

## **DEATH IN DISNEY FILMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH**

**MEREDITH COX**

**ERIN GARRETT**

**JAMES A. GRAHAM**

*The College of New Jersey, Ewing*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the potential influence of Disney films on children's concepts of death. A content analysis was performed on 23 death scenes from 10 selected full-length Disney Classic animated films. The portrayal of death focused on five categories: character status; depiction of death; death status; emotional reaction; and causality. The findings indicate that some animated Disney films present scenes that eclipse the permanence and irreversibility of death and often leave deaths (especially those of villains) emotionally unacknowledged. Previous work has shown that many children tend not to discuss death with their friends or parents for many reasons. More importantly, the films may serve as catalysts to introduce the concept of death into discussions between children, peers, and adults.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Death is an aspect of life that is not only inevitable but also painful, especially for children. Children do not have the knowledge or experience that adults have; thus, they are often unprepared to deal with the death of a loved one or even of a beloved cartoon character in a movie. Furthermore, it is not until about 10 years of age that healthy children achieve an understanding that death is irreversible, permanent, and inevitable (Brent, Speece, Lin, Dong, & Yang, 1996).

If death is a concept that many young children do not have a working understanding of, then why is it such a prominent theme in children's media, specifically in Disney movies? Do Disney's portrayals influence children's comprehension of death? The current content analysis describes and analyzes the portrayal of death in selected animated Disney films. In order to examine the possible affect that death scenes in Disney films might have for children, it is necessary to understand how children conceive of death.

### **Children's Understanding of Death**

Many of the classic Disney movies target young audiences who do not have very developed or accurate concepts of death. For instance, many children younger than five years old do not understand that death is final, and inevitable (Grollman, 1990; Speece & Brent, 1984). Between the ages of five and nine, children who do acknowledge the permanence and inevitability of death see death as something that only applies to older adults (Grollman, 1990; Speece & Brent, 1984). Some children who do not have a complete understanding of death often will fill in gaps in understanding with fantasy elements (Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992), which may be taken from the media that children view, such as Disney movies. If the media, specifically some Disney films, convey unrealistic messages about death, then aspects of those portrayals are likely to be internalized by children. These less than desirable notions about death may have an impact on how children will view later instances of death.

In general, children's comprehension of death depends on two factors: experience and developmental level. First, children's experiences with death (i.e., actual experience and what they have been told about death) are critical to their understanding of death (Speece & Brent, 1984). Second, the developmental level of the child also must be taken into account when examining the comprehension of death (Brent et al., 1996; Willis, 2002). For example, Willis pinpointed four aspects of death that children and adults do not view in the same way: irreversibility, finality, inevitability, and causality. Children may not understand that death is permanent and that it cannot be "fixed" or reversed. They also do not have enough life experience to realize that death is inevitable for all living things. Furthermore, because they do not think abstractly, some young children do not understand the causality of death.

There is much support to the idea that children have a very limited understanding of death (e.g., Baker et al., 1992; Brent et al., 1996; Grollman, 1990; Speece & Brent, 1984; Willis, 2002), and the partial understanding they do have is often based on fuzzy logic (Brent et al., 1996). Brent et al. found that most children do not fully understand that death is a universal, irreversible, and nonfunctional state (meaning that dead beings cannot do the things that the living do) until the age of 10 years. Interestingly, it was also found that even after children reach this level of understanding they might continue to struggle with the idea that death

is final, possibly because of certain religious beliefs. However, this may suggest a more mature understanding of death rather than a less mature one (Brent et al., 1996). Children with immature, binary concepts of death see people as either alive or dead, and do not consider the idea that there may be any other options based on religious values and ideas about afterlife.

According to Baker et al. (1992), the process of grieving after a loss and coming to understand death is a process that consists of psychological tasks that children progress through and eventually overcome their grief. The first stage involves *understanding what death is*, knowing its characteristics, and being able to recognize when it has happened. At this stage, it is important for children to feel self-protected, meaning that they need to know that just because someone or something has died does not mean the child or his or her family is in any immediate danger.

