

HOW IS THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY WITHIN AMERICAN SOCIETY REINFORCED BY “THE SIMPSONS” AND “THE FLINTSTONES”?

In this essay I will be considering the three main aspects of “The Simpsons”. Firstly the idea of Equilibrium-Disruption-Equilibrium. This concept means that each episode follows a set pattern. It starts off with the stereotypical Simpson Characters, Homer thinking about food, Marge organising family activities, Bart getting into trouble and Lisa being ingenious. This is then disrupted by one, or all of the four acting out of character, but by the end we return to the Equilibrium. The second idea I will be talking about is that of the “American Dream”, and how the characters in the Simpsons are living up to their maximum potential. Then I will be considering how the episodes of the Simpson’s we have studied both contrast and verify the sexist idea of how the family unit should act towards each other. Finally I will be considering how the episode of “The Flintstones” we studied compares to the episodes of “The Simpsons”.

The best example I have seen of Equilibrium-Disruption-Equilibrium is in the episode entitled “Bart gets an F”. This episode starts off with Bart not having done his book review homework for school and making up the events of the book, “Treasure Island”. He later finds out that he’s going to have to drop back a year if he fails another test. This event starts off the Disruption. Bart does not want to stay back a year and has visions of himself with his son in the same class. The only way Bart could possibly move up with the rest of his class is by studying, so he asks a “boffin” to help him study if in exchange Bart helps the “boffin” become popular. The day the test is supposed to be held it is snowing which means that the school is closed. However instead of going out to play with his friends Bart studies. He fails his test, anyway, as the title of this episode tells us. But when talking to the teacher he relates his trauma to an event in history, in result she raises his mark to a low D, which means he passes the test. The episode ends in equilibrium with Bart’s last sentence, “I kissed a teacher- Yuck!”

The “American dream” is the idea that all Americans should be given the chance to live up to their full potential. “The Simpsons”, however, contrasts to this idea as none of the characters, except Lisa is living up to their potential. Marge is the key person who contrasts to this idea, as the audience gets the impression that she is really clever but because she married Homer she has not been given the chance to prove this. Homer daydreams at work and does not give an interest to anything but food. Homer expects Bart to fail, and in the episode “Bart gets an F” he forces Bart to stay up to watch a movie instead of studying for his exam. Therefore Homer does not give Bart the chance to succeed at school, and so Bart can not live up to his potential. As over half the family unit of the Simpsons are not fulfilling the idea of the “American Dream” it forces us to believe that this idea is a lie.

The sexist beliefs of how the family unit acts is that the woman should stay at home to look after the children 24 hours a day 7 days a week, while the man goes out to earn the money. Homer does go to work but is dumb and does not do anything to help within his workplace. He also cares more about food than his own family's success, we know this when as in the episode "Bart gets an F" he says "I just want to have a beer when I'm caring". Homer being the man of the family is supposed to be the dominant character within the household however it becomes clear that Marge is. Marge, although she is the woman and therefore is supposed to be dumb and immature, is actually very clever and sensible.

Marge: What's that stench?

Estate Agent: Oh that's just hog fat, it's not that bad when you get used to it
[Marge looks annoyed]

Homer: umm hog fat!

This piece of dialogue shows us Marge being sensible while moving house in "Lisa's First Word". Lisa also contradicts the stereotypical views of a family unit, as she is far too bright for the age of eight. A quote that proves this is, "It's best to say nothing and appear stupid than talk and prove that you are" in the episode "Lisa's First Word".

These things contradict the sexist idea of how a family unit should act together. However there are a few things that reinforce these ideas. The audience can tell that Marge has the sole care of the family's comfort and health from nearly every episode we studied. One example is that in the episode, "Lisa's first word" Marge realises that Bart could be jealous of Lisa. This being a parenting statement that obviously took a lot of thought means that only Marge could have said it. Also in this episode she is seen gossiping with her friends as Homer comes home from work, and is she shown reading the bedtime story. Another example is, that in the episode entitled "Bart gets an F" when Bart is told he may have to stay back a year Marge offers emotional support. At this point in this episode Homers only input is "Well at least you will be bigger than the other kids". Bart is the stereotypical ten -year-old boy, as he prefers getting into trouble than studying and working hard at school. This point can be backed up by the episode, "Bart gets an F" as, in the first scene of this episode Bart throws his homework in the fire.

The Simpson's exposes the sexist nature of the family in a way that makes the viewers see Marge as the true heart of the family and Homer as dumb and selfish. In the Flintstones although, Fred is similarly shown as dumb, he is still the one that, in a way, manages the family unit. Although Wilma cooks cleans and runs their way of life, she looks to Fred in times of distress, that, according to sexism, women wouldn't be able to cope in.

The episode we studied of the Flintstones is one where Wilma's Mother comes to stay. This episode starts of with Disruption rather than Equilibrium, as Wilma has sprained her ankle and so Fred has to do the cooking and cleaning to prepare for the arrival of Wilma's mother. This episode tilts back to

equilibrium when Wilma runs straight to Fred for him to take action when she realises her Mother may be in trouble. However by the end of this episode we never really achieve complete Equilibrium as Wilma's mother, is still ordering Fred around.

Fred hates the fact that at the beginning of this episode he has to cook and clean, this shows the sexist attitude the Flintstones is based around that circulated during the 1960's. The sexist feeling is also highlighted by the fact that men do all the heavy lifting in this episode. All of the "Bornto Moving Co." workers are men and Fred has to carry Wilma's mother heavy furniture around the house.