

Is Disney's New Princess Undermining Family Values?

Sofia the First, Disney's new preschool princess on television, doesn't need a prince. She's the daughter of a poor single mother who marries King Roland. This daughter of a shoe cobbler must learn what it is to be a princess. She's aided by visits from famous Disney movie princesses.

In *The Wall Street Journal*, Nancy Kanter, senior vice president of original programming and general manager of Disney Junior Worldwide, says, "We knew we didn't want it to be a young woman looking for a man ... We're undoing all that damage."

On Kanter's blog, she says, "Kids learn from everything around them: parents, family, school, friends, and the media. It's so vital that key social issues are conceived appropriately. From an early age, youngsters need to be taught about social issues such as the best way to make friends, being honest and having grace. It's important that they are taught that it doesn't matter what they wear, but it's what is in the inside that makes them special."

In another post, she writes, "Whether in a book or on TV, I am often struck by the power of story and its ability to not only bring children to a place they might never have dreamed of, but also by its influence on behavior and attitude. It's why we pay so much attention to role modeling in our shows. Children imitate what they see and when they see the right things—truly valuable and aspirational things—they take them to heart and make them their own."

Where will Sofia go? Where will she lead 2- to 5-year-olds?

Clearly, the creators see a role for the media in shaping the social and moral values of 2- to 5-year-olds. It's fine to

promote honesty, grace and civility, but any message that undermines the traditional family is harmful. Children raised by their natural parents are far less likely to live in poverty, quit school, use drugs, commit crimes or spend time in prison. If Disney actually cares about the long-term well-being of children, it would promote the traditional family rather than the “modern family.”

It would even be of benefit to Disney to do so. Children raised by their natural parents have far more disposable income to spend on Disney tickets, theme parks and merchandise than do children raised by single mothers. Few single mothers marry a king who can turn their daughters into princesses. More often the daughter of a single mother becomes a single mother herself. The havoc wreaked on children is immense. The economic impact is severe.

Sofia the First, which first aired Nov. 18, has already become the top show among 2- to 5-year-olds.

“These children are the Walt Disney Company’s most important audience,” says Anne Sweeney, co-chairman of Disney Media Networks and president of Disney/ABC Television Group. “They’re the future, and this is their first introduction to our brand.”

The name Disney has traditionally been associated with family entertainment. Disney’s future is strengthened when the family is strengthened. It’s damaged when the family is undermined.

Tremendous research goes into the production of a program like *Sofia the First*. Disney would be wise to do tremendous research on the cause of poverty and the cause of high disposable income. They may learn that a princess who has both a mother *and* a father to take care of them and guide them, and a princess who marries a prince, is more likely to escape poverty and become a better Disney customer.

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