Characteristics of Caregivers in Disney Animations

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Objectives: To assess Disney's animated films regarding development of the conception of family for children, we examined types and roles of caregivers in films. **Methods**: The subjects were 54 Disney animations, from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) to Moana (2016). The authors found one main character and one person (or animal) as a caregiver, who (which) takes care of a main character in each film. We analyzed the caregivers' type, and assessed the role as a caregiver was given to a main character, especially in the case where parents are living. **Results**: In classifying the type of caregivers, 24 (44.5%) cases have both parents (adoptive or biologic) living in the films, no comments about parents in 21 (38.9%) cases, and orphaned main characters in 9 (16.6%) cases. Among the 24 animations in which parent(s) can be identified, caregivers in 9 animations fulfilled full functions fit for the criteria as caregivers. **Conclusion**: From the perspective of family, Disney animations have an atypical family structure, and reveal an insufficient caregiver role. This perspective must be considered in the short and long term, as to how the character of caregivers in these animations may influence development of the conception of a family in youth.

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Introduction

The life situation of the characters presented in an animated feature is absorbed by a child to form his or her concept of 'the ethnicity, generation, gender and the parent or the family' (Zurcher et al. 2018). The most accessible animated features for children are Disney animated films, which are called 'the Art of Animation' (Johnston and Thomas 1981). Parents accept these animated films without much critical thinking, allowing their children to be exposed to them because Disney animated features generally rework older stories, such as Andersen's or the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales, so they are easily accepted by people with different cultures (Kim 2004). Disneyland, which opened in Anaheim, California in 1955, also contributed greatly to highlighting the family nature of Disney animated features. Disneyland was Walt Disney's idea of an amusement park where families, not just kids, could go and have fun together. In addition to profit-

ability, Disneyland became the 'worlds' biggest toy' for children and adults because of being able to meet fairy tale characters and castles in real life (Gabler 2007).

One of the strengths of Disney animated features is that the main characters come from families facing hardships and must struggle against adversity to achieve their goals. Some scholars have suggested that positive representations of young main characters in trouble may offer hope to the negative and incongruent family stereotypes (Pistole and Marson 2005). Hence, these messages may be productive in building children's resiliency (Zurcher et al. 2018). In a recent analysis of 85 Disney animated films ranging from the years 1937–2018, over 75% of all Disney animated films depicted warm and supportive familial interactions, with 78.8% of the films illustrating a positive relationship between the protagonist and his or her family (Zurcher et al. 2018).

Although the Disney brand is synonymous with family entertainment, there is relatively limited empirical research examining Disney's portrayals of family and, specifically, parental figures (Holcomb et al. 2015). In Disney animations, there are over-representations of incongruent family structures–such as a single-parent family, absence of parental fig-

ures or orphans–compared with traditional real-world families. Because Disney's animations have featured a steady supply of dysfunctional and broken families, the functioning of the family as a caregiver is not sufficiently expressed, and a rather inadequate family circumstance is emphasised; hence, there are controversies about the appropriateness of Disney animated films as family movies (Garlen and Sandlin 2017).

Considering these controversies, there is an increasing demand for a re-evaluation of Disney animated features regarding their distorted parental relationship and family type (Holcomb et al. 2015). As far as we know, there has been no study of the type of caregiver and role for all Disney animated films. Therefore, the authors analysed all the Disney animated films released so far, focusing on the types and roles of caregivers.

Subjects and Methods

Subjects

We reviewed 59 Disney animated films to 2016 (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2017). After watching all the films, the authors discussed the criteria of the films that would be selected to be reviewed or not. Five films were excluded: two films without a consistent story line [Make Mine Music (1946) and Melody Time (1948)] and three for their short running times [Paperman, 7 minutes (2012), Get a Horse, 6 minutes (2013), and Feast, 7 minutes (2014)]. Series such as Fantasia (1940)/Fantasia 2000 (2000), The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh (1977)/Winnie the Pooh (2011) and The Rescuers (1977)/The Rescuers Down Under (1990) were counted as an independent film because they are not sequels and have their own stories; these, though, were analysed separately. Finally, a total of 54 films were analysed.

