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HAS CLASSIC TV GONE OUT OF STYLE?

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ABSTRACT

From The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, The Donna Reed Show, and Leave It to Beaver to Roseanne, Everybody Loves Raymond, and Married...with Children, the television and its sitcom families have been a part of our lives from TV's inception. Although sixty years have passed since TV's modest beginnings, through the power of technology, reruns, and networks such as TV Land, we, the modern viewing public, have a glimpse into the world of classic TV. A world filmed entirely in black and white, it gives us insight into the TV world of yesteryear. It also gives us the chance to compare that world with today's world filmed in spectacular Technicolor. It's easy to see that black and white versus color isn't the only difference between classic TV and modern programming. Turn on the TV during primetime tonight. Notice anything? Look in the upper left hand corner of the screen. Most shows today come with a rating, warning parents of violence, language, sex, and drugs that may deem the program unsuitable for younger viewers. Sixty years ago ratings were unnecessary. Anytime of day or night, adults, children, or the entire family could turn to any channel and watch wholesome TV programming. Just as times have changed, TV has changed the way it portrays the family unit. The classic sitcom family is generally nothing like the modern sitcom family. June Cleaver isn't Roseanne Conner, Jim Anderson isn't Al Bundy, and Ricky Nelson isn't Bart Simpson. They just don't make TV families like they used to.

In recent years, classic TV bashing has come into vogue. Many people complain that classic domestic sitcoms give an unrealistic portrayal of American families – then and now. They see classic TV as irrelevant to society. This, however, is untrue. As in the past, classic domestic sitcoms continue to provide their viewers with positive role models and a moral compass; they embody the ideals that America was founded on. This thesis is, therefore, a defense of the representations of family dynamics on classic domestic sitcoms, and, by extension, a critique of contemporary constructions. It compares the families on classic domestic sitcoms to those of modern domestic sitcoms. For the purpose of this thesis,

classic TV is defined to include shows that premiered prior to 1970, although they may have continued to air past that year. Accordingly, modern TV consists of shows that debuted in or after 1970. The year 1970 is used as the point of differentiation because, although TV was changing during the 1960s, the greatest divergence from classic TV is apparent in the 1970s. It must also be noted that this writer is speaking in generalities. In almost all cases, especially in modern TV, there are exceptions to most premises. These are exceptions, however; and the premises apply to the majority of shows of their times.

Television has been written about as long as the medium has existed. While this thesis cites numerous books and articles, it is important to discuss some of the most notable sources here. First, Prime-Time Families, by Ella Taylor (1989), takes a look at TV's influence on cultural change. Taylor, using historical context and sociology, examines changing TV family life and the changing ideas of the "normal family", both pre- and post-1970. She then goes on to explore domesticity within another sitcom setting – the workplace. Where Taylor studies sitcoms, S. Robert Lichter, Linda S. Lichter, and Stanley Rothman study numerous genres of TV's prime time in the book Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture (1994). This comprehensive study details how television has portrayed American society since its beginning. It also looks at social conflict and leadership in America and the interaction of TV and our society. Prime Time, like this thesis, argues that TV is not merely a "fantasy factory" but a serious source of social commentary. Living Room Lectures, by Nina C. Leibman (1995), compares and contrasts classic TV shows with feature films of the same era. In doing so, she explores how each genre depicts common themes as well as familial power, gender roles, and finances. Finally, Stephanie Coontz's The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (2000) provides a jumping off point for this thesis. In her book, Coontz uses historical analysis to show that the classic domestic sitcoms were not the "traditional family" in America. She analyzes the gender roles and division of labor in the 1950s. Coontz asserts that nostalgia created the unrealistic yet ideal family presented in classic TV. Despite Coontz's criticism of the lack of realism in classic sitcoms, that alone does not make classic domestic sitcoms unworthy of study.

Where the aforementioned texts provide a foundation for this thesis, most of the comparison presented here is based on this writer's own observations and knowledge of television. Two main sources were referenced to support and provide details of the sitcoms discussed. The first, The Great TV Sitcom Book, by Rick Mitz (1988), delves into a few of the "front runners" of each year from 1949 to 1988. The second, The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows: 1946 – Present, by Tim Brooks and Earle F. Marsh (2007), provides a short description of each show in addition to a list of characters and actors. Both of these sources buttress this writer's knowledge of the subject matter.

