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## The presentation of fatherhood in comedic television: a men's studies approach to the Simpsons

Robert C. Short  
*University of Dayton*

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THE PRESENTATION OF FATHERHOOD IN COMEDIC TELEVISION: A MEN'S  
STUDIES APPROACH TO *THE SIMPSONS*

Thesis

Submitted to

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Degree

Masters of Arts in English

By Robert C. Short

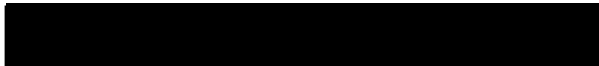
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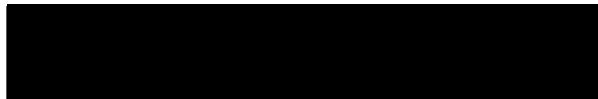
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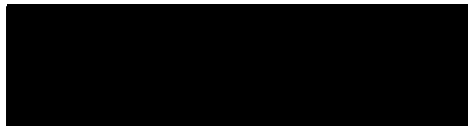
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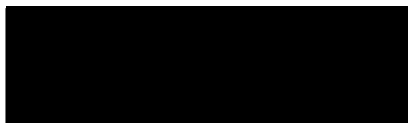
Boehnlein, M, James  
Faculty advisor



Strain, M, Margaret  
Faculty Reader



McCombe, P, John  
Faculty Reader



Conniff, P, Brian  
Chair, Department of English

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2007

# THE PRESENTATION OF FATHERHOOD IN COMEDIC TELEVISION:

## A MEN'S STUDIES APPROACH TO THE SIMPSONS

Name: Short, Robert Clayton  
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. James Boehnlein

### ABSTRACT

In the field of feminism, and specifically post-modern feminism, a movement has been developing that seeks to apply feminist concepts to areas of interest that had been overlooked by previous studies. This has led to the so-called Men's Movement which has attempted to focus on issues of masculinity, patriarchy and male identity. This thesis builds upon the efforts of previous Men's Movement studies to explore the issues and portrayal of fathers as currently seen in the modern media. Specifically, this paper will focus on the critically recognized television show *The Simpsons*, for its remarkable nineteen television seasons and for its established credibility as a subject of academic study. By examining the character of Homer Simpson in his role as stereotypical father, an overall pattern of image deformation can be seen in how the images of fathers have changed in the media. Further, by examining the formulaic relationships of father-to-family that form the foundation of the series, this paper can illustrate what areas maintain negative archetypes of male behavior.

## Acknowledgements

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## INTRODUCTION

Robyn Wiegman explains how, when feminism first began to develop as a theoretical movement, the role of men and masculinity tended to be homogenized into a single, monolithic and patriarchal authority. In describing the early women's movement, Wiegman details the collapse of "men and masculinity into a generalized category for man and woman that generalized that generalization to the organizational practices of patriarchy" (34). This union allowed for the further development of theories and concepts, including new dimensions of patriarchy and the nuances of oppression. It also, however, had the partial goal of gathering the theorists into a central base or sisterhood in the hopes of giving "woman" and "feminist" a singular meaning. However, as history has demonstrated, feminism, rather than developing into its own monolithic counter to a unified patriarchy, has remained a field with a wide variety of theoretical approaches. With increased development in theoretical feminists' approaches, feminism had abandoned a one-theory worldview for a multiple-theory focus. The preconception of men, however, has remained unchanged from its original status as a static, unified entity. Recent focus by scholars in Men's Studies has revealed the cracks in this monolith. As critics acknowledge the diverse perspectives, the current men's studies movement has taken root and expanded.

One of the first stereotypes that men's studies have had to overcome is the common assumption that men and masculinity are unchanging. Specifically, the question has arisen whether men can add to feminist discussions of whether they are permanently and unconsciously bound as oppressors. Robert Pease, in his study of male feminism,

proposes that the view of both man and patriarchy as an unchanging element of society is inherently flawed. Pease develops several key elements of men's studies, including the identification that men can change and isolate themselves from elements of patriarchy, that man can contribute to feminism without devaluing it, and that men can be victims of a patriarchal system. He supports that "men can be victims and have felt grief over being victimized as boys" (16). He suggests that not all men are inherently oppressive and that oppression itself comes with a number of negative results that undermine men both physically and mentally. For this reason, he claims that men's studies seeks to provide a positive element to the potential of man to change. In his words, "Men's sexuality can be loving, caring, and nurturing and a non-oppressive heterosexuality is possible for men" (Pease 19). With this positive potential, Pease provides a counter-argument to the view of masculinity as unchanging.

In a similar line of research, Rosalind Coward argues that society has accepted numerous changes to the patriarchal system. However, she notes that it is limiting to believe that men are unaffected by these experiences (1999). Phillipa Gates claims that society has placed on men the unreasonable assumption that they must display both the traits of traditional masculinity, as well as qualities previously associated with femininity to find acceptance. However, she states that such a co-existence is impossible. She observes that masculinity is far from homogeneous as it can be divided by "class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and other social determinants" (29). These divisions demonstrate the existence of a multiplicity of masculinities based on a diversity of experiences that are not shared by all individuals. Contemporary western society has not recognized this multiplicity and continues to promote a singular masculine model. This

failure to recognize diversity is problematic to those who do not find themselves fitting into the monolithic model.

Several authors, including Coward, Susan Faludi, Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, have identified a "Crisis of Masculinity" in which men find themselves struggling to redefine themselves and their role in society. This struggle is based on a conflict between old definitions of masculinity and new expectations brought on by increased awareness of feminist ideals. Coward claims the recent upsurge in men's insecurities is indicative of a larger shift in the fundamental assumptions of men (83). For her, masculinity and maleness are undergoing a period of intense re-examination and confusion. With the advent of feminism, the world has changed around men, who find the situation difficult to comprehend. This change has left men struggling to resolve what Coward calls "a new internalizing of criticisms of male behavior and self-restraint, alongside aggression and anger which cannot be dealt with" (85). Faludi, in her work with various male experiences, charts many of these same problems associated with men. Specifically, she identifies feelings of discontent, anger, and disappointment on the part of many young males who find their lives upturned by new expectations regarding women. However, she also notes the vanishing element of intimacy not allowed to men in public situations (127).

Furthermore, the "Crisis of Masculinity" does not owe its origin solely to an increase in feminist ideology. In their definition of the Men's Movement, Pilcher and Whelehan note the belief that the concept of masculinity can be oppressive in a manner similar to the oppression of women caused by the patriarchy. Pilcher notes a number of potential causes including the degeneration of traditional masculinity and images in the

media of incompetent males. They argue that "Men need liberation from masculinity, just as much as women need liberation from the thrall of patriarchy" (86). These elements of restriction, confusion, anger, and societal and expectation underlie many of the current issues surrounding men in crisis. Specifically, the view of men who feel bound and controlled by masculine expectations demonstrates one of the fundamental challenges in the masculine monolith.