Methods

Caregiver's type

To analyse the caregivers' characteristics, the authors decided to focus on a main character and the caregiver related to the main character for each film (Table 1). A caregiver is defined as someone who (which) has a close relationship with the main character and provides for the needs of the main character. After choosing one caregiver related to the main character each film, the caregiver's type was set based on the time when the caregiver appeared in the main character's growth process. The caregivers' portrayal were based on Callister et al.'s family configuration (Callister et al. 2007): single-parent families (whether biological, adoptive or step); families (whether biological or adoptive) with both

parents; orphans without adoptive or foster parents; and a main character without caregiver for whom the parents did not appear are explored (Table 1). For each film, the authors noted the year of the film released.

Role as a caregiver

The authors analysed each film to see how the caregivers performed their roles. For each animated film, fulfilment of the role as a caregiver was determined by evaluating four items (meeting basic needs, protection of youth, guiding development and advocacy) as pass or fail, which was modified from Small and Eastman's conceptual framework (Small and Eastman 1991). The followings are the details of the criteria for each item: 1) meeting basic needs–'offer child care for young children,' 'provide meals,' and 'provide referrals to social and/or community services if necessary'; 2) protection of youth– 'parental monitoring of children's behaviour while taking into account their children's increasing needs for autonomy and privacy,' 'teach children necessary survival skills such as dealing with peer pressure and self-care,' and 'parental education to identify symptoms of common adolescent problems'; 3) guiding development–'learning and practice of parental competencies such as warmth, demandingness, balance of power, communication, conflict resolution, and positive role modelling' and 'parents' consistency with the authoritative parenting style'; 4) advocacy–'parental awareness of their right and responsibility to be advocates for their children.'

Ethics statement

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Kyung Hee University Hospital (KMC IRB 1534-08).

Results

Caregivers' type

Parents appeared or were commented on in 24 (44.5%) films: for biologic parent(s), both parents appeared in six, single father in four, and single mother in four; for adoption, both parents appeared in three, single father in three, and single mother in two; for step-parents, a single mother appeared in two (Table 2). The main characters are orphans in nine (16.6%) films, and there were no comments about parents in 21 films (38.9%) (Table 2).

Role as a caregiver

Among the 24 films in which at least one parent appeared, authors concluded that the caregivers in nine films fulfilled all four functions. Fulfilling only some functions as a caregiver for the first half of the movies and then the rest of the

Table 1. Caregiver type in each Disney animation film (n=54)

No.	Title (year released)	Main character	Type of caregivers				
			Type of parents				Other types
			BF	BM	SF/AF	SM/AM	
1	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	Snow White				✓ (SM)	
2	Pinocchio (1940)	Pinocchio			✓ (AF)		
3	Fantasia (1940)	Mickey Mouse					PN
4	Dumbo (1941)	Dumbo		✓			
5	Bambi (1942)	Bambi	✓	✓			
6	Saludos Amigos (1943)	Donald Duck					PN
7	The Three Caballeros (1944)	Donald Duck					PN
8	Fun and Fancy Free (1947)	Bongo					PN
9	The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad (1949)	Mr. Toad					PN
10	Cinderella (1950)	Cinderella				✓ (SM)	
11	Alice in Wonderland (1951)	Alice					PN
12	Peter Pan (1953)	Peter Pan					PN
13	Lady and the Tramp (1955)	Lady					PN
14	Sleeping Beauty (1959)	Aurora	✓	✓			
15	101 Dalmatians (1961)	Pongo					PN
16	The Sword in the Stone (1963)	Arthur			✓ (AF)		
17	The Jungle Book (1967)	Mowgli			✓ (AF)	✓ (AM)	
18	The Aristocats (1970)	Duchess					PN
19	Robin Hood (1973)	Robin Hood					PN
20	The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh (1977)	Winnie the Pooh					PN
21	The Rescuers (1977)	Miss Bianca					PN
22	The Fox and the Hound (1981)	Tod					OR
23	The Black Cauldron (1985)	Taran					OR
24	The Great Mouse Detective (1986)	Basil of Baker Street					PN
25	Oliver & Company (1988)	Oliver					OR
26	The Little Mermaid (1989)	Ariel	✓				
27	The Rescuers Down Under (1990)	Bernard					PN
28	Beauty and the Beast (1991)	Belle	✓				
29	Aladdin (1992)	Aladdin					OR
30	The Lion King (1994)	Simba		✓			
31	Pocahontas (1995)	Pocahontas	✓				
32	The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996)	Quasimodo			✓ (AF)		
33	Hercules (1997)	Hercules			✓ (AF)	✓ (AM)	
34	Mulan (1998)	Mulan	✓	✓			
35	Tarzan (1999)	Tarzan				✓ (AM)	
36	Fantasia 2000 (2000)	Mickey Mouse					PN
37	Dinosaur (2000)	Aladar				✓ (AM)	
38	The Emperor's New Groove (2000)	Kuzco					PN
39	Atlantis: The Lost Empire (2001)	Milo Thatch					OR
40	Lilo & Stitch (2002)	Lilo Pelekai					OR
41	Treasure Planet (2002)	Jim Hawkins		✓			
42	Brother Bear (2003)	Kenai					OR
43	Home on the Range (2004)	Maggie					PN
44	Chicken Little (2005)	Chicken Little	✓				
45	Meet the Robinsons (2007)	Lewis			✓ (AF)	✓ (AM)	

