not a female. As a matter of fact, in this case, the second leader is not one person, but two, Jordan and Jerome, King Bob's best friends and advisors. Jordan and Jerome always follow and support King Bob in all his decisions and they are characterized by their loyalty. However, they are also defined by their lack of personality, since they are incapable of contradicting the group's chief leader even though they may disagree with him. Both act responsibly when fulfilling their duty, which consists in making sure that everyone complies with the rules.



JORDAN AND JEROME PERSONALITY TRAITS
LOYAL
RESPONSIBLE
LACK OF PERSONALITY
ATTENTIVE
GOOD FRIENDS

In short, Jordan and Jerome appear together by King Bob's side. Both are the second leaders because although they serve the King, they also play the role of advisors to the latter, all of which makes them indispensable figures in the group. They are very reliable and do everything the King tells them to do. Despite the fact that their most prominent function is to accompany their boss, and that to that extent they share an almost identical profile, their physical appearance is both strikingly different and at the same time very well matched, since they represent opposite types: Jordan is taller and thinner, and Jerome is shorter and chubby. Additionally, mention must be made of their close friendship and perfect mutual acceptance.

Finally, group 4 is different from the rest of the groups since it is exclusively formed by female characters. Consequently, the main leader is a girl, Ashley Armbruster, who is also the only female leader of all four groups. This group also differs from the rest because, although there is a clear leader, among the other three members there is no really clear disparity in their degree of prominence. Even so, the figure of Ashley Quinlan slightly stands out among the trio. Although Ashley Quinlan is always giving orders to the other Ashleys, Ashley Armbruster is the one who devises the plans and has the most relevance. We may therefore, for the sake of our character taxonomy, characterize Ashley Quinlan as a low-profile second leader inasmuch as she takes Ashley Armbruster's orders and is often in charge of directing the rest to carry them out. Ashley Quinlan is dressed in blue and her personality is portrayed as arrogant,

snobbish and manipulative. Like the main leader, she uses her social status to bully and exclude other students.



ASHLEY QUINLAN PERSONALITY TRAITS
REPELLENT
EGOTISTIC
BOSSY
SELFISH
RICH

In short, Ashley Quinlan shares many personality traits with Ashley Armbruster, the first leader, such as selfishness, wealth or stylishness. However, Ashley Quinlan, the second leader, is even bossier and meaner than the rest. According to Spinelli, the four members of “The Ashleys” are “snotty, prissy, and members of a stupid, snotty, prissy club” (episode 7, season 1). She is also portrayed as hostile to the protagonists, and so she is described and perceived as possessing a negative personality.

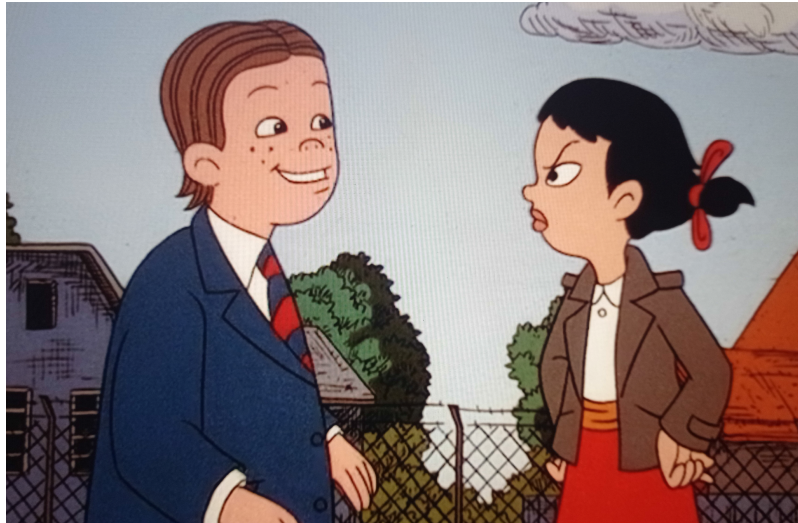
4.4. Analysis of the groups' main characters

The last step in this character profiling is to identify the narrative protagonists in each group to determine if there is a correlation between leadership and plot-related characterological prominence. To this end, both the identified leaders and the narrative main characters will be studied in this section so as to assess who is more relevant for the plot, whether the first or the second leader, or if, on the contrary, neither of them are narrative protagonists, or both can be considered to possess that functionality.