In addition to the issue of men in crisis, recent interest in men and masculinity has increasingly focused on men, fathers, and fatherhood, especially as depicted in various forms of media. Specifically, a great deal of attention has been paid to images of men in films (Susan Jeffords, Stella Bruzi, and Phillippa Gates). Susan Jeffords and Phillippa Gates identify significant changes to masculine presentations between the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger and his transition from action hero to comedic figure is an example of this transformation of men appeared in the media. They refer to his "action hero" movies of the 1980s (*Terminator*, *Commando*, *Predator*) versus the family oriented movies of the early to mid 1990s (*Twins*, *Kindergarten Cop*, *Junior*). The concept of the masculine, action hero and tough guy receded into the background, replaced by more emotional and uncertain characters.

While specific attention to fathers and fatherhood has been a topic of interest, the current literature review indicates that there has been very little effort to examine the role of the father as presented on recent television, especially within in animation. Animated television programs have traditionally not received much scholarly attention. This may be due to the fact that subject matter is intended for juveniles, to be comedic, or both. Additionally, animated shows face the additional restraint of having to preserve the status

quo of the program by the end of each episode. As such, there is the illusion that the series does not grow with time. There is further, as Valerie Chow states, “the sense of an animated sitcom as the trash of American sociocultural life” (112). However, this thesis agrees with her argument that this “banality...makes it a worthwhile subject of critique” (112). For this reason, this paper will focus on the elements of the television family, as evidenced in one of the longest running televised families, *The Simpsons*.

*The Simpsons* has been a continual and popular success for over 15 years and represents a cultural watershed by which changes in American society can be measured. Created in a transitional period between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the show appeared at a crucial time in the transformation of the father figure. Originating first as a series of animated skits on *The Tracy Ullman Show*, *The Simpsons* has grown significantly since these early days. While the series began by satirizing the cultural expectations of the day, it has since become a pop-culture icon of comedy and satire. Having recently released their first full length feature film, *The Simpsons* has reached another milestone in its remarkable life. It has already been the topic of several scholarly books and articles, making it no stranger to the academic world. However, the series, despite a remarkable lack of change in its surface structure, has undergone a slow evolution in terms of its characters. If one compares the recent movie to some of the earliest episodes, one will see a remarkable amount of difference in the nature of Homer Simpson. The character of Homer moreover, symbolizes the transformation of a man who mirrors the changes that have affected men and Fathers in contemporary society.

*The Simpsons*' success is built upon a legacy of deforming images into caricatures, specifically male caricatures. However, while the show has changed, the

shadow of the masculine monolith still hangs over the series. *The Simpsons* still depict images of men as negative and reflect little positive change. This paper will first trace how the appearances of fathers in television have changed from the early presentation as a superhuman family head in the 1960s and 1970s to the current presentation as the so called "Doofus Dad." This term developed by the present author will then be defined in detail to show the elements of this stereotype. Finally, the paper will explore the various relationships of the Doofus Dad, as portrayed by Homer Simpson. Examples from the television series and movie will show the expected relationship of the father when interacting with sons, fathers, daughters, and spouses. This paper will demonstrate two elements. First, the Doofus Dad is a purposefully comedic stereotype that limits the potential of fathers. Secondly, the archetype illustrates standards of behavior regarding what is expected of men.

## TELEVISION FATHERS, A HISTORY OF DEFORMATION

An examination of the history of the televised father reveals a series of plagiarized scenes and repeated characters. In her essay on the history of television parenting, Bernice Kanner notes that the first generation of family shows featured almost uniform presentations of idyllic, nuclear families with strong, paternal figures and undeveloped maternal figures. Kanner claims that “these TV Dads were strong, dependable, always available to their children and deeply involved in their children’s lives...The women were less prominent. Loyal and loving homemakers, they revered their husbands as more than themselves” (48). Such presentations of fathers as unrealistically perfect were negative both towards the mothers, who were eclipsed by the father’s shadow, and the fathers, who face with an ideal they could never achieve. This first generation of television families, despite their limits, formed the archetype for future generations by establishing the idealized but unattainably perfect male image. Examples of these can be seen in such historic examples as *Leave it to Beaver*, *the Waltons*, *The Andy Griffith show*, and even later television shows such as *The Brady Bunch*. As television expanded in popularity, these images of fathers underwent successive generations of programs that recognized the impossibility of these images.

*The Simpsons* owes much of its success to the dozens of television series that came before it. These programs laid a foundation of archetype deformation that would become the focus of much of *The Simpsons*’ comedic material. Chow, in her study of Homer Simpson, notes how *The Simpsons* shows that television is merely the repetitive plagiarizing of source material (111). She suggests that *The Simpsons* depended on “the

construction of gendered hierarchies,” a reference to a form of “identity formation” which is “dependent upon repetition” (111). In theory, the continued repetition of an image leads to it being prioritized. Logically, this concept implies that the continued repetition of the early father archetype led to it being preferred. According to Chow, *The Simpsons* is an example of how such an preferred archetype can be manipulated and deformed and she claims that “Homer’s body points to the (de)formation of identities”(110). Jonathan Gray, in his book, *Watching With The Simpsons*, notes that *The Simpsons* demonstrates an awareness and abuse of sitcom genre standards (56). Gray argues that *The Simpsons* is “genre conscious” by claiming the show has “exhausted almost all of the family sitcom plots” and now has taken to parodying them (56). If these plots had not existed, then the program would not have been nearly as effective. This is supported by Kevin Dettmar who wrote that *The Simpsons* owes most of its existence to previous television sitcoms such as *The Flintstones*, *All in the Family*, and *Ozzie and Harriet*. (87) These early television series all demonstrate similar forms of archetype deformation in their presentation of the family and fathers.

Even the writers of *The Simpsons* have stated that they are aware of the sitcom foundation. In the television episode, “The Day the Violence Ended,” the producer of Lisa and Bart’s favorite television show, *Itchy and Scratchy*, states that “Animation is built on plagiarism. If it weren’t for someone plagiarizing *The Honeymooners*, we wouldn’t have *The Flintstones*.” In this statement, the show acknowledges its debt previous television shows. This allows the writers of *The Simpsons* to satirize their own critical success but it also underlies one serious problem with television fathers: while the perceptions of fathers has shifted over the decades since *The Simpsons* first came on the

air, the fundamental formula that informs the show has not changed. The archetypes deformed in the character of Homer Simpson are the same archetypes being deformed in the previous generation of television series. What *The Simpsons*' producers have not taken into account is the cultural impact of the show. While *The Simpsons* once shocked and scandalized, it has since become a benchmark: the norm for comedic fatherhood and a new generation of identity deformations.