Table 1. Caregiver type in each Disney animation film (n=54) (continued)

No.	Title (year released)	Main character	Type of caregivers				
			Type of parents				Other types
			BF	BM	SF/AF	SM/AM	
46	Bolt (2008)	Bolt					PN
47	The Princess and the Frog (2009)	Tiana		✓			
48	Tangled (2010)	Rapunzel	✓	✓			
49	Winnie the Pooh (2011)	Winnie the Pooh					PN
50	Wreck-It Ralph (2012)	Wreck-It Ralph					PN
51	Frozen (2013)	Anna					OR
52	Big Hero 6 (2014)	Hiro Hamada					OR
53	Zootopia (2016)	Judy	✓	✓			
54	Moana (2016)	Moana	✓	✓			

BF: biological father, BM: biological mother, AF: adoptive father, AM: adoptive mother, SF: stepfather, SM: stepmother, OR: orphan, PN: parents not appearing

Table 2. Overall proportions of caregivers' type in Disney animation films (n=54)

Type of caregivers	Number (%)
Parent(s) appeared or commented	
Single father	
Biologic	4
Adoptive	3
Single mother	
Biologic	4
Adoptive	2
Stepmother	2
Subtotal (single parent)	15 (27.7)
Both	
Adoptive	3
Biologic	6
Subtotal (both parents)	9 (16.7)
Subtotal (single and both)	24 (44.4)
Orphan	9 (16.7)
Uncertain or no comments about caregiver	21 (38.9)
Total	54 (100.0)

functions for the last half was present in five films; an incomplete fulfilment throughout the movies appeared in eight films, and no fulfilment was present in two (Table 3).

Discussion

Even considering the fact that a movie is a setting for a dramatic effect and fun, the representation of the family structure within Disney animated films is quite distant from the generally accepted family concept. A percentage of parents alive, single or both was 24/54 (44.5%) in this study. In the United States in 2016, the most predominant family arrangement in case of parent(s) living together with their children was both parents and unmarried children (69%) followed by single mother or father households (23%) and a family of the children's guardians (4%) (US Census Bureau 2016). According to the population and Housing Census of Korea in 2016, the largest number of family types were composed of parent(s) and unmarried children: both parents and children (66.1%), followed by single mother and unmarried children (15.8%) and single father and children (2.7%) (KO-SIS 2016).

One of the incongruent representations of Disney animated families compared with real-world families is an over-representation of single parents (Zurcher et al. 2018). Single parents appeared in 15 films among the 24 films where parent(s) appeared in this study. When parents are removed from the storylines without any reasonable explanation, parent–child interactions that illustrate a caregiver's support, protection, guidance, and advocacy will be absent. This can negatively influence the development of one's concept of family, such as by recognising a distorted setting as reality, even if it is a virtual situation made for dramatic fun (Tanner et al. 2003). Often, Disney animations do not explain why a spouse does not exist when a single parent comes along. Even a parent sometimes dies without any specific reason or explanation. These situations give children a sense of fear and trauma that they can lose their parents at any time, and it may affect children into adulthood as well (Collier and Gaier 1958). In particular, the younger the child is when exposed to fear, the longer he or she will remember the episode (Harrison and Cantor 1999).