The middle phase involves *understanding that death is a reality and accepting the emotions that come along with that realization*. This may include reflecting on times spent with the deceased loved one and coming to terms with the fact that he or she is gone while still maintaining memories and an internal connection to that person. Thus, we should not give children the false hope that a loved one may “come back” after death, and we should not discourage them from remaining emotionally attached to the deceased individual (Baker et al., 1992). This phase shows a marked difference in the way that children and adults grieve. Many adults move through the process more quickly than children do because they may understand and have more actual experience with the concept of death. Thus, many adults do not have to spend as much time figuring out what has happened when a loved one is suddenly gone, as would a child.

The last phase of this process involves a *reorganization of a child's sense of identity and his or her relationships with others and with the environment*. The child will also be able to invest emotionally him- or herself in relationships with others without being overly afraid of losing that person to a death. At this stage, a well-adjusted child still remembers the loved one without fearing excessively that others will die and is able to cope with those memories and any sadness associated with them (Baker et al., 1992).

### **Parents Role in Children's Comprehension of Death**

There are other reasons why children may misunderstand death beyond the obvious cognitive limitations. Many children tend not to discuss death with their parents or friends because they think the subject is too unpleasant, frightening, or even unnecessary (Wass, Raup, & Sisler, 1989). The manner in which some parents communicate with their children about death may influence the child's comprehension of it. When it comes to talking about death, a lot of parents do so in a way that is very confusing and potentially harmful to children (e.g., Ryerson, 1977; Willis, 2002). It seems that some parents' main objective shifts

from explaining and teaching to *protecting*. For instance, rather than telling children why and how people die they may focus on downplaying the emotionality, seriousness, and reality of death.

Though their intentions are good, many adults often hinder children's understanding of death by using confusing terms and abstract language to explain the concept to them. They may say that someone has "passed away," which does not convey a realistic portrayal of death to children (Willis, 2002). They may use euphemisms (such as "sleeping for a long time" or "taken a long trip") in an attempt to downplay the impact of death in order to protect children, which only serves to confuse them. These phrases convey to the young child that the loved one who has "passed away" may "wake up" from their long nap or "come home" from their voyage (Willis, 2002). Furthermore, describing death to children as a long "sleep" is not only confusing but may foster a fear of going to sleep among children (Grollman, 1990).

Ryerson (1977) points out that sometimes parents avoid the topic of death altogether and are very awkward about discussing it with children. Many parents' hesitation to talk to children about death in a straightforward way likely stems from their own fears of death, which may have origins in the way that their own parents spoke to them about it. The implication is that this matter-of-fact manner of explaining death is likely to perpetuate a cycle of faulty communication between parents and children. Ryerson describes the mourning process in children as well as ways to help children cope with death. The use of fairy tales may be a source of identification and interest for children, and they can be used to facilitate discussion between children and adults about death and grieving.

The fairy tale has served as the most honest and clear-cut managing of death available to children over the ages (Dobson, 1977). According to Dobson (1977), its main purpose is to stimulate children's intellect and help them tackle their "darkest and scariest thoughts about separation, rejection, abandonment, and death" (p. 175). Fairy tales often contain non-threatening references to death, which makes them appropriate for use with children. Fairy tales, many of which have inspired many Disney films, present interesting and somewhat controversial portrayals of death and grieving.

### **Popular Children's Films, Children's Grieving Processes, and Death Education**

The present study is an exploratory analysis of death from animated Disney movies. In general, there is limited research that examines the relationship between popular children's films and children's comprehension of death. For instance, Sedney (1999) examined the portrayal of grief in young characters in children's films. The films all had hopeful messages showing the possibility for a happy life following the death of a loved one. However, the films showed differing degrees of grieving. Sedney points out that sometimes deaths are unacknowledged

completely, which is an aspect that is common to children's films, especially among those with missing parents. In other cases, there is an acknowledgment of death, but it is not grieved, as in *Bambi*. In contrast, in *The Lion King*, death is acknowledged and the young character grieves and displays a gamut of typical grieving emotions ranging from self-blame and anger to profound sadness. Sedney describes the merits of *The Lion King's* grief portrayal because it offers a realistic view of grief as well as a resolution to sadness. For this reason, this particular film has the potential to be an effective teaching tool to serve as a basis of discussion on the topic of death with children.