## DOOFUS DAD ELEMENTS

I have coined the term “Doofus Dad” to refer to a category of related traits of comedic television father figures to illustrate the new deformed archetype. While Doofus Dad characteristics can be traced back across several generations of television sitcoms, including television shows such as *Sanford and Son*, *All in the Family*, and *The Flintstones*, *The Simpsons*’ 16 seasons offers a wide spectrum of the characteristics.

The first, most easily identifiable characteristic of the Doofus Dad archetypes are in the male’s physical and behavioral habits. They are often overweight, lazy, hedonistic or vain. Such is the case of Homer Simpson who he is featured in a number of episodes which revolve around his weight, drinking habits, appearance and general self-centeredness. Overall, Doofus Dads have their physical traits portrayed negatively. They are usually ugly, clumsy, and generally incompetent. If the Doofus Dad has an occupation, it is one which he maintains through deception or feigning actual skill. Likewise, the Doofus Dad will often claim expertise in a skill in which he has no actual knowledge. For instance, in *The Simpsons Movie*, Homer attempts to fix the roof but only succeeds in making a bigger hole. Furthermore, Doofus Dads tend to make selfish decisions without thinking out the consequences. For instance, in the episode “King Size Homer,” Homer gains over three-hundred pounds in order to gain disability benefits. This portrayal of fathers subverts traditional archetypes of strong, selfless, hard-working father figures. In their place is a character that is selfish, lazy, and unhealthy.

In addition to negative physical traits, Doofus Dads tend to be presented as ignorant, opinionated, easily-angered, jealous, oblivious to their surroundings or having

improbable ideas that often backfire. For example, in the episode “Homer’s Phobia,” Homer has to have it explained to him that John, a family friend, is gay. He then overreacts, refuses to see John and makes a number of statements that reveal his own ignorance such as “He didn’t give you *gay*, did he?” Further, when Bart begins to imitate John, Homer attempts to make his son more “manly.” However, the results backfire terribly, such as when a group of “manly” steel workers all turn out to be gay or when Homer is attacked while hunting. This is notable on multiple levels, not only because of Homer’s overreactions, but also because of the subtle mocking of masculinity embodied both by Homer and his quest to “masculinize” Bart.

In another example of the Doofus Dad archetype, in the episode “Homer Goes to College,” Homer cannot separate the preconceived expectations of college he has learned watching television from the real thing. This appears in his assumption that the dean will automatically be a hardnosed disciplinarian even though the character is quite the opposite. Further, Homer’s plans to reinstate a group of fellow students revolve around throwing the dean off a bridge, which illustrates again Homer’s faulty reasoning. All of these traits emphasize the male as the incompetent schemer whose plans and advice should not be trusted. This element of the Doofus Dad archetype mocks the traditional role of father as a helper and advisor.

In all, the Doofus Dad archetype is a deformation of previous paternal archetypes from the early age of television. The new archetype is easier to mock and use for comedic purposes. Whereas the original fathers were larger than life figures, the new “Doofus Dad” father is a deeply flawed character. This flaw extends into their relationship with their families.

### Doofus Dads, *The Simpsons* and Fatherhood

In one of the earliest episodes of *The Simpsons*' first season, Homer attends a bachelors party for one of his coworkers. As the scene cuts in, he and the majority of the attendees sit in a stooped, bored posture while the groom's father makes a stirring and emotional speech about how proud he is of his son's achievements. To this Homer responds, "Can this be any more sappy?" The door then opens, to reveal an exotic dancer who causes the formerly bored partygoers to perk up. Several minutes later, the scene cuts back to show the once bored attendees dancing on tables while the groom and his father sit sullenly in the corner. The camera closes up on the father who despondently states, "Son, we're in hell." ("Homer's Night Out"). This first season episode captures *The Simpsons* rejection of the traditional caring father archetype in favor of the Doofus Dad. This rejection is understandable if one looks at the history of the series

While *The Simpsons* had been on the air as one minute shorts on *The Tracy Ullman Show* for three year, it only came into its own when it premiered as an independent program. When *The Simpsons* became a full fledged show, it occurred at a transitional time in American media. The 1980's were a time when men, frustrated by limited images, reacted with films that appeared to glorified traditional forms of masculinity and fatherhood. These films expanded the role of masculinity to show a more nurturing side, but did not fundamentally change in light of feminist criticism. Stella Bruzzi identifies several movies from this period including *Three Men and a Baby*, the Indiana Jones trilogy, *Top Gun*, *Field of Dreams*, *Table for Five*, and *Kramer vs. Kramer*, which focused on promoting traditional masculinity with positive elements of fatherhood. While movies such as *Kramer vs. Kramer* did make the concept of the stay-at-home

father more appealing, Bruzzi claims that the traditional masculinity did not disappear. Quite the opposite, as the 1980's saw an increase in powerful masculine figures who often took on fatherly mannerism. Movies such as *Three Men and a Baby*, *Field of Dreams*, *Table for Five*, and *Kramer vs. Kramer*, fathers were more emotional and accepting, while at the same time having the idealized masculine characteristics of attractiveness and physical control. In movies where maternal figures were absent such as in *Three Men and a Baby* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*, any initial awkwardness the father displays is replaced with a stronger emotional bond with the child. *The Simpsons* appeared when these concepts were beginning to be satirized and the show reflects this change.

As previously noted by Susan Jeffords, Stella Bruzzi, and Phillippa Gates, the shift from the 1980s to the 1990s demonstrated a change in the presentation of men in media. While the 1980's experienced a resurgence in powerful male images, the former male action heroes developed satirical and comedic sides in the 1990s. In *The Simpsons*, this satire manifested through the degeneration of old and new archetypal expectations. Andrew Tolson argues that idealized working class father is both a "Perfect gentleman" and "a fighter," thus embodying two ideals which are to be transferred to the child (30). The 1980's added to this concept by developing the ideal of the "man of action" and the caring father. In *The Simpsons*, the writer's understanding of this expectation twists the stereotype to degenerate the father. Rather than being a perfect gentleman, the father is a self-absorbed slob. Rather than a fighter, the father is a frightened child. In this way, *The Simpsons* satirizes both the traditional and 1980's expectations of what fathers should be. Rather than be a masculine fighter or gentleman, Homer behaves as a childish slob who

transfers nothing to his child. However, while it satirizes the expectations of fathers, the series does not shy from portraying much of the negativity as factual and unchangeable.