As the marriage rate decreases from 7.5 per 1,000 population in 2006 to 7.0 in 2016 in the United States, the divorce rate becomes lower from 3.7 per 1,000 total population in 2006 to 3.0 in 2016. However, the remarriages were 27% among all marriages in 2016. The proportion of divorced

Table 3. Caregivers' role of parents in Disney animation films (n=24)

Type of caregivers	Title	Role as a caregiver*				Note
		①	②	③	④	
Single father	BF					
	The Little Mermaid	O	O	△	△	
	Beauty and the Beast	O	X	O	O	
	Pocahontas	O	O	△	△	
	Chicken Little	O	O	△	△	
	AF					
	Pinocchio	O	O	X	X	
	The Sword in the Stone	O	O	X	X	
	The Hunchback of Notre Dame	O	X	X	X	
Single mother	BM					
	Dumbo	O	O	X	X	
	The Lion King	O	O	O	O	GE
	Treasure Planet	O	O	O	O	GE
	The Princess and the Frog	O	O	O	O	GE
	AM					
	Tarzan	O	O	O	O	GE
	Dinosaur	O	O	O	O	GE
	SM					
	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	X	X	X	X	
	Cinderella	X	X	X	X	
Both parents	AP					
	The Jungle Book	O	O	O	O	GE
	Hercules	O	O	O	O	GE
	Meet the Robinsons	O	O	O	O	GE
	BP					
	Bambi	O	O	O	O	GE
	Sleeping Beauty	X	O	X	X	
	Mulan	O	O	△	△	
	Tangled	O	X	X	X	
	Zootopia	O	O	X	X	
	Moana	O	O	△	△	

*Role as a caregiver: ① Meeting basic needs, ② Protecting adolescents, ③ Guiding and supporting development, ④ Advocacy. △: parent as a caregiver, not in the first half, but roles in the later part. AF: adoptive father AM: adoptive mother AP: adoptive parents BF: biological father BM: biological mother BP: biological parents, SM: step mother, GE: good enough role as a caregiver, satisfied with four functions throughout the movie

couples with children under 19 years of age was almost half of the total number of divorced individuals (47.5%) in Korea in 2016 (KOSIS 2016). Considering the divorce and remarriage rate and consequent increase of youth experiencing parental divorce, if a child internalises the Disney representa-

tion of divorced families only including one parent, the child's fear of a loss of a parent through divorce may be unnecessarily heightened because he or she may worry about never seeing one of his or her parents again after a divorce (Tanner et al. 2003). Unless parents explain the reason for the separation of family members or divorce, the children in a single-parent family may blame themselves for a parent leaving, perhaps imagining their bad behaviour as driving the mother or father away (Visher and Visher 1979).

Among the debates regarding how families function in Disney animated films, the prejudice about stepmothers is one of the most influential (Visher and Visher 1979), where there is still a groundless belief in the devil stepmother (Arnold 1979). Although many people think that stepmothers appear in several Disney animation films, stepmothers, in fact, appear only in two films: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) and Cinderella (1950). Despite the fact that Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was released about 80 years ago (1937), it is still watched by children today, and is ranked tenth to date and ranked first in terms for animated films (Box Office Mojo 2019). The image of the bad stepmother can continue to affect one into adulthood (Collier and Gaier 1958). In the case report of a girl being sexually abused, she depicted her situation like the abuse from the stepmother in Cinderella, which is evidence that Cinderella's evil stepmother image is socially acceptable (Grünberg 1994). Children's value systems can influence their lives and society in various ways. The prejudice against stepmothers may affect the child's perceptions and adaptation status, which is especially alarming considering the number of remarried families being on the rise. This, in turn, provides a source of conflict in remarried families (Visher and Visher 1979). Interestingly, Disney Studios has not produced an animation with a stepmother after Cinderella, but the exact reason behind this has not been found in the literature.