In contrast with Sedney (1999, 2002) who found positive aspects of portrayals of death in children's films, Schultz and Huet (2001) examined the highest grossing American films and Academy Award nominees and concluded that the majority of portrayals of death are unrealistic and sensational, and are rarely accompanied by realistic and normal grief reactions. This was true about some children's films as well. Many of the films did not either acknowledge death or use "death terminology," lending further support to the idea that our culture has taboos about discussing death in a straightforward manner (Schultz & Huet, 2001). Interestingly, Schultz and Huet point out that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) does not distinguish between types of violence and death when considering ratings, which also affects audiences, and most notably children.

As previously emphasized, the amount of research done on the media's influence on children's understanding of death is very limited. Many death educators propose some form of death education for children (Wass et al., 1989). How is this education to be initiated? We propose that using popular animated Disney films may be one way to intervene and may provide a foundation for discussion between children and adults about death. Specifically, we examined the portrayal of death and grieving in Disney films geared toward children, focusing on five factors: character status, depiction of death, death status, emotional reaction, and causality.

## METHOD

### Film Selection

The analyzed content consists of 10 Disney Classic animated full-length feature films. The movies were selected only if a death occurred or was a theme in the plotline. The movies were chosen from various decades in order to sample the portrayal of death across time in Disney films. The first animated Disney full-length feature film was released approximately 60 years ago; thus, films were selected from both the first 30 years of production (pre-1970s) and from the last 30 years (post-1970s). Due to a lack of full-length films with death scenes released before the 1970s, only three movies were selected from that period, whereas seven were selected from more recent decades. This limited selection

could also be attributed to the fact that full-length animated Disney movies were released on an average of three per decade in the past, whereas 14 were released in the 1980s and 1990s. The films were not chosen haphazardly; rather, the researchers went through the plot outlines of all animated Disney Classic films and chose from that list, being careful to select both older classics and more modern films that children are familiar with today. The movies examined for this study were: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Bambi* (1942), *Sleeping Beauty*, (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Lion King* (1994), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998), and *Tarzan* (1999).

### **Coding Categories**

Two coders watched the movies together and coded the data individually. Each character's death was analyzed by the following five coding criteria.

#### *Character Status*

This category refers to the role the character that died played in the plot. We coded for two different types of characters. First, a *protagonist* is a character that is seen as the "good guy," hero/heroine of the movie, or the main character whom the story revolves around. An *antagonist* is a character who is seen as the "bad guy," villain, nemesis, or enemy of the protagonist.

#### *Depiction of Death*

Refers to how the character's death was shown in the film. In an *explicit death* the audience sees that the character is definitely dead because the body is shown being physically damaged/killed and/or the dead, motionless body is shown on screen. An *implicit death* refers to one in which the audience can only assume that the character is dead based on the fact that they do not appear again in the film and/or that they have encountered something that would presumably result in death. Examples include seeing a shadow of a dead body or a character falling off a cliff. *Sleep death* refers to an instance in which a character falls into a state of prolonged sleep. Generally, this is the result of a spell due to an original intent to kill.

#### *Death Status*

This category refers to if a death was a true end of life or if it was shown as something negotiable that does not necessarily represent the absolute end of life. A *permanent/final* death is one in which the character does not return in any form. A *reversible* death is one where a character returns in one of two ways. A *reversible-same form* death is one in which the character seemingly comes back from a dead or seemingly dead state in his or her original body. In a

*reversible-altered form* death, the character returns either in a physically transformed state or in the form of a spirit.