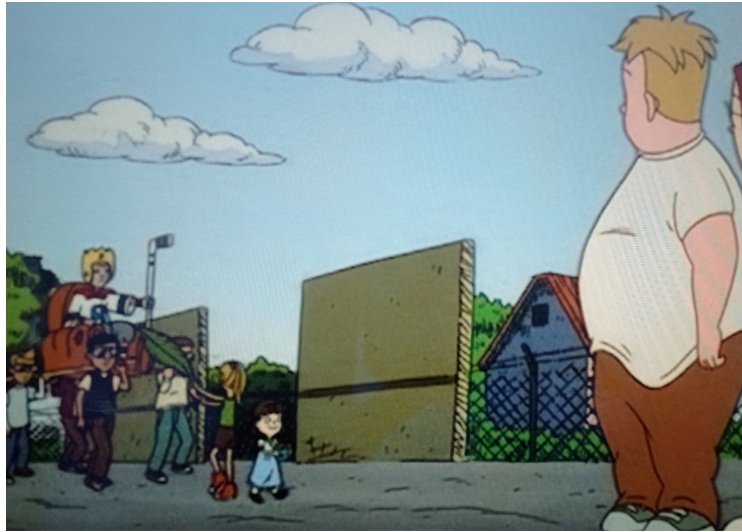
In group one, the results of our scrutiny showed that the hierarchical leadership falls on Principal Prickly, since he occupies the highest rank, but the second group leader, Miss Finster, has the most prominence in the storyline among the school's teaching staff, as she is an important presence in the recess and she hangs out more with the students to prevent them from getting into mischief, even if that means spying on them. The importance of Miss Finster is due to the fact that as she is a regular teacher, and not the principal, she has a more direct contact with the children insofar as she is the one who has to supervise them and punish them for their misbehavior. The figure of Principal Prickly is essential but more so as a result of his status than for his interventions in the series plotline. He is in charge of implementing what we may call retributive justice, rather than guiding the studentship, so that his participation is in this sense very limited. However, Miss Finster appears in all the episodes in the role of the adversary who spoils the plans of the gang. In this way, she plays a major role within the teaching staff. Moreover, her role as antagonist of the gang makes her a regular presence in every trouble that takes place around the youngsters. Besides, although she consistently exhibits her flaws as an excessively demanding and bossy person, she also betrays, in a somewhat dramatic way, her personal feelings and weaknesses, which makes her into a rounder character somehow.



In group two, the main leader is T.J. Detweiler as he is the one who steers his comrades in their adventures. The second leader, Ashley Spinelli, is also an essential mainstay in the group as well as the latter's main advocate. The protagonist role in this case is shared by both leaders, since the two of them are guides and spokespersons for their playground mates in front of teachers and other students. They are the most independently-minded and even rebellious of the gang, as the other four members take on a more passive attitude and they do not display such a continuous involvement. Because of their defiant personality, T.J. and Spinelli are always getting into trouble with other classmates and teachers, and this makes them true protagonists of the stories. In this way, both characters are always looking for new experiences to live and obstacles to face. In addition, they are particularly vocal about their strengths and their limitations, which makes them connect more with the audience. For example, in episode 3 of season 1, "The Experiment," we learn that both share the protagonism because the two decide to disprove an urban legend that says that if they kiss a girl or a boy, they will have to get married. This episode is an example that they can confront challenges to make themselves develop and evolve as persons. Moreover, they often appear together in several scenes where they agree on initiatives and collaborate to materialize them.



In the third group, the main leader is King Bob, a sixth grader whose power extends over all the children in the schoolyard. His group is made up of his two friends and advisors, Jordan and Jerome, who are the second leaders (and who, as suggested above are somehow merged in a single personality), and a girl who plays a subservient role. Although Jordan and Jerome take up a fair amount of screen time and are certainly important for the course of the adventures that take place at recess, the protagonist is undoubtedly King Bob, as he is always present in the playground, even though he sometimes appears accompanied by members of his immediate circle or by others performing the role of servants. His two chief advisors and the maid always appear at his side, and when that is not the case, they rarely have an individual presence in the playground. In this way, King Bob can be considered the undisputed leader and protagonist of group 3, since he plays an essential role in the fulfillment of the activities and adventures of the schoolyard. King Bob is in charge of facing any difficulty or obstacle so as to secure the common good for all children. An example of how everyone always resorts to him to solve their troubles is in episode 6 of season 1, “Officer Mikey.” The gang must help Mikey, one of the members of the group who dreams of becoming a police officer. To achieve this end, the gang embarks on the broader scheme of getting the dreams of everyone fulfilled, including the dream of little Brittany who fantasizes about sitting on King Bob’s throne. King Bob acts in this episode as a “wish granter”, though not before engaging in a complex sequence of events whereby everyone gets what they want.