Due to this satirizing, *The Simpsons* demonstrates an awareness and rejection of traditional archetypes regarding fathers. This rivalry appears in the comparison on screen of Homer Simpson, and Ned Flanders. This rejection also shows in the behaviors advocated by the series, both for comedic value and for plot purposes. This includes the often violent, confrontational, and yet brotherly relationship between Bart to Homer, Homer's troubled relationship to his own father, the relationship between Homer and his daughters built on sacrifice and the problematic marriage of Homer to Marge.

#### Ned Flanders and Homer Simpson, a Contrast

As early as the pilot of the series, the writers made a conscious effort to compare Homer Simpson with his next door neighbor Ned Flanders. In the pilot, and continued throughout much of the series, the character of Flanders highlights good fortune, better parenting skills, or overall more positive paternal archetype. While Flanders does undergo the greatest, and most unusual, growth of the series, his first purpose has always been as a foil to Homer's weakness as a father.

In *The Simpsons*' premier, he is shown having more Christmas presents, better decorations, and seemingly a better relationship with his son. In all, the character of Flanders is best described as an almost perfect paternal force, at least in comparison to Homer. Furthermore, it is possible to interpret Flanders as an example of the non-deformed Father archetype which Homer is intended to mock. While Homer is selfish, rude, and inconsiderate towards his children and displays all the traits of the Doofus Dad

archetype, Flanders appears in the opposite manner by being a kind, loving and protective parent. In fact, these very qualities are explored in *The Simpsons Movie* as the emotionally abandoned Bart watches in wonder as Flanders tucks in his children, remarking, "So that's what snug is." These differences extend also to the physical, in that Flanders has been portrayed as an almost perfect physical specimen. His relationship with his wife lacks any of the friction exhibited between Homer and Marge, making their marriage almost ideal. This marriage may even be considered too ideal as Ned Flanders' wife, Maude, has had limited development as a character in comparison to her husband. In overall terms of archetypes, Ned Flanders illustrates everything that Homer is not.

The differences between the men invariably cause friction which leads Homer to attempt to best his neighbor, if only to rub his face in it. This method is repeated in several episodes, including "The Call of the Simpson's" and "Dead Putter's Society." "Dead Putter's Society" is especially noticeable, as in this episode Bart becomes a vehicle in Homer's desires to upset the seemingly infallible Flanders. Having become envious of Flanders for various reasons, Homer seeks to one-up his neighbor by having Bart best Todd Flanders in a game of miniature golf. The two even engage in a bet so that the parent who does not win must mow the others lawn in a dress. However, the bet backfires when Bart and Todd concede the game. At Homer's insistence, both fathers end up mowing the lawn, as neither child won. However, Homer is enraged to discover his plan to embarrass Flanders has turned against him as his neighbor cheerfully laughs it off. In these situations, the traditional archetype seems to triumph over the Doofus Dad Archetype. However, such perceptions are deceiving.

While Flanders does act as an idealized version of the paternal father, the show's creators undermine the presentation of Flanders in a number of ways. First of all, while he demonstrates many of the emotional qualities that Homer seems to lack, his two sons Rodd and Todd, are portrayed as almost personality-less and lacking in individuality. By doing so, the writers imply that Flanders's children are more maladjusted than Bart and Lisa. Later seasons depict Flanders as a medium for the exploration and criticism of conservative values and religious topics. He is often shown limiting his children's exposure to various media like television, sheltering them from sugary foods, and deeply immersing them in religious teachings. In addition to being over protective, Flanders has also been portrayed as lacking confidence and constantly seeking advice from religious leaders on how to live his life. Perhaps the most striking event to happen to the character was the death of his wife Maude in the episode "Alone Again, Natura-Diddily." This event violated one of the general unspoken rules of television comedies by not returning the show's status quo to its original position by the end. Instead, the show attempted to deal with Flanders' grief and recovery. Instead of having a Doofus Dad, the archetype attempts to show natural problems and illusions in the old archetype. While Flanders does have many of the qualities that Homer lacks, this does not mean he lives a perfect life.

In the series, Homer's status as the main character makes his behavior, though ultimately destructive and unchanging, the favored archetype. Flanders is a foil to Homer, at once both a better caregiver and yet disliked, makes Flanders into the non-favored archetype. The result is favoritism towards the deformation rather than the traditional. While Flanders ultimately has many positive traits, there is more empathy for the child-like Homer rather than the straight-laced Flanders. The deformation of his character and

imperfections make it easier to feel sorry for Homer than Flanders who seems almost too perfect. It is only when Flanders reveals weakness that the audience is expected to empathize with him.

## BART AND HOMER, BEST OF FRIENDS

If the relationship between Ned Flanders and his sons is based on affection and protection, the relationship between Bart and Homer is a much more complicated affair that has developed as the show has evolved, though not necessarily in a positive manner. As *The Simpsons* has grown, a slow disintegration has occurred in the portrayal of the father-son relationship. In the first few seasons, Homer occasionally displayed behavior that was selfless and constructive towards Bart. While not a perfect father in his actions, he did display a certain capacity for acting in a fatherly manner by countering Bart's behavior and trying to support him. However, as *The Simpsons* developed, the relationship between Homer and Bart also deformed until it had transformed from a father-son relationship to a buddy-buddy or best friend relationship. Homer ceased to be a source of authority and instead became an instigator of mischief with Bart as his comrade-in-arms.

*The Simpsons* did not always cling to this dynamic and the Doofus Dad stereotypes that would become so rigid later on. In a number of early episodes, Homer takes on a more active role as disciplinarian and moral center. This is best seen in the episode "No Disgrace Like Home," which focuses on an unhappy Homer taking on the unfamiliar role of moral center, selling the home television, and enrolling the family in therapy against their better wishes. In this early case, the effort to control or prune his family is remarkably different from many of the later repetitions of this theme, which feature Homer as an ineffective disciplinarian. This does not fit with the expectations of the Doofus Dad archetype because the episode shows Homer as having the strength to

seek positive change and act selflessly. What is even more striking is that he is opposed in his efforts by Marge, who should be his ally in this effort. While Homer's actions are seemingly out of character, the writers manage to spin the ending in such a way that the show can return to status quo, with Homer emerging the hero, despite the utter failure of his efforts. Similar examples of Homer's acting selflessly appear in later episodes, as seen in "Bart the Daredevil," "Bart After Dark," and "Itchy and Scratchy: The Movie." His efforts are increasingly sporadic, however, as the series progresses, with Homer becoming an agent of punishment, usually at the insistence of Marge, rather than an active pursuer of discipline and positive change.