The first chapter of this thesis compares family structure and composition, including the reasons for missing family members and how these roles are filled. Chapters two through four compare the roles of family members – fathers, mothers, and children respectively. Chapter five looks at race as a part of both classic and modern domestic sitcoms and the integration of television through time. Chapter six then compares the issues addressed in classic and modern sitcoms, such as family problems, sexuality, and current events. Next, chapter seven provides a comparison of the values reflected by each type of sitcom. Finally, chapter eight compiles the information presented in the previous sections to discuss the benefits and downsides of both classic and modern television. It then discusses the value of classic domestic sitcoms and their place in society. Within these eight chapters, it will be proven that although classic and modern sitcoms are different; classic TV still has value and, therefore, a place in modern society.

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Chapter 1

Family Composition

Family Composition in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It's 1956. You turn on the television and adjust the antenna. On the screen appears a quaint kitchen. Jim Anderson is sitting at a round table reading the morning newspaper and sipping homemade orange juice. His wife, Margaret, wearing a floral apron and pearls, is at the stove frying bacon. The door swings open and oldest daughter Betty enters. "Good morning, Betty," Margaret says.

"Hi, Mom," she replies. "Good morning, Father."

"Hello, Princess," Jim says, turning to the next page with a flourish.

Margaret removes the bacon from the skillet and yells, "Bud! Kathy! Breakfast is ready!" She places the plate of bacon, eggs, and toast on the table.

In comes Kathy, schoolbooks in hand. "Good morning," she says with a smile and begins to fill her plate with eggs.

"Where's Bud?" Margaret asks.

"Probably trying to shave again," says Betty with a giggle.

"Bud, come down here. You're going to be late for school!" shouts Jim. Margaret places three packed lunches on the counter for her children.

"Let's go, Kathy," says Betty. The two girls wipe their mouths, kiss their parents, grab their lunches, and leave for school.

"Bud!" yells Margaret becoming annoyed.

Clomp! Clomp! Clomp! Bud, with small pieces of tissue stuck to his chin, rushes down the stairs and into the kitchen. "Gotta go, Mom!"

"What did you do to your face?" asks Margaret.

“I told you it’s too soon for you to start shaving,” scolds Jim.

“I know. I’m going to be late!” announces Bud as he takes a fistful of bacon and runs for the door. “Bye, Mom. Bye, Dad.” A few seconds pass. The door flies open and Bud runs back in. “Forgot my lunch!” Bud snatches the lunch bag from the counter and leaves again in a hurry. Jim looks up at Margaret from behind the paper. The two exchange glances and shake their heads.

This scene from Father Knows Best is a typical representation of the classic TV family. You turn the channel. On The Donna Reed Show, Donna Stone is baking a cake for her children, Mary and Jeff, as her husband, Alex, says goodbye to a patient. Turn the channel one more time to Leave It to Beaver, and there is Ward Cleaver lecturing Beaver once again for losing his money. The names may be different, but the family structure is the same. The classic sitcom family is nuclear – a family group consisting of only biological mother, father, and children. In most cases, the family is composed of a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and attentive children of varying numbers and sexes. Grandparents and other relatives are seldom seen, except in the occasional episode in which the plot revolves around the extended family member’s visit.

Nuclear families were the centerpiece of domestic sitcoms from TV’s inception through its early years. One of the earliest domestic comedies, Mama, which premiered in 1949, follows the Hansen family’s adventures in turn-of-the-20th-century San Francisco. Mama, Papa (a carpenter), and their children Katrin, Nels, and Dagmar are the center of the series (Desjardins 1401).

A few years later in 1952, America was introduced to the Nelsons on The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet. Again, the show followed Ozzie; his homemaker wife, Harriet; and their two teenage sons, David and Ricky. The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet “epitomized [the] upright, happy family life for decades;” and over its fourteen-year run, the Nelsons gave us “an idealized portrait of the American nuclear family of the postwar years” (Weisblat 26-27).

Perhaps one of the most recognizable nuclear families of 1950s television is the Andersons of Father Knows Best. The Andersons entered American living rooms in 1954, and the show quickly became one of the most appealing domestic sitcoms on TV (Mitz 99). As the title suggests, the head of

the family is Jim Anderson, an insurance salesman. His wife, Margaret, takes care of the house and children. There are three Anderson children: teenage daughter Betty, affectionately called Princess by her father; adolescent son Bud; and the baby of the family Kathy, a.k.a Kitten. Much like the Nelsons of The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, the Andersons are a nuclear family that reflects the family norm of the time.