In girls-only group four, where each of the four Ashleys is characterized by having a specific signature color, group leader is Ashely Armbruster, the blonde girl whose identifying color is pink. The second leader, as we saw earlier, is Ashley Quinlan, characterized by the color blue; she is the bossiest and most selfish of the four girls. Despite the fact that Ashely Quinlan, the second leader, is the meanest group member and entertains cruel plans, the clear protagonist in narrative terms is Ashley Armbruster. As a matter of fact, the first leader has similar characteristics to the second one since both are rich girls raised in similar environments. Nevertheless, Ashley A. is occasionally outspoken about her weaknesses and is capable of resolving conflicts in a more reasonable way. This makes her a powerful lead character, since by showing her flaws and virtues she becomes more relatable to audiences. Additionally, in the several scenes where she appears, she is always the one who takes the initiative and verbally addresses the rest in the playground so as to reach an agreement. Another characteristic to take into account is that she appears in the scenes ahead of the rest of her friends. What makes her also a main character is her persuasiveness and self-determination to carry out her plans, and how the whole episode revolves around this idea and spawns new adventures in the schoolyard. For example, in episode 7 of season 1, “First Name Ashely,” Ashley A. decides that since Spinelli’s first name is Ashley, she has to be part of her group even though she does not share Spinelli’s ideas, style and looks. As can be seen in the following images, Ashley Armbruster is the one who most interacts with the rest of her classmates, which makes her more open-minded and rounder as a character.

Visually, this translates as her often taking a more forward (image 1) or central position (image 2).



Image 1 (Ashley Armbruster ahead of the rest of her friends)



Image 2 (Ashley Armbruster in the center of the group)

The study of the protagonist role in each of the groups in *Recess* shows that such a role always falls on the characters we previously tagged as first or second leaders, never on any other member of the gangs. In group 1, we observe that the protagonist is not the first leader but the second, that is, the character who gets along worst with the main

gang and who triggers off the many adventures. In group 2, we see that both, the first and the second leader, are truly protagonists, since both share very similar personalities that consistently place them at the center of the story. However, in groups 3 and 4, we notice that the main leaders are also the protagonists as they have a more articulate voice in their respective groups, and therefore, become more important in the playground.

The above observations, therefore, indicate that there is a correlation between being the protagonist and the leader of the group because in three out of four groups, the first leader is the protagonist (groups 2, 3 and 4). Nevertheless, among the main group leaders, there is only one female character, while among the protagonists, there are two female characters who were not characterized as first leaders (groups 1 and 2).

5. DISCUSSION

The previous analysis has zoomed in on the several groups that are active in the schoolyard of *Recess*, the animated TV series, as well as on their composition, with a special focus on the two chief leaders and the main characters of each of the four groups. The different steps of the analysis have led to some conclusions that relate to this bachelor's thesis theoretical framework.

First, it can be observed that three of the four groups are mixed, i.e., made up of male and female characters, and only one group consists exclusively of girls. According to Reimers, "girls engage more often in sedentary activities, locomotion, or activities on playground equipment, and boys are more likely to play sports or active games" (9). It would appear, therefore, that the only-girls group (group 4) is the one that best matches this assumption of normality whereby groups tend not to be mixed gender-wise, since they practice different activities. In this way, this series breaks with gender roles and stereotypes to a certain extent since most of the groups (three out of four) are made up of both boys and girls. However, the groups that are mixed are not numerically balanced, as in the first group there are 5 females and 1 male; in group two, there are 4

males and 2 females; and in group three, there are 3 males and 1 female. Thus, the most prevalent gender in mixed groups is male.

Regarding leadership and gender, there is clear inequality because the main leaders are always male, except in group 4, which is exclusively made up of girls. The male leaders, Principal Prickly, T.J. Detweiler and King Bob, are portrayed as essential figures to their group since they have the ability to exercise leadership while being kind to everyone. The male leader with the least positive personality traits is King Bob, but despite his temperament, he is perceived in general as a generous person who looks after the welfare of everybody in the playground. However, the main leader of group 4 ('The Ashleys'), Ashley Armbruster, is seen as the most antagonistic character in the series, one who does not engage in the innocent games of children. Ashley A. is described as rich and arrogant, a girl who is only interested in fashion and in bullying other students. On the whole, group leadership in *Recess* features a remarkable degree of inequality, since most gangs are led by males (3 out of 4 groups), and in the only group led by a female, the latter is depicted with unfavorable traits that position her as an enemy. According to Eschenbeck et al, "girls scored higher in seeking social support and problem solving, whereas boys scored higher in avoidant copying" (20). This may explain why boys are the preferred leaders, as they do not depend on the support of others, and they rely on their decisive and authoritative power.