In the first few seasons, Homer and Bart exhibit moments of temporary bonding but such moments do not last. They are used to highlight abnormality and undercut a belief in the healthy father-son relationship. In the second episode of the first season, "Bart the Genius," Homer's violent relationship with Bart is illustrated in the first few minutes of the show when he chases Bart through the house. When Bart is mistaken for a genius, however, this behavior changes to a positive one in which the two engage in a friendly and affectionate game of catch. When the truth is revealed, the relationship reverts to the previous violent example. This brief change in behavior emphasizes that *The Simpsons* prioritizes the dysfunctional relationship rather than the traditional relationship between father and son. While such a traditional caring encounter could be made into a permanent part of this episode, the situation returns to the status quo instead. As the series progresses, this kind of reversion to traditional father-son interactions is replaced with buddy-buddy interactions, as seen in *The Simpsons Movie* when Homer regains Bart's friendship by inviting him to assist in a death defying motorcycle ride.

This emphasis on friendship over paternal care marks a weakening in Homer's status as father.

Another important indicator of the change in the relationship can be seen in the use of names. The pilot of the series has Bart referring to Homer as "Dad" for the majority of the episode, and it is only in later episodes that the term is dropped in place of Bart's continual use of "Homer." This is fully cemented by the 4<sup>th</sup> season episode "Lisa's First Word," in which Lisa's recognizes her father by his first name, not the conventional "Dad." By this point, the children have all but ceased to identify Homer as father and instead rely on his informal familiar first name. The only exception to this is Maggie, who at the end of the episode calls Homer "dada." This recognition is neutralized by the fact it happens when she is alone. As a result, Homer loses the respect of his children, especially Bart. Without it, the relationship between father and son becomes dependent on their buddy-buddy adventures.

As the series progresses, any remaining positive examples of Homer as an adult are slowly replaced with the continual depiction of Homer and Bart's relationship as a form of buddy-buddy and co-conspirator relationship. Specifically, the various misadventures of Homer, including a number of bad ideas and dangerous missteps, include Bart as his willing accomplice. For example, in "The Wizard of Evergreen Terrace," Homer and Bart break into the Thomas Edison museum. In "Lard of the Dance," Homer drags Bart into a plot to steal and then sell the school's grease. In another example of Homer dragging Bart into illegal activity, both he and Bart become beer smugglers in the episode "Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment." Finally, in "Maximum Homerdrive," Homer decides to become a trucker and takes Bart along.

While these adventures do not all end badly, the episodes always return to the status quo by the time the credits role. However, even the writers of the series recognize that these kinds of activities are not always easily resolved in a half hour's time. *The Simpsons Movie* begins with one such conspiratorial activity in which Bart and Homer engage in a dare contest in which Bart streaks through Springfield and is arrested. This humiliating experience is further compounded when Homer refuses to take any responsibility for Bart's actions, leaving his son embarrassed and naked while handcuffed to a tree. This is not the first time that Homer's selfishness has damaged his relationship with his son. In the episode "Brother from the Same Planet," Homer forgets to pick up Bart from soccer practice, prompting him to get a big brother as a replacement for Homer. However, by the end of the episode, Homer and Bart have reconciled and restored the status quo.

However, the writers do not immediately fix this problem in the movie. The gulf between father and son widens until their relationship is almost entirely lost. In its place, Bart finds himself drawn to the potential of a caring relationship with Flanders, and thus the old archetype. Bart eventually proclaims his preference for Flanders' parenting style over his own father's. The relationship between the Homer and Bart is only re-established when Homer again taps into their shared love for stupid acts and danger, thus allowing for the Buddy-Buddy relationship to trump the previous archetype of the stable parental role.

Through the slow erasure of the father-son relationship, the Doofus Dad loses much of his authority and respect. While there is still a strong relationship between Homer and Bart, this relationship is fragile and based on a shared love of trouble. While audiences may find these antics comedic, the fact is that the relationship between the two

is based solely on shared mischief. It is possible to laugh at the conflict between the two, and then take consolation when the situation is restored, regardless of the fact that the relationship will likely break down again. Though viewers have come to expect the relationship, the writers acknowledge this fact in the movie by exploring the breakdown in the friendship, but there is no final resolution.

## **GRANDPA SIMPSON: CHASING RESPECT**

Susan Faludi describes the fathers of the Post-World War II generation as “remote, as unreal as those perfect dads on television, though not intentionally so” (4). She goes on to explain this remoteness as a disconnection between fathers of this period and their baby boomer sons. Isolated by changes in the world and changes in masculine expectations, these men found themselves struggling to live up to the shadow and expectations of their fathers. Consciously or not, some of the elements of this dynamic appear in the continuously troublesome relationship between Homer and his father, Abraham “Grandpa” Simpson.

Homer’s relationship with Grandpa is repeatedly displayed as antagonistic and problematic, even more so than Homer’s relationship with Bart. While Homer participates in Bart’s mayhem, he is far less capable of sharing such moments with his own father. Instead, Grandpa often heaps verbal abuse onto Homer and rarely offers emotional closeness. This abuse comes in the form of Grandpa’s belief in Homer’s inferiority. As seen in such flash-back episodes as “The Way We Was,” Grandpa tells Homer to aim low rather than try hard: “Oh, Son, don't overreach! Go for the dented car, the dead end job, the less attractive girl.” Likewise, in a later flashback episode, “I Married Marge,” Grandpa is overjoyed that Homer has found anyone and informs him that “You’ll never do any better. Ha ha, you lucky bum! The fish jumped right in the boat and all you gotta do is whack her with the oar.” The writers portray the elder Simpson father as a disappointed parent who lacks faith in his son’s capacity to excel. This emotional gap is further explored at in the episode “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou,” when Grandpa exclaims “A millionaire! Oh, I kept the wrong one” upon learning of Homer’s

millionaire half-brother. These statements reveal a disconnection between father and son which in part helps to soften the audience's reaction to Homer. *The Simpsons* develops sympathy for Homer by showing that as problematic as his relationship is with Bart, it at least is stronger than his own relationship with his father.

While Grandpa Simpson's actions toward his son are deplorable, Homer's actions are at times no better. The traditional response to Grandpa is to ignore him, as seen in many episodes in which he is locked out of the home, left in a car, or otherwise ignored. Aside from ignoring him, the second response is for Homer to treat Grandpa like a child, as seen in the episode "Old Money" in which he kidnaps Grandpa onto a family fun outing. In "Homer Simpson in: "Kidney Trouble," Homer ignores Grandpa's pleas for a bathroom break while returning from another such fun outing, inadvertently leading to Grandpa's kidneys exploding. These irresponsible reactions are predictable considering Homer's status as a Doofus Dad. However, there is the potential for a closer relationship, as seen in the episodes "One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish" or "Lisa's First Word," but it never transpires. For instance, the flashback episode "Lisa's First Word" ends with Grandpa selling his home, moving in with, and hugging Homer. However, Grandpa is sent to a retirement home shortly thereafter. In this way, the status quo of the television series is maintained, with the relationship restored back to its original state of flux.

