Themes of Good and Evil in Disney Movies

Walt Disney’s first feature length film was produced in 1973: the famous story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. Like most of the Disney movies that followed, Snow White features a loveable and beautiful princess who battles the archetypal evil character… only to have good prevail at the end of the movie. For decades to come, Disney follows this model, embodying the “hero’s journey”, as its heroes embark on the ongoing mission to eradicate evil. While we remember the catchy sing-along tunes we sung as children, most Disney movies actually feature quite violent and disturbing images, ideas, and philosophies in their movies. It is not until adulthood, that we come to realize how intense these Disney messages are, and truly uncover the subliminal messages of good, evil, bad guy, good guy, that have insidiously sunk under our surfaces. How has our childhoods of Disney affected the way that we view basic concepts of good and evil?

The investigation of Disney’s effect on our perceptions of good and evil, will trace the roots of some of our key conceptions in the way we view the world around us. It may speak to the weight that we place on some crimes rather than others. It may inform us of our levels of susceptibility to external influence. Perhaps we can even discover the patterns that draw us into media propaganda. Such that, if a childhood of Disney has lead me to believe that a certain model of a character is “evil”, than why wouldn’t I, as an adult, consider someone portrayed in the same sort of way, evil as well; a tactic actually used by the Nazis in World War Two to foster hatred against the Jews. By examining the ways in which our children are trained in differentiating good and bad, such as in the portrayal of evil in Walt Disney’s children’s films, we can localize the roots of certain key ideas prevalent in society’s classifications of itself.
My method for this investigation, will be to collect a corpus of several Disney screen plays spanning the past four decades, (which I have already locate in an online database). I will look at the issues surrounding good and evil, and the ways that good triumphs over evil. I will attempt to categorize the characters by their surrounding synonyms and collocate the words that we tend to associate with “badness”. I also want to study the trends of evil characters over time, to see if and how our perceptions of them have changed. Have we viewed evil in a static way or does our most recent Disney films (i.e.; Frozen), exhibit a modern face of evil? I will need to use tools such as text arc, and voyant to accomplish these goals. One thing I know off the bat that I will have to take consider carefully, is the fact that I am using scripts, and therefore must take into account the extra usage of names when it announces who is speaking.