

## The Moving Image: Family Life as seen on TV

I will be looking closely at two particular programmes involving families: 'The Simpsons' ('Homer Alone') and 'The Royle Family' ('Sunday Dinner') both families have been labelled 'dysfunctional' yet both programmes have attracted huge TV audiences. I will be comparing the portrayal of family life in both these programmes and will try to account for their popularity.

'The Simpsons' is an American cartoon set in Springfield. The family consists of: Homer and Marge whom are married and parents to Bart, Maggie and Lisa. In the episode 'Homer Alone' Marge is feeling depressed because the rest of the family depend on her to do everything for them, she is feeling under a lot of pressure. After a while she decided she's had enough of doing everything for the rest of the family, therefore, she drives her car across the motorway and remains inside the car when it is parked up. This results in other motorists having no access to the road. By doing this act Marge soon gets noticed. Police cars and reporters arrive questioning Marge about the event. Soon after Homer arrives announcing that he loves her and wants her to come home to her family. It works; she comes out of the car and goes home. After a long think she decided she needs a break to get away from everything for a short while, she needed to clear her mind. So the next day she goes away for a while, and leaves the rest of the family behind. Bart and Lisa went to stay with their aunties, whereas Maggie is left with Homer. During the short period of time when Homer was responsible for Maggie, he manages to lose her! He finally finds her just prior to the return of Marge.

'The Royle Family' is a British sit-com set in Manchester. The family consists of Jim and Barbara, the parents to Denise and Anthony. Norma, the mother to Barbara, Dave, Denise's boyfriend and Twiggy a family friend. In the episode 'Sunday Dinner' the family is round at the Royle's house for their Sunday dinner. Jim and Dave are late as usual due to them being at the pub. At the pub Jim invites Twiggy back round to their house to join them for Sunday dinner without consulting Barbara. They eat lunch and chat about usual family issues.

When an audience sit down to watch a cartoon, for example 'The Simpsons', they expect it to be funny and continuously revolving around a family or a group of friends. It is usually set in the same village or area. Cartoons are usually played on set days during the week and last the same period of time, it usually tends to be a short amount of time, ranging from 20-30 minutes. Cartoons have a very busy atmosphere, there are barely any moments when nothing is happening or no-one is speaking. The appearance of a cartoon character is often very different to human beings. In 'The Simpsons' the characters have yellow skin and hair that remains exactly the same all the time. 'The Simpsons' is a very typical cartoon. The characters are abnormal as they have yellow skin and are not real people. The colours are very bright and unrealistic, for example the sky is all blue apart from a few clouds which are just white. Music is used very frequently throughout cartoons. In 'The Simpsons' music is used to create an effect on the event or character to make the audience have opinions of the situation. For example, we see Bart in detention, therefore we automatically suspect him to be quite mischievous. The beat of the music would fit in with the atmosphere of the event.

When an audience sit down to watch a sit-com they would expect a television series usually lasting about an hour. It would feature the reactions of a regular cast of everyday, realistic characters to unusual situations, such as misunderstandings or embarrassing coincidences. 'The Royle Family' is a typical sit-com because it has people playing characters which relate closely to everyday life. The characters are involved in common situations and the language they use to speak to each other is very informal, they use slang words and occasionally swear. The cameras are hand-held which gives a real-life feeling and no added lighting or special effects have been used. The clips shown are not always the best, clearest quality picture which you would get in a top quality DVD. They are just what you would expect to see when using a video camera.

An opening sequence to a programme acts like an overture it has a dramatic effect on the audience. After watching the opening sequence you may think that the programme is going to be boring and not worth watching. Your viewing of the opening sequence depends on whether it appeals to you or not. Usually if the opening sequence doesn't appeal to you, you decide against watching it. It gives a taster of the programme and shows the type of programme that it is and a little about the characters involved.

The opening sequence of 'The Simpsons' begins with clouds across the screen and a bright blue sky. The title 'The Simpsons' appears across the screen in bright yellow bubble writing. This already suggests that it is a cartoon because the writing is bubbly bright and colourful. The camera then zooms into the letter P to show a bird's-eye view of Springfield, it is very colourful. You can be definite that it is a cartoon now because the

village is in two dimensional form not three dimensional and all the buildings are blue or purple.