If one can believe that young men learn about how to be fathers from their own fathers, then the Grandpa Simpson's behavior helps to understand Homer's behavior. While Homer is an over-emotional, immature Doofus, Grandpa is an emotionally distant, manipulative character. While Grandpa never developed a respect for Homer, Homer

seems to compensate by being too familiar with his son. Still, the buddy-buddy interaction between Homer and Bart lacks any kind of respect. Homer would never call his father Abe but his own son has no such compunctions regarding his own father. This lack of respect and emotional closeness emphasizes a close, emotional bond between father and son instead of the harsh, disapproving style of Grandpa Simpson. It is noticeable, that in privileging this archetype, the writers of *The Simpsons* have emphasized the father-son gap that has been the center of Men's Studies. While *the Simpsons* recognize this gap between Homer and his father, the solutions mirror many of the problems associated with the Buddy-Buddy relationship between Homer and Bart. Rather than long term reconciliation, the series merely returns to the original status quo and business as usual. The result is that gap never actually closes, and the quick fixes advocated in the series never last.

## **FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS: SACRIFICE AND POTENTIAL**

While Homer and Bart share a buddy-buddy and co-conspirator partnership, the relationship between Homer and Lisa is more complicated, reflecting the differences in their behavior. Like Homer and Bart's relationship, the bond between Lisa and Homer undergoes noticeable changes as the show progresses. Initially, Lisa appears as a feminine version of Bart, displaying many of the same troublesome traits. The only difference is her intelligence, as seen in the premier, and a stereotypical infatuation with a pony. The character changes, growing more mature, intelligent and moral as the series develops just as Homer becomes more childish. This maturity is apparent in the how the father-daughter relationship is explored in a number of episodes including "Lisa's Pony," "Lisa the Geek," "Lisa the Beauty Queen," "Lisa's Sax," "Lost Our Lisa," "Make Room for Lisa," "One Fish, Two Fish, Blowfish, Blue Fish" and "Lisa's First Word." The relationship between Homer and Lisa, and, to a different degree, Homer and Maggie, is defined by two important themes: reparation and sacrifice. Much like Homer's relationship with Marge, the father-daughter relationship with Lisa follows a predictable pattern of offense and redemption. The pattern appears initially in the early episode "Lisa's Pony" in which Homer makes up for embarrassing Lisa by buying her a pony. This plot repeats in other episodes such as "Lost our Lisa" when Homer seeks redemption by smuggling Lisa into a museum and in "The Dad Who Knew Too Little" when Homer makes up for lying by invoking a pleasant memory. This concept is not as problematic as Homer's relationship with Marge because Homer is not always the sole source of the problem as seen in the episode "Lisa's Substitute." The involvement of

Homer in situations that he is not directly responsible for leads to the second most common theme.

The theme of sacrifice in the father-daughter episodes of *The Simpsons* appears multiple times. In several episodes, including "Lisa's Pony," "Lisa's Sax," and "Lisa the Beauty Queen," Homer makes some sacrifice, such as working an extra job or giving up the chance for an air conditioner, to make Lisa happy. The best example of this has nothing to do with Lisa and actually applies to the other Simpson's daughter, Maggie. In the sixth season episode "Maggie Makes Three," a flashback to Maggie's birth reveals that Homer tried to quit his job and take his lower-paying dream job at the bowling alley. His dreams are dashed when Marge becomes pregnant with Maggie. Homer is forced to beg for his old job back, and receives a sign saying "Don't forget: you're here forever" to remind him every day. However, Maggie gives Homer strength to persevere, as the end of the episode reveals Homer has used pictures of Maggie to cover some of the letters so that the sign now says "Do it for her." The episode captures the theme of sacrifice by showing how Homer surrenders his dreams for the sake of his daughter. The theme of sacrifice is also explored in other ways, including time and money, as Homer sacrifices both in order to make Lisa happy. For instance, Homer sacrifices money on several occasions just to make Lisa feel better, ("Lisa's Sax," "Lisa the Beauty Queen"). The overall pattern is one of Homer sacrificing for the well being of Lisa and Maggie.

The themes of sacrifice and redemption are key to the father-daughter relationship because of the different expectations for sons and daughters. In the episode "Lisa the Simpson," Lisa fears she is losing her intelligence due to a defective gene. However, by the end of the episode, the status quo is restored when it is revealed that the defective

intelligence gene only affects males. The episode ends with an upset Bart asking “What about me” to the camera, before going back to playing a game involving soup-pot helmets and butting heads. The silence at the end of the episode is troubling in that it illustrates the how the expectations differ for Bart and Lisa. Lisa is comforted when she fears for her diminished capacity, while Bart is left with no answer. While initially very similar, Lisa and Bart have diverged with time into two very different characters. Early episodes display Bart as having untapped potential, as seen in the episode “Itchy and Scratchy: The Movie” when a future Bart is shown grown up as a Supreme Court Justice. This is shown to justify Homer’s harsh discipline of Bart during the episode. However, later episodes that featured future sequences show Bart as a construction worker, as seen in “Lisa’s Wedding,” or as an out-of-work drifter in “Bart to the Future.” In these same episodes, Lisa is presented as a successful college student and president. These images emphasize the Lisa’s potential, and to a lesser extent Maggie’s, as the intelligent female child. While there is no actual bias against Bart in images of Homer sacrificing for Lisa and Maggie, they reflect one of the issues of Men’s Studies. While early episodes, such as “Itchy and Scratchy the Movie” and “Bart the Genius,” imply that Bart could have potential, the concept is never fully explored. As a result, the character of Bart doesn’t change while Lisa shows development.

The emphasis on the recurring themes of sacrificing for one’s daughters promotes an archetypal father-daughter relationship where the father is willing to sacrifice his own well being on the behalf of the daughter. Lisa and Maggie receive more attention than Bart because they both have potential futures (Maggie as an infant full of potential and Lisa as the brighter child). In this manner, the Lisa/daughter archetype supports

traditional feminist traits of female empowerment. This support is not, in itself, problematic towards men. However, when compared to the buddy-buddy relationship shared between Homer and Bart, the problems become clear. While the father-daughter relationship is far from perfect, it at least reinforces the paternal role as provider for the daughters while an absence of such a role, or even the need for that role, is shown in regards to sons. Homer sacrifices so that his daughters can achieve their potential, but no mention is made regarding the need to sacrifice for Bart's potential.