The year 1957 introduced America to another famous fictional family – the Cleavers. Leave It to Beaver, unlike Father Knows Best and The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, focuses on the offspring rather than the parents as the stories were told from the children’s point of view (Orlik 1339). The show’s namesake is the younger Cleaver son, Theodore, who received the nickname Beaver as an infant. Beaver’s family includes his father, Ward; his mother, June; and his older brother, Wally. Beaver and Wally’s friends are introduced and change as the series progresses and as the boys age. These buddies are the main supporting characters on the show as rarely extended family members are introduced.

The Dick Van Dyke Show premiered in the fall of 1961. This sitcom, unlike those previously discussed, blends domestic and workplace comedy. The show revolves around Rob Petrie, a comedy writer; his wife, Laura; and their son, Richie. “The Dick Van Dyke Show was a lot of people’s favorite because – just like the Kennedys – it gave the country a sense of family and unity and community” (Mitz 159).

In the classic domestic sitcom prior to 1970, rarely is a parental figure missing from the nuclear family; and, if there is, death, not divorce, is the cause. Divorce was frowned upon during TV’s early years; therefore, if a program wanted to be accepted by the viewing public, it had to conform to the norms of the day. A single parent due to the death of a spouse was much more admissible than a single parent due to divorce.

One such sitcom in which the nuclear family is incomplete due to death is My Little Margie. The show, which debuted in 1952, features cute and perky Margie Albright, a 21-year-old who schemes up wild shenanigans (Mitz 53). She lives with her widowed father, Vern Albright, who has chosen not to

remarry. Instead, as Vern states in the opening narrative, “I’ve been both mother and father to her since she was born” (“My Little Margie TV Show”).

Widows as well as widowers dotted the classic TV screen. Julia, a 1968 sitcom, followed the struggles of Julia Baker, a black nurse and single parent, as she tries to raise her young son Corey after the death of her husband in a helicopter crash in Vietnam. Although Julia dates throughout the series, she never remarries (Bodroghkozy, “Julia” 1232).

In 1969, another instant American classic was launched. The Brady Bunch is based on the merging of two families because of remarriage. Architect Mike Brady, a widower who has three sons, marries Carol Martin, a widow who has three daughters; and the story begins.

Also in the fall of 1969, The Courtship of Eddie’s Father introduced Tom Corbett, a widower magazine editor, and his six-year-old son, Eddie. Eddie cleverly tries to get his father a wife, and himself a stepmother, throughout the sitcom. Tom Corbett, like other TV widows and widowers, endeared himself to the public and garnered viewers' sympathy because he has lost a spouse.

If a spouse was missing in an early TV sitcom, his or her role was often recast in order to keep the nuclear family dynamics intact. Sometimes the role is filled by an extended family member or a family friend while at other times it is filled by a domestic servant.

Aunt Bee steps in to fill the role of Opie’s mother on The Andy Griffith Show which debuted in 1960. Sheriff and widower Andy Taylor applies his old-fashioned wisdom to raising his son Opie, a task he shares with his Aunt Bee. Aunt Bee takes care of the house, the traditional mother’s duty, by doing the cleaning and cooking while Andy is serving the people of Mayberry.

That same year, My Three Sons premiered. The premise of this show is an all-male family. Father and widower Steve Douglas lives with his sons Mike, Robbie, and Chip in early episodes and with Robbie, Chip, and adopted son Ernie after Mike goes off to school. Since their mother’s death, Francis “Bub” O’Casey steps in to be the “woman” in their life (Mitz 149). Bub, the Douglas boys’ maternal grandfather, does the all of the cooking, cleaning, and other housework. Later in the series, he is replaced by Uncle Charlie; but the role remains the same.

Another show in which the traditional roles must be filled is Family Affair. Bill Davis, president of a construction company, raises his brother's children after his brother and sister-in-law are killed in a car crash. He takes in teenage Cissy and twins Buffy and Jody. Mr. Giles French, a gentleman's gentleman, becomes a nanny to the children and takes care of them while Bill is traveling for work (Mitz 198-199). In this sitcom, which first aired in 1966, Mr. French takes on the traditional mother role while Uncle Bill takes on that of the father and breadwinner.