As for the second leaders, we observe that the situation changes, since most of them are female, but the difference is that they play a secondary role and are subordinated to a male chief leader. The second female leaders are Miss Finster (group 1), Ashely Spinelli (group 2) and Ashley Quinlan (group 4), and the second male leaders are Jordan and Jerome (treated as a single individual). Out of the three second female leaders, only Spinelli is described with friendly and humble personality traits. In contrast, the second male leader(s) of group 3 (Jordan and Jerome) are described as responsible and loyal people who do their job. Miss Finster and Ashley Quinlan are described as bossy women and antagonists to the protagonist gang. An example of this inequality can be found in group 1, where the only man is the main leader, the school's principal, who is described as kind and understanding, while the second leader of group 1 is a woman, the

school's secretary and a member of the teaching staff, who is in turn described as authoritarian and strict. This confirms Rodriguez's claim that "most primary teachers are women and school principals are men" (262). And indeed, in our series of choices, Miss Finster is a primary teacher and the school's academic secretary, while Principal Prickly is the director. In short, the second positions are usually occupied by females, and most of them are described with negative traits.

Regarding the main characters of each group, one may expect the leaders to be the most important figures in the development of the series, but this is not always the case. In group 1, the most influential character is the second leader, Miss Finster, since she is the one who interferes the most in the children's activities, and therefore, the one who is most prominent among the group of teachers and has the greatest relevance in the development of narrative. In the second group, we find that the two leaders, T.J. Detweiler and Spinelli, are the protagonists of the group as they are the ones who get into trouble the most, and are in charge of solving the group's problems. In groups 3 and 4, the leaders, King Bob and Ashely Armbruster, are the protagonists of each group as both are always present in the playground and are the ones who interact the most with the rest of the students, thus showing more of their personality traits. Therefore, there is a tendency for the first leaders to be the main characters, except for group 1. In this aspect, we observe a more gender-balanced situation, as there are three female leads and two male leads.

To conclude, a gender imbalance can be observed insofar as the main leader-positions are held by men —Principal Prickly, T.J. Detweiler and King Bob—, and if a woman plays that role, in this case Ashley A., she is portrayed as a bad character. This same situation is found when we put the focus on the second leaders, a category in which women predominate (3 out of 4). Nevertheless, only one of them is described as a reliable leader, Spinelli, while Miss Finster and Ashley Q. show negative personality traits. As regards the male second leaders, Jordan and Jerome, they are seen as rational and loyal leaders who can be trusted. It has been also detected that main leaders tend to be the protagonists of each group. The above observations underscore what may be problematic issues as far as the series target audience is concerned. As Kalayci points

out, “cartoon messages can have a tremendous effect on young children, [...] they create most of their world through what they observe” (245), which means that if cartoon series project inequality and this is naturalized, they may help perpetuate an unequal society.

Even so, we should bear in mind that *Recess*, which enjoys a large audience, has received both numerous positive and negative reviews by critics and audiences. In fact, most of them are favorable and refer to the show as a very funny and entertaining series suitable for wide audiences. Furthermore, adult viewers point out as its most relevant positive aspects the fact that it promotes friendship and teamwork, as well as the importance of enjoying childhood and engaging in games. In addition, a review made by a child points out that Spinelli provides a great role model as well as a highly relatable and enjoyable character. On the other hand, *Recess* has also received some negative criticism on account of some stereotypes depicted or the bullying or violence against the students who are considered geeks or weak (Adult User Reviews for *Recess*, para(s) 1-3). Interestingly, it would appear that stereotypes are perceived by the adult audiences as something problematic, even though not much emphasis is placed on leadership and gender, which may suggest that society at large is so used to gender role imbalance that we accept it uncritically.

6. CONCLUSION

The hit TV show *Recess* is a cartoon series in which different groups of children are formed in the schoolyard. In this way, studying leadership and its relationship with gender and stereotypes is an essential factor in understanding the image shown to children and adolescents in terms of gender roles. The study of the show’s different groups, their leaders and their main characters, enables us to conclude that this Disney series projects an unequal status quo in that traditional stereotypes and gender roles are maintained. Even if it is true that some characters depart from traditional gender roles, the bulk of our analysis reveals that male figures tend to occupy a position of superiority

over female characters, and that in turn, men are described with positive values, while women are portrayed with the most negative personality traits.