The diverse type of family structures presented in Disney animation can be like two sides of a coin: to think positive, it can be advantageous in that films show the various family types of modern society; to be negative, considering that children can accept fictionality in the media as a norm of reality, it is not possible to rule out the fact that children risk perceiving a generalised family form as a universal reality (Callister et al. 2007). However, from the psychoanalytic view, these animated films with atypical family structure can enhances fantasy and rather contact with reality (Peller 1959). Because most Disney's animations are based on famous fairytales or folklores and such successful stories might have a universal daydream such as 'the fantasy of loss and return,' 'the fantasy of the reversal of roles,' and 'the fantasy of hero (Oedipal-level stories)' (Peller 1959). Thus, the essential part

of a story, of its plot, of the story characters' motivations and even conflicts also remain unconscious or preconscious and for this very reason arouse children's emotions and sympathy most effectfully. For a normal development in children, Disney's animated films based on fairy tales can provide resolutions of psychic conflict by providing symbols for the threatening thing that has happened or could happen (Airas 2015).

Children interact with family members and see their parents' and family's roles. Children can also learn and understand the roles through media, including animated features. In the current study, of the 54 animated films, parents appeared as caregivers in 24 films, and in less than half of these 24 films (9/24), the caregivers displayed good parenting. On the contrary, a recent analysis of 104 families in Disney's animated feature films showed that over 75% of all Disney animated films depicted warm and supportive familial interactions, with 78.8% of the films illustrating a positive relationship between the protagonist and family (Zurcher et al. 2018). The difference of the percentage of good parenting suggests that the rating can be influenced by the perspectives regarding the constitution of family and variables of interest in each study. The authors in the current study rated the parental roles based on the criteria of the functions and responsibilities developed by Small and Eastman (1991), and these ratings probably do not reflect an objective evaluation of parents' roles toward their children because parental roles are changing and differ based on the culture and generation. Unfortunately, there is also a lack of evidence from long-term studies that follow up on how Disney animated features affect one's concept formation of parents' role in children's lives. Further prospective and retrospective research are essential to see the impact of Disney's animated films on children's character development. In particular, studies on how Disney animations are perceived by children who grow up in typical homes and children in atypical family structure are needed. To overcome the shortage of evidence here, fairy tales, though often read by children, have usually been told first by some intimate person, such as mother, grandmother, or father, whose personality becomes inextricably bound into the whole (Macquisten and Pickford 1942), and parents should guide children and help them think critically about potentially harmful or distorted content in films; doing so may help children develop sound or, at least less stigmatised, family and parental images (Wilson 2008).

The current study has some limitations. First, because the analysis is based on films made during a fairly long period of production from 1937 to 2016, some variables, including time and cultural changes, were not taken into consideration. Second, it may not be appropriate to analyse Disney animat-

ed films as research subjects because a dramatic setting may be necessary when considering the intention of the film is for entertainment. Third, there is a possibility that the subjective opinion of the researchers has interfered with the analysis and classification work when it comes to the characteristics of the research method; a more definitive quantitative and qualitative judgement criteria might have helped here. Finally, to determine who a caregiver is, the authors set and analysed the main characters. However, the current article has focused on the characteristics of caregivers, and we did not discuss anything more about the main characters. Beyond these limitations, the current study is meaningful in that it is the first study to analyse all of Disney's animated features released over 80 years while looking at caregivers' type and role.

Conclusion

Disney's animated features, a classic family entertainment, are particularly impressive and entertaining, using beautiful images, music and stories to reach children. Parents and educators for youth have acknowledged both the entertainment and educational value of Disney animated features. However, there is an insufficient objective assessment of the scientific value and less scholarly discussion of these Disney movies, which has raised some controversies about unconditionally accepting Disney animated features as children and family movies. As has been shown, Disney animated features mostly adopt unusual or broken family types rather than the universal family form. Hence, we need more research to investigate the influence of these non-traditional caregivers on the children's concept of family.

Conflicts of Interest
The author have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

Author Contributions
Conceptualization: Geon Ho Bahn. Data curation: Yeon Jung Lee. Formal analysis: Yeon Jung Lee. Funding acquisition: Geon Ho Bahn. Investigation: Geon Ho Bahn. Methodology: Minha Hong, Seung Yup Lee. Project administration: Geon Ho Bahn, Seung Yup Lee. Writing—original draft: Yeon Jung Lee, Minha Hong. Writing—review & editing: Geon Ho Bahn.

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