## MOTHERS AND FATHERS/WIVES AND HUSBANDS

While the father-son and father-daughter relationships are important, the relationship between husband-wife is another important element in understanding the Doofus Dad Archetype. As Jonathon Gray observes, *The Simpsons* has been on the air for sixteen years and, as such, has employed in one form or another all of the stock sitcom plots (56). However, there is one particular plot that reveals the relationship between the mother/father archetypes: the Mother, underappreciated by her children and husband, leaves for a few days. In her absence, the family quickly falls into chaos as the overwhelmed father and children try (and ultimately fail) to maintain order in the absence of the mother. By the end of the episode, the mother returns and order is ultimately restored, with a new-found appreciation for her presence. Like all sit-com plots, however, the enlightenment gained in one episode does not carry into the next as the status quo must maintained if only so that is can be upset in the following episode.

The “under appreciated mother” plot has appeared in dozens of television series, and even in a few movies. Specifically, *The Simpsons* rely on this trope often with the episodes “Homer Alone,” “\$pringfield (Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling)” and “Marge in Chains.” Ultimately, the father is incapable of providing support for his family. He cannot fill the void caused by the mother’s absence nor can he take over her role. Order can only be restored when the mother reclaims this role. On the surface, this can seem empowering to the mother as it shows her being appreciated, but it is ultimately oppressive towards both men and women as it implies a number of expectations regarding the role of men and women.

The archetype of the “Mother” presented in *The Simpsons* is not the mother as a passive figure, but, like Lisa and Maggie, a figure with great potential. While the character of Marge usually begins each episode in the stock position of homemaker and caregiver, there are numerous episodes in which Marge breaks out of this limitation to try something new, be it a new profession, a new hobby, or even merely a new perspective. The writers employ this adaptability to subvert old archetypes of the mother as solely a homemaker and propose a new archetype in which the mother is quite capable of becoming much more. Yet, the mother does not grow beyond the circumstances of her status permanently. She steps outside of them briefly, as seen in “Homer Alone,” but must return so as to restore order. One of the reasons for this is the father’s incapability of fulfilling the role of the mother in her absence. While the mother has potential to be more than just a homemaker, the father, in accordance with Doofus Dad’s expectations, lacks the maturity to step into the vacated role. This demonstrates the negative elements of the Doofus Dad archetype: the mother, despite having stepped outside of the role of motherhood, must ultimately return to that role because if the father attempts to fill in, the effort will ultimately fail. This archetype respects the mother both for her capacity to be more than what she is, and for her loyalty to the position of homemaker.

The portrayal of the father as an incompetent caregiver, in part, illustrates some of the elements described by Faludi and Bruzzi. Bruzzi uses Faludi’s description of men as belonging to a society “deeded by the fathers, inhabited by the sons, but belonging in the end to neither” to reinforce the argument that men are unsure of their role in society (Faludi 41). Bruzzi describes these men as “no longer knowing what their role in life was” (154). While Bruzzi identifies that some feminists in the woman’s liberation

movement argued “that men as well as women can learn to nurture” (149); she states a truth in that many women would prefer to be both breadwinner and primary caregiver, than surrender the role of caregiver: “There is plenty to suggest that that women were compelled to juggle careers and childcare because men and fathers were simply reluctant to take on much of the domestic burden, but equally there is evidence to suggest that women would rather keep up this act than hand over the nurturing to those few men willing to take responsibility.” (149). In *The Simpsons*, Homer’s behavior helps maintain the traditional expectation of male helplessness. By acting childlike himself, the father is shown to be incapable of being a responsible caregiver. This supports the view that Marge must take on the role of the homemaker while ignoring the issue of juggling career and childcare.

The dynamic between archetypes of fathers and mothers extends beyond simple functions of breadwinner vs. caregiver. There is also the issue of moral and familial character. Doofus Dads can be identified by their juxtaposition with strong, female characters that represent the superego or the moral foundation of the family. An excellent example of this can be seen in *The Simpsons* episode “\$pringfield.” In this episode, a proposition to legalize gambling is made at a town meeting, at which point the entire assembly turns to regard Marge, preparing for an objection. Surprisingly, Marge states she thinks the proposal is a good idea. This pattern repeats in the episode in which Homer mistakenly refers to Marge’s opposition to the gambling issue. By doing this, *The Simpsons’* writers show their own awareness to the archetype in which Marge occupies as the mother and moral conscience.

Marge, and by extension all mothers, have been stereotyped in *The Simpsons* as the foundation of the family. In this regard, Marge acts as the moral center around which the character of Homer, and by extension all fathers, orbit. As demonstrated in a number of episodes, including "Homer the Heretic," "War of the Homers," "Colonel Homer" and "Homer's Night Out," Homer often performs some act which strains his relationship with Marge, including making bad decisions, over indulging, or acting selfishly. Homer's guilt in these cases is usually not in doubt and Marge maintains the moral high ground by reproaching him for his behavior. In the end, however, the two reconcile when Homer returns to Marge. What is not immediately apparent about this common situation is the natural oppression it has towards men by placing them perpetually at fault.

This situation can be broken down into the dual roles of reconciler and reconciled. In the sample episode "War of the Homers," Homer takes on the role of reconciler as it is his selfish behavior that isolates him from Marge (the reconciled) by choosing to sneak out and go fishing. The reconciler is the individual who has made the mistake and therefore must seek forgiveness, either by making amends or demonstrating contrition. The task of the reconciled is to inform the reconciler of the problem and accept the reconciliation. Ideally, these roles should be easily reversible, but this is not the case. In the episode "*Simpsons*," Marge becomes addicted to gambling and abandons her role as the moral center of the family, thus becoming the Reconciler. Ultimately, it falls to Homer to confront Marge over her problem by becoming the Reconciled. Once Homer has persuaded Marge to stop gambling, however, he proceeds to taunt her by claiming that her gambling addiction supersedes a long list of mistakes he has made. This implies that women have the ability to make mistakes and become Reconcilers. However, Fathers

cannot step into the role of the reconciled for long. While Marge has no trouble changing her character through her failure, Homer cannot maintain his new role without reverting to his Doofus Dad archetype. The result is a bias against Fathers who cannot become anything better than the Doofus Dad and cannot take on the position of the mother. This view of the unchanging father represents another view of a monolithic and unchanging patriarchy.

As has been demonstrated, *The Simpsons* is historically dependent on the legacy of sitcoms that have preceded it. As fathers became increasingly the center of television comedy, the role of the serious and moral center had to shift to another character. In this case, that shift has raised the position of the mother as the new head of the household. In keeping with the satirical nature of many comedies, Marge's position is often undercut by her status as the housewife. The show's writers have tried to liberate the female characters, showing that wives and mothers need not be limited by the expectations placed on them. Still, there has been little effort, especially in later seasons of *The Simpsons*, to liberate Homer from the Doofus Dad archetype. Instead, the Doofus Dad is weighted down by a series of troubling expectations.

