

# Critical Media Analysis on The Simpsons

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The Simpsons premiered in 1989 and captivated audiences around the world, and has set the longest running prime time animated comedy. It is currently in its 28th season and see's no end as it continues to produce new episodes paying homage to the iconic stature of American society and culture. It is hailed as the one of



most successful cartoon series ever made, and has revolutionized and paved the way for shows such as Family Guy and South Park. In this comparative analysis I will critically analyze the Simpsons through the lens of American popular culture, its use of satire and look at the family dynamics and archetypes it perpetuates through media.

When looking at the shows that were created and broadcasted before and along side The Simpsons, we can see similar parallels looking at the popularity of the cartoons such as the post nuclear family The Jetsons, the family dynamics of The Flintstones, and wholesome family sitcoms Father Knows Best, Leave it to Beaver, My Three sons, Growing Pains, Family Ties and The Crosby Show. The Simpsons took the ideology of the traditional American family and provided a new and exciting take on the family life, and the conventional roles within the home.

“...by refuting previously accepted family archetypes and presenting viewers with a set of dysfunctional outrageous characters, whose absurdity made them normal and relatable.”(Carr pg.

1) When reflecting on Homer Simpson as a viewer a quote resonated with me describing his character as “A moving, ever expanding satire, he is at once the best and worst of American

dadness. He is forever wanting the things he'll never have, scheming to get them and failing, his appetites and disappointments as classic as the central conflicts from which all great theatre and literature derives.”(Mullin pg. 1) Furthermore the Simpsons dropped the pretence that the traditional American family portrayed by previous television shows, and allowed the audience to see newly constructed version that “...mocked the idealistic representation of family life. (Carr pg. 1)

In the Stack and Kelly article they used the Simpsons as an example as giving the viewer the opportunity to critically analyze the power dynamics that the creators present based on gender, age, religion, class, corporate ethics and family life. “Of course, we have the ability to think critically about what we see and hear, and institutions other than the media have an influence on how we come to know the world. But the media are a pivotal vehicle through which the social is continually recreated, maintained, and sometimes challenged.” (Stack and Kelly pg. 9) In the article by Carr, she discusses the use of metafiction as the show explores and interrogates fiction with the use of parody and fictional modes (Carr pg. 7) A common through line with the The Simpsons is that the creators have always found ways to mimic reality with the use of cliché, contrived metaphors, cultural references, satire, cultural knowledge and morality. In the Feltmate article Pinsky insulates that “The Simpsons’ humour elicits laughter because it taps into an underlying truth the audience recognizes.” (Feltmate pg. 3) As an audience member we find humour in things we find true and relatable, and often incorporate cultural relevant references happenings around the world through popular culture, politics, religion, and history. Another method used was to invite celebrities as guest characters, which in the past included stars such as Micheal Jackson, Meryl Streep, George Harrison, William Shatner, Robert Goulet,

and Jon Lovits just to name a few. Other ways to connect with the audience was its clever use of satire using culturally relevant references to popular culture such as *The Sound of Music*, *Rear Window*, *Flowers for Algernon*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Cape Fear*. “Through parody, transgressive texts can work to disarm and dismantle the hegemonic status quo, defining the genre through ironic contrast, and provoking a new, counter-hegemonic understanding of that genre” (Feltmate pg. 6)

The Simpsons challenge and oppose dominant ideologies and in result has made them one of the most beloved American animated sitcoms around the world due to its witty use of satire and culturally relevant nuances stemming from American popular culture. The Simpsons flipped the paradigm and family dynamics that was presented to americans and made it more outrageous, hilarious and relatable to its viewers. Matt Groening and his creative team revolutionized the portrayal of traditional roles within a family by its predecessors and continues to make history reigning as the longest animated prime time comedy series ever made.

## Resources

Carr, Hayley (2017) *Metafiction in the Simpsons* School of Design, Visual Communications  
Retrieved [http://www.academia.edu/30959099/Metafiction\\_in\\_The\\_Simpsons](http://www.academia.edu/30959099/Metafiction_in_The_Simpsons)

Feltmate, David (2009) *It's Funny Because It's True? The Simpsons, Satire, and the Significance of Religious Humor in Popular Culture*. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 81, Issue 1, 1 March 2013, Pages 222–248, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfs100>  
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Mullin, Brett (1999) *The Simpsons, American Satire* The Simpsons Archive. Retrieved from <https://www.simpsonsarchive.com/other/papers/bm.paper.html>

Stack, M., & Kelley, D.M. (2006). *Popular media, education, and resistance*. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(1), 5-26