

INTRODUCTION

When a child is young everything they observe becomes instilled in them in some way (Witt 2000). Although the media has become more diverse and progressive over the years, children are still being taught gender stereotypes. **1 in 3 women** currently suffer from an eating disorder of some kind, caused by the perpetuation of constant negative messaging about their bodies (National Institute of Mental Health).

As children's media is one of the first exposures to this, it could be leading to the high rates. This study investigates whether sexism and objectification in children's media causes a susceptibility to body related mental illness.

Sexism's Prevalence in Children's Media

Palo Alto High School
Julia Noone



- Eyelashes
- Full head of styled hair
- Makeup
- Pink

- Eyelashes
- Full head of styled hair
- Makeup
- Pink
- "Dress"
- necklace

Figure 1,2, and 3 (left to right) Sloths from the ice age movie series* displaying stereotypical gender assigned traits

METHODOLOGIES

The original methodology for this study was to have a correlational study using a survey to get a wide pool of results from teenage girls on their experiences with this. However, the study was approved for a case study on myself.

There is a gap in knowledge for what is known about the effects of sexism in children's media on girls mental health, as it is minimally researched and much more focus is spent on the effects of social media. The data collected aims to close this divide and help people be aware of what they are consuming. The subject reflecting is me, the researcher, and a female teenager age 17. The reflection and questions were made by me as well, using a computer and Google Docs. I answered 8 questions about my favorite childhood media and how my confidence and mental state has been affected by the extreme expectations of women in media.

RESULTS

After obtaining the data, I proceeded to research and look deeper into the media I mentioned in my answer, through a more objective lens, searching for sexism and objectification.

Many of the characters I looked up to reflected my physical appearance: white with blonde hair.

1. **Barbie by Mattel**
2. **Betty Cooper from Archie Comics**
3. **Rapunzel from Tangled**

All of the characters have a slim body type or an exaggerated slimmer hourglass figure.

I felt that this was the way I was supposed to look, as all of my favorite media and characters reflected this.

One television show I enjoyed and still enjoy is called Winx Club (figure 4). Every female character in the show has an extremely small waist, legs, and arms while also being curvy. Even the older women in the show meant to be 100+ years old, have said body type. I remember wishing I was built the same way, even up until recently, agreeing that this affected how I felt about myself. Very young I had it ingrained in me that my body was meant to look a specific way, and that set very high standards that I was physically incapable of achieving.

IMPLICATIONS

This reflection is indicative of a link between the exposure of stereotypes or objectification and girls' mental health issues, specifically body-related illnesses. For the first 10 years of my life, my source of negative body imagery was children's media. Causation cannot be determined through this study, but the correlation is clear. That should be enough for parents, media companies such as Disney, and young girls to be concerned. If companies that produce popular children's media rethink their designs to be less limiting for women, young girls won't receive as much negative messaging so early. Parents can use this study to rethink the media they let their children consume, and watch out for early warning signs of mental illness.

REFERENCES



Figure 4
Bloom from
Winx