However, a positive note is that there is only one group formed exclusively by girls, since the other three are mixed groups, that is, they consist of boys and girls. This breaks away from traditionally established stereotypes, as it is not so usual for the two genders to form mixed groups in schools. However, the major gender differences in the series result from the positions occupied by the several characters and from character presentation itself. In the case of group 4, the all-girl group, this is presented as the antagonistic group that opposes the series' main characters, which ultimately positions its members as nasty girls.

The group's main leaders are always male, except for group 4, which is formed only by females. Principal Prickly, leader of group 1, is the school director and is described as a strict but responsible and empathetic man who is always looking forward to introducing improvements in the school so as to make the children feel comfortable. T.J. Detweiler is the leader of the protagonist gang (group 2), and he is characterized as a rebellious and impulsive child, but at the same time highly sociable and caring for his friends. The last main male leader is King Bob (group 3), who is portrayed as authoritarian and intimidating, and everyone must obey him, but his positive traits, such as being sociable and looking out for the welfare of everyone on the playground, clearly stand out. The fourth leader, Ashley A., is the only female main leader, and is described as a rich girl who is only concerned with fashion, and her way of having fun is to bully other students. As a result, we note that in *Recess* there is inequality in portraying stereotypes and gender roles. Male leaders, in spite of having flaws, have virtues invariably highlighted, while the only female leader's flaws are just as invariably emphasized. In addition, there is a willingness among male leaders to help others and therefore, to build a better and fairer "society," while the female leader is seen to be concerned only with the trivial and the superficial—an entrenched female cliché. These descriptions confirm established stereotypes and gender roles whereby women are associated with physical appearance and style, while men are intelligent and rational.

The second leaders stand out for being mostly female figures. Miss Finster (group 1) is the school secretary and a member of the teaching staff, and she is described as nosy and intimidating. It is unusual for her to show weakness. Spinelli (group 2) is a rebellious, nonconformist girl who is capable of getting into any trouble to help her friends and chase away her enemies. Jordan and Jerome (group 3) are King Bob's friends and advisors, and they are depicted as rational and loyal people who help and obey their leader in everything. The second leader of group 4 is Ashley Q., a rich and selfish girl who, like her leader, is dedicated to harming others. As we can see, as far as second leaders are concerned, the female figures predominate, but among them only Spinelli has positive personality traits. In this regard, we notice how traditional gender roles and stereotypes are reinforced since Miss Finster occupies an inferior position to the school principal's, while Ashley Q. embodies the stereotypical feminine concern with beauty and physical appearance. In turn, the male figures of Jordan and Jerome fit into these stereotypes as they are seen as rational and responsible leaders, while their female counterparts are portrayed as illogical and intrusive. Nevertheless, Spinelli breaks somewhat with the standard stereotypes as she is aggressive and combative, and she is not afraid of the consequences that may occur.

As for the protagonists of each group, it can be observed that normally the first leaders are the main characters —T.J. Detweiler, King Bob and Ashley Armbruster—. However, in group 1, the second leader, Miss Finster, is the protagonist since she is the one who participates the most in the plot. Moreover, in group 2, both leaders, T.J. Detweiler and Spinelli, are the protagonists. This makes a more balanced situation regarding gender and stereotypes because children and adolescents have male and female figures as main characters, so they can take them as a reference.

In this way, the study of the leaders and protagonists of *Recess* has allowed us to analyze whether the show follows the traditional gender roles and stereotypes set by society in its presentation of both personality traits and tasks of the different characters. As we have found out, there is a tendency for the main leaders to be male, while the second leaders are female. This projects an inequitable and unfair society because it places women in inferior positions to men. Furthermore, when it comes to female

characters, they are often described with negative adjectives, such as meddling and irrational, or as girls obsessed with physical appearance; by contrast, male characters are treated as good leaders, rational, loyal, and extroverted. Thus, the hypothesis that men tend to be principal leaders and that women are in inferior positions is confirmed. On the other hand, the second hypothesis—that gender does not matter in the series's characterization—has proven false, since the results of our analysis confirm that girls are characterized by using adjectives with negative connotations. The last hypothesis, that the protagonists belong to the male gender, has turned out to be equally untrue, since in this regard the situation is more balanced, there being three females and two males in this role.

Showing that the leaders in most groups are men and that women lack the capacity to be in command in a rational way is a consequential problem in society as *Recess* is a series aimed at children and teenagers. It is crucial not to forget that children learn by imitating the behaviors and situations they see, and nowadays television is one of the means by which they learn the most. In this way, parents have to carefully choose what series their children watch, because if as viewers they are systematically exposed to traditional gender roles and stereotypes, they will internalize this mindset as they grow up.

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