#### *Emotional Reaction*

Refers to how the other characters in the movie responded to or dealt with death. *Positive emotion* refers to a character or characters being visibly happy (e.g., smiling, cheering) or showing signs of relief. *Negative emotion* refers to a character or characters reacting with frustration, remorse, anger, or with general signs of sadness (e.g., crying). *Lacking emotion* refers to characters reacting to death as if it is inconsequential or the death is not dealt with or acknowledged by all characters.

#### *Causality*

Causality refers to what led to or caused the death and whether the death was portrayed as being justified or unjustified. In a *purposeful* death, a character dies as the result of another character's intent to harm or kill him or her. An *accidental* death refers to one where the death was unintentional and was the result of an unplanned event. In addition to being either purposeful or accidental, death events were also coded as being either *justified* or *unjustified*. *Justified* deaths were ones in which the character who died had done something that warranted punishment; the general message conveyed was that they "deserved" to die. *Unjustified* deaths were ones in which the character did not do anything wrong; there was a sense that they did not deserve to die.

### **Intercoder Reliability**

Two coders rated the selected films. Intercoder reliability was judged as acceptable if the raters achieved more than 70% agreement on all categories, using Cohen's Kappa. The reliability between coders was tested on a randomly selected subsample of four films (40% of the sample). Intercoder reliability was computed for each of the five categories of interest: character status ( $K = 1.00$ ), depiction of death ( $K = 0.92$ ), death status ( $K = 1.00$ ), emotional reaction ( $K = 1.00$ ), and causality ( $K = 0.87$ ).

## **RESULTS**

Our study examined the portrayal of death and grieving in Disney films geared toward children, and focused on five factors.

### **Character Status**

A total of 23 death scenes occurred in the 10 Disney films analyzed. Protagonists and antagonists were portrayed nearly equally in those scenes. Out of the

23 characters who died, 52% were protagonists ( $n = 12$ ) and 48% ( $n = 11$ ) were antagonists (see Table 1).

### Depiction of Death

Implicit death accounted for 43% of total deaths ( $n = 10$ ) and explicit death ( $n = 11$ ) accounted for 48%. We found that 64% of explicit deaths occurred among protagonists ( $n = 7$ ) while only 36% of explicit deaths were the deaths of antagonists ( $n = 4$ ). In contrast, implicit deaths occurred more among antagonists: 70% of antagonists died in implicit death scenes ( $n = 7$ ), whereas only 30% of protagonists did ( $n = 3$ ). Sleep death was not nearly as common as “real” death portrayals, occurring in 9% of death instances ( $n = 2$ ). Both sleep deaths occurred among protagonists (see Table 1).

### Death Status

A large majority of deaths (74%) were portrayed as permanent, final, and irreversible ( $n = 17$ ). Out of the permanent deaths, 59% were those of antagonists ( $n = 10$ ) and 41% were protagonists ( $n = 7$ ). Reversible death occurred in 26% of death scenes ( $n = 6$ ). Of the six reversible deaths, 67% ( $n = 4$ ) of characters returned in their same form and 33% ( $n = 2$ ) reappeared in altered forms. All of the reversible deaths were among protagonists (see Table 2).

### Emotional Reaction

In terms of reactions to a character’s death, the most prevalent type of emotion displayed by characters was negative emotion, which occurred in 48% of death scenes ( $n = 11$ ). Negative emotions included typical grieving responses such as fear, crying, and expressing anger or frustration over a loss. Out of the negative emotional responses, 91% ( $n = 10$ ) were for the deaths of protagonists, whereas only 9% ( $n = 1$ ) resulted from the death of an antagonist. Positive emotion, indicated by happiness, relief, or celebration of a loss, occurred in only 13% of deaths ( $n = 3$ ). Positive emotion resulted solely from the deaths of antagonists.