The first character to be introduced is Bart; he has yellow skin and hair. He's in detention writing on the black board which immediately gives us the impression that he's mischievous. As soon as the bell goes, he rushes out of school as quickly as possible. We then meet Homer; he is working with radioactive materials at his work and as soon as his bell goes he rushes out to go home as soon as possible being extremely careless as he leaves. Marge and Maggie are then in the car on the way home. Lisa is at band practice, she is playing her instrument proudly. We then go back to see Marge and Maggie in the car, Marge obviously has a big influence on Maggie because she copies everything she does. When Marge beeps her horn so does Maggie. She has her own toy steering wheel in the passenger seat, she steers exactly the same ways as Marge pretending to be driving just like her mum. The credits appear and the programme begins. In the opening sequence there are 23 shots of different situations in a short time of one minute and fourteen seconds. During a cartoon there are never silences or gaps, something is always happening.

During the opening sequence of the 'The Royle Family' the background is dark blue and it is set in the Royle's living room. The family members are introduced one by one with them sitting on the sofa. The way they are introduced is exactly how they are throughout the sitcom. Jim is sat on his own chair in full view of the TV. Everyone else has a seat on the sofa except for Anthony, who is left to sit on the floor by himself. The music throughout the opening sequence is Oasis 'half the world away'. This song could be used to suggest that there is one world inside the Royle's house

and the outside world is something completely different from their own. The lighting is just plain and ordinary like everyday life, no brighter or duller colours have been added for any special effects.

Characters are very similar in both programmes in different ways. There are few characters living and working together, there will be extra minor characters put into the programme on odd occasions. The characters in both programmes can express their personality without informing us about themselves; it is easy to tell their opinions through watching their actions and reactions. Marge, in 'The Simpsons' is similar in character to Barbara in 'The Royle Family'. They are both the person in each family whom keeps them together; they do everything for the family, and receive little in return. They don't get appreciated enough from the rest of the family. Just Also, we have Homer and Jim who are alike in many ways. They are both idle and expect everything to be done for them by their wives. They can be very rude and inconsiderate to the rest of their family. Jim makes several complaints to Barbara about her cooking, he makes jokes about other people in the room but will not accept rude remarks made about him. Homer expects Marge to do everything for him; she makes his sandwiches in the morning, goes to the shop with his bowling bowl straight after, food shops for the family. In 'Homer Alone' Bart and Lisa make it clear that they don't get on in the beginning, but as time goes on we see them holding hands in fear whilst at their aunties house. This shows that they do love it each other but don't show it until they need to. Denise and Anthony act in exactly the same way at Bart and Lisa.

Both 'The Simpsons' and 'The Royle Family' have been labelled as 'dysfunctional', however, I do not agree with this. I believe that a real family should consist of whom they are closest to. It could include friends and animals! Each family member should respect each other and support them whenever they require it most. They will stick by each other no matter what and rely each other to help them through tough situations. Some families don't show their love and support for one another until a real crisis occurs but you can be sure that they will be there for you. I think that both 'The Simpsons' and 'The Royle Family' are not dysfunctional. They act as if they don't care about each other but that changes when it comes down to it. 'The Simpsons' don't realise how close they are until Marge goes away, when she returns the family all sleep in the same bed and discuss how much they have all missed her and how bad life could be without her. In 'The Royle Family' they all ask about each other and are interested in each other as soon as Twiggy leaves they all talk about him as if he wasn't part of their close family and they all knew that if they expressed their own personal feelings it wouldn't leave that room.

The target audience is whom the programme is directed to. I think that 'The Simpsons' is directed to anyone as it has bright, funny cartoons, which is what children would like to see. They don't have to understand the speaking to understand the programme; you can tell what's happening by the actions and reactions of the characters. It is also targeted at adults because there are jokes about political issues and famous people that adults would understand and find funny.

I think that 'The Royle Family' is targeted at adults. It doesn't appeal to children as there aren't bright colours, it hasn't got a busy atmosphere and there isn't enough slapstick, simple humour throughout for them to laugh at. Adults would find it funny because it's just like real life; everything they say or do is just like a typical family, like our own.

Both programmes are extremely popular in different ways. 'The Simpsons' is funny because of the family's continuous sayings and jokes. The actions they do are so unrealistic that it's just so funny and the family always have terrible things happening to them, but always manage to get through it. 'Homer Alone' Homer loses Maggie but she is luckily found safe and sound just prior to the return of Marge. 'The Royle Family' is popular because of the way it is filmed and presented. No extra lighting or special effects have been used to create a more exciting set. It is dull and just how it would be in a normal house. It's so realistic that it looks like there are hidden cameras in house and they're just filming them without them knowing. It is popular because people enjoy watching people like themselves, they can see what real family life is like.