The Positive Cultural Value of The Simpsons

The Simpsons, which started in 1989, is a popular American TV series that has had a positive influence on American culture. It portrays an image of American family life in the 1950s and 1960s through the hijinks and everyday adventures of the dysfunctional Simpson family. The Simpsons presents the dominant values and norms in American society and discusses uncomfortable topics in American culture. It takes serious topics and makes them seem humorous and understandable. The Simpsons is very entertaining because it pokes fun at our cultural norms, celebrities, and political figures in a sophisticated way. It also addresses important topics like the role of the family, political orientation, religion, and racial issues. This unique show teaches us moral and social lessons by questioning our belief systems, values, and life styles. Its success as the longest running comedy show on television is a reflection of the influence it has had on its audience.

The setting for this cartoon is Springfield, a fictional town in America. Homer, who is the father, is a foolish, alcoholic, slothful, yet caring man. Marge, his wife, stays at home and takes care of her family and is a serious person. Bart is a mischievous 10-year old kid who likes to pull pranks on people, which often gets him into trouble. Lisa, the middle child, is smart and talented, but not popular at school because of these special abilities. Maggie is a baby who does not talk and only sucks on her pacifier. The
family magically never ages in this TV show, yet the show still manages to deal with current events and popular topics.

Homer works as a safety inspector at the local nuclear power plant. Unfortunately, he is a lazy guy who sleeps whenever he can. The government and corporations appear to have secret control over important events in the series and are considered to be enemies by the people of Springfield. Mr. Burns, Homer’s wealthy boss, and Waylon Smithers, Burn’s assistant, are constantly watching Homer to keep him in line.

*The Simpsons* is unique in that it does not follow the typical script of the happy American family, in fact, Bart and Homer are actually anti-heroes. Ott states that “In essence, Homer models an identity; his being critiques the modernist idea of a unified, coherent subject” (66). We see that the characters are not perfect and we do not need to be perfect. It offers us a realistic view of how life is. It is easier for all of us to identify with imperfect people. Additionally, Lisa, who always tries her best but still faces disappointment and unhappiness, teaches people what is right and wrong and supports environmental issues. When she does rebel against social conformity, she usually does it for the right reasons. She does care about fairness but sometimes she takes her views too far in an attempt to get extra attention. She has been known to cheat at school. We all have our problems, even smart-minded girls like Lisa.

Gun Control is an important societal issue that *The Simpsons* deals with. In the episode titled “The Cartridge Family”, Homer purchases a gun to protect his family, but is very careless with it. Marge is upset with her husband and leaves the house with her children. The second amendment, which is about a citizen’s right to bear arms, is highlighted in this episode. Both sides of this complicated issue are presented.

*The Simpsons* creators enjoy portraying politically charged issues and politicians and by doing this, they educate the audience. Former American presidents like George Bush are mocked for their
attitudes and closed-mindedness. Both Democrats and Republicans are portrayed as if they are out of
touch with the American people. Mr. Burns, Homer’s boss, even decides to run for governor so that he
does not have to pay for polluting the environment.

*The Simpsons* deals with racial prejudice through a portrayal of certain characters. Apu, an
immigrant, earned a Ph. D. in India but took a job at a local convenience store to pay off his loans. He
represents a stereotype of the Indian immigrant. His character forces us to confront our own biases
against hard working immigrants. Krusty the clown is the star of Bart’s favorite TV show. He is Jewish
and uses a “New York Catskills” humor to entertain with religious parodies.

*The Simpsons* invites us to look at ourselves. Advertisers use the television to promote their
products to Americans. We are constantly bombarded by ads for things we do not need. When we
watch advertisements on television, they make us want to buy these products. The reason this show
depicts the family watching all of these ads is because they want viewers of *The Simpsons* to look at
their own consumerism. As we watch, we see ads everywhere on the streets of Springfield and on the
TV shows that Homer and Bart watch. Homer watches his favorite ads such as Lard Lad Donuts and Duff
Beer. Bart watches his favorite TV shows, including *Krusty the Clown*, who himself promotes products.
Advertising is everywhere! Corporate America is trying to seduce us into buying their useless products.
This is a satirical look at our lives and the Simpson family’s life. While we watch *The Simpsons* and all of
its advertising, the Simpsons are watching their favorite advertisements on their own television in
Springfield. As Gray argues, the television is almost a sixth family member (228-229). Bart and Homer
fight over the television shows they want to watch. They are seduced by the advertisements and they
want to buy things they see on TV commercials. The message we are receiving is that it is okay to spend
money. Advertisers within the comedy are constantly satirized.
The Simpsons offers a view of gender roles. Marge Simpson, with the blue beehive hairdo, is the matriarch of the Simpson family and is a stereotype of a housewife. She is always saving the day by helping her family. However, Marge does not seem like a real person on the show because she is very tall, has strange hair, and speaks with a high-pitched and irritating voice. She also shows us another side of motherhood and marriage when she gets upset and disappointed in her husband. Unlike the perfect 1950s TV housewife, she does get angry at times. She cannot tolerate Homer being irresponsible or doing something foolish. However, she cares for him and does not want him to act ignorant and immature in front of others. She is not afraid to show her discontent at the lack of fulfillment in mothering. Marge Simpson shows us a very realistic view of the modern housewife (Neuhaus 763-765).

The Simpsons has been on television for twenty five years. It has successfully delighted its audience with satire, parody, and comedy that appeals to all ages. New reality characters with sophisticated humor are introduced which generates continued interest for fans and prompts the examination of our cultural controversies and belief systems. The Simpsons will continue to have an impact on American culture in the future as long as there is news and conflicts in the world.
Works Cited