Table 1. Depiction of Death by Character Type

Depiction of death	Protagonist	%	Antagonist	%	Total
Explicit death	7	63.64	4	36.36	11
Implicit death	3	30.0	7	70.0	10
Sleep death	2	100.0	0	0	2
Total	12	52.17	11	47.83	23

**Note:** Percentages are row percentages.

Interestingly, neutral or lacking emotion occurred in 39% of death scenes ( $n = 9$ ), which is nearly as frequently as grieving/negative emotion did. The majority of instances of lacking emotion (78%) were associated with the deaths of antagonists ( $n = 7$ ), whereas only 22% of protagonist deaths resulted in neutral or lacking emotion ( $n = 2$ ) (see Table 3).

### Causality

Purposeful deaths occurred most frequently, i.e., 70% ( $n = 16$ ) of all deaths. Out of these purposeful deaths, 38% ( $n = 6$ ) were justified and 62% ( $n = 10$ ) were unjustified. Accidental deaths made up 30% of total deaths ( $n = 7$ ). Out of accidental deaths, 71% ( $n = 5$ ) were justified and 29% ( $n = 2$ ) were seen as unjustified. When justification was considered, regardless of motivation or cause of death, it was found that the respective prevalences of justified and unjustified deaths were nearly equal: justified deaths accounted for 48% of all deaths ( $n = 11$ ) and unjustified deaths accounted for 52% of deaths ( $n = 12$ ).

When both aspects of the causality category were considered together (purposeful/accident and justified/unjustified), the following was found: all purposeful, justified deaths resulted in the death of an antagonist ( $n = 6$ ), and all purposeful, unjustified deaths were those of the protagonists ( $n = 10$ ). All of the

Table 2. Death Status by Character Types

Death status	Protagonist	%	Antagonist	%	Total
Reversible/Same	4	100	0	0	4
Reversible/Altered	2	100	0	0	2
Permanent/Final	7	41.18	10	58.82	17
Total	13	56.52	10	43.48	23

**Note:** Percentages are row percentages.

Table 3. Emotional Reactions by Character Type

Emotional reaction	Protagonist	%	Antagonist	%	Total
Positive emotion	0	0	3	100	3
Negative emotion	10	90.9	1	9.1	11
Lacking emotion	2	22.22	7	77.78	9
Total	12	52.17	11	47.83	23

**Note:** Percentages are row percentages.

accidental, justified deaths were to antagonists ( $n = 5$ ) and the accidental, unjustified deaths were to all protagonists ( $n = 2$ ) (see Table 4).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of our content analysis was to examine the depiction of death in Disney movies. Based on the content analysis of 23 death scenes in 10 Disney films, several trends were observed. Each of the five aspects of death portrayals is discussed separately.

### Character Status

The deaths shown in the films were comprised of almost equal numbers of protagonists and of antagonists. This demonstrates a fair distribution of the portrayal of “good” and “bad” characters, showing that both character types are susceptible to death. Many children viewing these scenes receive the message that even good characters that we care about may also die (Brent et al., 1996; Willis, 2002).

### Depiction of Death

The depictions of explicit and implicit deaths were fairly equal. Explicit deaths were seen more in scenes where protagonists died. This can be viewed as a positive point because these scenes demonstrate real, explicit deaths of characters to whom the viewer has developed an attachment. However, this can be potentially traumatic for some children because they actually must witness a death. An example is seen in *The Lion King*, where a child must watch as Mufasa is thrown to his death.

Table 4. Cause of Death by Character Type

Cause of death	Protagoniste	%	Antagonist	%	Total
Accidental–justified	0	0	5	100	5
Accidental–unjustified	2	100	0	0	2
Purposeful–justified	0	0	6	100	6
Purposeful–unjustified	10	100	0	0	10
Total	12	52.17	11	47.83	23

**Note:** Percentages are row percentages.

The fact that implicit deaths occurred mostly among antagonists may send the message that their deaths are inconsequential in comparison to those of the protagonists. This can perhaps be seen as negative due to the fact that the antagonists' deaths are often merely implied (rather than being explicitly described).