While Homer is inherently a comedic character, there is an underlying assumption about what is funny and what is not. Thus while the television series is intentionally satirical, an underlying morality exists. In almost every occasion, the self-centered actions of Homer are the source of the problem. The first and fundamental element in this morality is the view of the father as a self-centered but not malicious child. Homer and Marge are juxtaposed as the offending husband and the patient wife. These episodes center around Homer unknowingly making a mistake that damages his relationship with

Marge. For instance, in the episode "War of The Simpsons," Homer's drinking and decision to go fishing, rather than attend marriage counseling, threatens their marriage. By the end of the episode, however, Homer redeems himself in his wife's eyes by revealing his commitment to their marriage. This repeats in a number of episodes including "Colonel Homer" and "Homer's Night Out." In these instances, the father figure makes a number of mistakes including drinking too much, lying, and over indulging. However, the wife ultimately accepts the father back after a moving emotional plea, as seen in "Homer's Night Out." In each case, the episode reinforces two ideas; first, a husband and wife can reconcile after any incident if the husband is truly repentant and says the right thing. Secondly, it is assumed that the husband's actions are not inherently malicious towards the wife, but rather the result of shortsightedness and therefore should be given leniency. It is notable, however, that in each episode, the reconciliation occurs but there is no long-term change in the husband's behavior. As is the nature of the television sitcom, the intention is a return to the status quo by the end of the episode. However, this implies that fathers do not have to change their behavior in order to maintain the relationship with their wives. In reality, such behavior is extremely damaging to relationships as lives are not resolved as quickly as those in television episodes and forgiveness not as easy to offer.

While *The Simpsons* imply that Marge should forgive Homer's mistakes, there are certain situations which the shows writers have strictly avoided. One common element that Homer has never displayed is the issue of infidelity. While Doofus Dad characters, like Homer, tend to be selfish, there is a refusal to be unfaithful. In several episodes of *The Simpsons*, including "Colonel Homer" and "The Last Temptation of Homer," Homer

is given the opportunity to cheat but remains faithful to Marge. Despite the fact that Homer, and Doofus Dads, are continually portrayed as being oblivious to their surroundings and hedonistic, there is the assumption that they will always remain loyal to their spouses. This implies that the act of cheating on a spouse is not forgivable while certain activities such as drinking, lying, and ignoring responsibilities are.

While Homer has never made the mistake of being adulterous, there have been several episodes in which Marge either kicks Homer out or leaves with the children. In "Cartridge Family," Homer buys a gun, but drives away Marge when he refuses to get rid of it. In "Secrets of a Successful Marriage," Homer gets kicked out after revealing personal secrets about Marge and his love life to the whole town. These episodes demonstrate a breach of trust and intimacy and, in the case of the gun, threaten the family. In these cases, the husband's actions threaten the physical security of the marriage (as seen in "Cartridge Family") or the emotional security (as seen in "Secrets of a Successful Marriage"). In light of the seriousness of such acts, the reconciliation must likewise be more sincere. In *The Simpsons Movie* this is especially clear when Homer, in a classical act of short-sighted selfishness, illegally dumps sewage into the Springfield Lake on the way to getting free donuts. This act ruins the town's environmental reform and turns the Simpsons into fugitives. As his act of reconciliation, Homer reveals his grand plan to fix everything by moving the family to Alaska. While Marge is initially hesitant to even consider such a plan, Homer manages to convince her through a deep and emotional plea to believe in him. Surprisingly, Alaska turns out to be even better than imagined, complete with idyllic landscapes and friendly animals that help Marge into bed. However, when Marge learns that Springfield is scheduled to be blown up, she uses

Homer's same impassioned plea in an effort to get him to help her. Homer responds that this is the dumbest thing he has ever heard, prompting Marge to leave him with the children. Marge states she has had enough and feels she can no longer deal with Homer's behavior. Realizing that he has fundamentally harmed their marriage, Homer risks his life to save the town and hopefully redeem himself in the eyes of Marge. This pattern shows that the expectation of reconciliation is proportional to the act.

This portrayal of Homer reinforces an image in which the husband is allowed to be self-interested and immature. As long as he possesses the traits of faithfulness and a willingness to seek redemption, he is acceptable. On the other hand, the archetype presented in Marge emphasizes that the wife's reaction to this behavior is justified. Along with this justification is the assumption that the wife should always be willing to accept the Father back, provided his apology is sincere. The limitations of both these archetypes are easily identifiable as they make the mother into the moral center that is always right, while the father is always wrong. Even if the husband may be right briefly, as seen in certain instances, this does not fully excuse his selfishness. Only by making an extreme act of reconciliation can the husband repair the damage and insure forgiveness. The result is a troubled relationship in which the wife is expected to accept the mistakes and care for the husband almost the same way that she cares for the children with infinite forgiveness. Likewise, he is expected to feel shame and seek redemption in all cases, as well to sacrifice for his family.

## CONCLUSION

The role of fathers in television leaves many areas for exploration. The dynamic between fathers and daughters is open for a more study. The topic of fathers without partners or with deceased spouses is also an area of future exploration as currently this seems to be the only alternative to a Doofus Dad situation.

In all, *The Simpsons* has proven to be a scathing reflection of culture as its use of comedy has given it great staying power. By playing on the fundamental assumptions about gender, the series employs deformed archetypes of gender to comedic results. Currently, fathers have been and continually are the comedic anchor of the television series. The normalization of the father as buffoon is a growing element in the media and appears to expand with every new show that maintains this stereotype. Already, *The Simpsons* has inspired a new generation of television programs such as *Family Guy* and *American Dad*. Considering that *The Simpsons* was the product of other television series, it can be assumed that it will produce successor shows of its own. With all the research pointing to a crisis in male self image and identity, there is little doubt that representations of Doofus Dad and irresponsible fathers do little to improve the situation.

So far, *The Simpsons* has demonstrated an awareness and support of feminist issues by portraying positive images of women that emphasize their capacity for change. However, the series has not been able to provide a similar support to men who must struggle with the unchanging traits of the Doofus Dad and the Buddy-Buddy relationship between father and son. What is called for here is not a change in the presentation of women in *The Simpsons*, but greater awareness towards the issues facing men. Currently,

it is possible for viewers to laugh at Homer when he comically errs, taking comfort in ones own superiority. However, at the same time, there is the subtle acceptance of these elements of the Doofus Dad archetype without complaint. Why is it that Homer can never take over for Marge? Why is Bart's potential always left unfocused? Why must the relationship between Homer and Bart be based solely on friendship and not respect? These are simple question that await answers. As long as fathers are expected to be partners for their sons, providers for their daughters, and penitents for their wives, there is likely to be little change in the situation. One can only hope that the same social consciousness that has driven *The Simpsons* so far will lead to a new portrayal in the seasons to come.

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