Though sleep deaths only occurred twice out of 23 total deaths, it is important to discuss the implications of this type of portrayal. The sleep deaths occurred in two older films: *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*, which is likely due to the fact that before the 1970s presenting death to audiences in animated films was not considered as big of an issue as it is today. Instead, the issue was dealt with through the use of the sleep deaths, in which spells meant to incur death were magically altered to produce only sleep in characters, rather than death. The fact that sleep deaths did not occur in Disney films released post-1970s may be an indication that children's exposure to death has increased and is now a somewhat less taboo issue in our society.

### **Death Status**

The majority of deaths shown in the selected Disney films were permanent. This is a positive message because it enforces the idea that death is a permanent phenomenon, a concept that many young children do not fully grasp (Baker et al., 1992; Brent et al., 1996; Grollman, 1990; Willis, 2002). Seeing this in Disney films might help some children develop this understanding sooner. However, if they are left unaided in understanding these scenes, they may be upset at the permanence of death. Therefore, because many young children lack the cognitive abilities and experiences required to comprehend the concept of death fully, it is important for parents or teachers to guide them through the processes of learning about death.

Of the deaths that occurred, only six were shown as reversible. All of these reversible deaths occurred among protagonists, showing that antagonists or "bad guys" do not get a second chance at life, at least in some Disney films. Protagonists, on the other hand, fare much better. Half of the protagonists that had died in all 10 films "came back" in some way. An example of a scene that represents this concept is one in which Mufasa returns to communicate with Simba in *The Lion King*. This shows many children that loved ones can always be a part of them, even after death. However, young children may confuse this idea with the notion that the deceased may actually return (Worden & Silverman, 1996).

### **Emotional Reaction**

In terms of emotion shown over death, almost all of the negative emotion was shown as a result of protagonist's deaths. This may provide some children who lack experience with death with a model of grieving (Baker et al., 1992). Presumably, when children see characters grieve and show sadness or frustration

over the deaths of loved ones, they may learn that these are acceptable and normal behaviors.

Positive emotional reactions to death occurred solely for antagonists. However, this was not common; the deaths of only three “bad guys” resulted in positive emotion such as visible happiness and relief over their deaths. Most of the deaths that lacked any real emotional reactions were those of antagonists. This shows that the death of a character that is disliked may not warrant clapping and cheering but that it is not worth recognizing it at all. In addition, when one of these deaths *is* acknowledged, it is done in a positive and celebratory manner.

### **Causality**

It was found that all of the justified deaths within the 10 Disney films were those of antagonists. This further demonstrates the trend in Disney films to vilify the antagonists to a point where they are seen as deserving their death. Along the same lines, all unjustified deaths were those of protagonists, showing that good characters never deserve to die.

The deaths of antagonists often result from accidents. However, we are made aware by the films that the antagonists deserve to die because they have done negative things, usually to a protagonist. The fact that they die accidentally allows them to “get what they deserve” while still allowing the protagonists to look good. In other words, protagonists are too good to kill others; thus, the antagonists must die accidentally. For example, in *Beauty in the Beast*, Gaston (the antagonist) stabs the Beast (the protagonist). The Beast, writhing in pain, “accidentally” causes Gaston to lose his balance on the castle tower, which results in Gaston falling to his implied death. When protagonists died, antagonists most often purposely killed them. This further demonstrates the evil of the antagonists.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this content analysis was to examine how death is depicted in Disney films. This study is limited in scope, but it serves as a good starting point for the work of others in the area of animated film and children’s understanding of death. We are not making conclusive statements about the effects of media on actual children; however, we are suggesting possibilities worth further examination. Our conclusions, based on the content analysis of 10 Disney films containing 23 death scenes, indicate that Disney’s portrayal of death may be both good and bad; yet they can serve as effective learning tools for children. Some portrayals of death in Disney films send ambiguous messages about death and may be confusing to many young children. As stated earlier, some young children do not have the cognitive ability or experience to understand death fully (Brent et al., 1996; Speece & Brent, 1984; Willis, 2002). Furthermore, many animated Disney films contain moral implications. The results from this content

analysis indicate that the antagonists (“bad guys”) deserve to die. These aspects of death in the film may serve as discussion points for parents to talk about their own family’s beliefs and morality.

These films may give children something to relate to when they are experiencing a loss. Watching films in which characters die may help children understand real death in a way that is less traumatic and threatening. Based on many of the movie scenes, children may better learn how to deal with death in terms of grieving and understanding what has happened when someone or something dies.

Depictions of death may also serve as springboards for discussion between children and adults about death. As previously mentioned, many parents try to downplay the severity and reality of death when discussing it with children (Grollman, 1990; Ryerson, 1977; Willis, 2002). However, using Disney movies may be a more comfortable way of discussing this difficult topic for both parents and children. Even films with unrealistic messages about death can be used as tools for pursuing discussion about death. Parents can watch Disney films with their children and verbally walk them through a death scene, deconstructing aspects that may be unrealistic and clarifying points that are exaggerated or confusing. This idea of using Disney films to discuss death can be extended to educational and counseling settings as well.

Though our content analysis provides interesting insight into the portrayal of death in Disney films, there are some limitations of this study that should be addressed. First, because the current study focused solely on Disney movies that were known to contain death, our sampling method was one of convenience. Future research may benefit from examining a wider variety of children’s media. In addition, due to the small sample of films, the results may not generalize to other animated features. Continuing studies should be done on other types of animated films besides Disney movies.

Further studies may be done utilizing concrete hypotheses based on current findings. The findings from this and future studies can be used to implement new ways of educating children about death, both in home and counseling settings, possibly using Disney films as springboards for discussion. It may also be interesting to examine the next wave of Disney films, as they are released, to determine whether Disney’s past and current trends in death portrayals remain the same. Although findings in this area may someday enlighten the creators of Disney movies to their potential to impact children’s conceptions of death.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, J. E., Sedney, M. A., & Gross, E. (1992). Psychological tasks for bereaved children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *62*, 105-116.
- Brent, S. B., Speece, M. W., Lin, C., Dong, Q., & Yang, C. (1996). The development of the concept of death among Chinese and U.S. children 3-17 years of age: From binary to “fuzzy” concepts? *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying*, *33*, 67-83.

Dobson, J. (1977). Children, death, and the media. *Counseling and Values, 21*(3), 172-179.

Grollman, E. A. (1990). *Talking about death: A dialogue between parent and child* (3rd ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Ryerson, M. S. (1977). Death education and counseling for children. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 11*, 165-174.

Schultz, N. W., & Huet, L. M. (2001). Sensational! Violent! Popular! Death in American movies *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying, 42*, 137-149.

Sedney, M. A. (1999). Children's grief narratives in popular films. *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying, 39*, 315-325.

Sedney, M. A. (2002). Maintaining connections in children's grief narratives in popular film. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 72*, 279-288.

Speece, M. W., & Brent, S. B. (1984). Children's understanding of death: A review of three components of a death concept. *Development, 55*, 1671-1686.

Wass, H., Raup, J. L., & Sisler, H. H. (1989). Adolescents and death on television: A follow-up study. *Death Studies, 13*, 161-173.

Willis, C. A. (2002). The grieving process in children: Strategies for understanding, educating, and reconciling children's perceptions of death. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 29*, 221-226.

Worden, J. W., & Silverman, P. R. (1996). Parental death and the adjustment of school-age children. *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying, 33*, 91-102.

Direct reprint requests to:

James A. Graham, Ph.D.  
The College of New Jersey  
Department of Psychology  
P.O. Box 7718  
Ewing, NJ 08628-0718  
e-mail: jgraham@tcnj.edu