The typical classic TV sitcom family obviously shares certain family traits. Nuclear families were common both on American main streets as well as on TV; and, as in post WWII America, divorce was unacceptable; therefore, it was also taboo on TV. In all regards, however, the semblance of a nuclear family and its corresponding traditional family roles had to be maintained even if that meant filling the roles of absentee parents with other characters. The nuclear family formed the nucleus of classic TV family sitcoms and reaffirmed traditional family roles.

Family Composition in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

Now it's 1990. You grab the remote and turn on the TV. On the screen appears a messy kitchen. Dishes are piled high in the sink; the refrigerator is covered with notes, coupons, ads, and children's artwork. Dan Conner is slumped in a chair at the kitchen table reading the newspaper. His wife, Roseanne, wearing jeans and a red and blue flannel shirt, her hair in curlers, is placing bread into the toaster. Their son, D.J., comes in and sits at the table with his feet propped on the chair beside him. "Dad, do you know what would be good for breakfast?" D.J. asks.

"What?" mumbles Dan only half paying attention.

"Pie," answers D.J.

Dan looks at Roseanne. "Tell him no, Dan," barks Roseanne as she slathers the toast with butter.

“Your mother says you can’t have pie for breakfast,” responds Dan. Their daughter Darlene enters and plops her backpack onto the floor. She hands Roseanne a crinkled note from her teacher requesting a meeting between the two in the afternoon.

“Why do you always wait ’til the last minute to give me these things?” shouts Roseanne.

“I’m sorry! What do you want me to do, throw myself off a bridge?” retorts Darlene sarcastically.

Roseanne snaps back, “Yeah, and take your brother and sister with you!” (Roseanne and Williams)

The *Connors*, like the *Andersons*, have been called the typical American family. This scene from *Roseanne* reflects the family of modern times. *Roseanne* and other modern sitcoms such as *Married...with Children* and *Two and a Half Men*, however, are diametrically opposed to the black and white sitcoms of the ‘50s. The modern TV family is often a non-nuclear family. Divorce and blended families are concepts common to the modern sitcom genre. Children may even be adopted or illegitimate. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors, co-workers, and housekeepers are now a major part of weekly storylines.

In contrast to classic sitcom families, non-nuclear families are the centerpiece of the modern domestic sitcom. Premiering in 1971, *All in the Family* is an early example in which an “outsider” becomes a member of the family. Archie Bunker and his wife, Edith, live with their daughter, Gloria, and live-in son-in-law, Mike Stivic. Mike provides a source of conflict because his liberal, “hippie” beliefs frequently oppose Archie’s views. This groundbreaking sitcom ushered in a new era of sitcom families.

Another notable non-nuclear sitcom family appeared on America’s television screens in 1978. *Diff’rent Strokes* featured Arnold and Willis Jackson, two orphaned African-American boys who are taken in by their deceased mother’s employer, rich businessman Phillip Drummond and his daughter, Kimberly. Additionally, *Diff’rent Strokes* featured no less than three maids during the show’s run. Each maid also served as part of the Jackson-Drummond extended family.

In 1984, Kate and Allie dealt with the issue of single parenthood. Kate McArdle and Allie Lowell are divorced women who decide to move in together and “raise their three children as a family unit” (Catron 1239). Although Kate and Allie are not related, the pair merges their households, which include Kate’s daughter, Emma, and Allie’s children, Jennie and Chip, thereby forming a non-nuclear family.

A few years later in 1987, another sitcom featuring a single parent premiered. This sitcom, Full House, centered on Danny Tanner, a recently widowed man and his three daughters, D.J., Stephanie, and Michelle. However, this single father did not raise his daughters alone. Danny enlists his deceased wife’s brother, Jesse Katsopolis, and his childhood best friend, Joey Gladstone, to help him raise the girls. With the addition of these two men to the household, the family becomes non-nuclear. This non-nuclear family is extended near the end of the series’ run to also include Jesse’s wife, Rebecca, and their twin sons.

A more recent example of a modern non-nuclear family comes from 2009’s Modern Family. The storyline focuses on the extended Pritchett family. Family patriarch Jay Pritchett is married to Gloria, a Colombian woman half his age. Together they raise Gloria’s son, Manny. Jay’s gay son, Mitchell Pritchett, and his partner, Cameron Tucker, raise Lily, the Vietnamese baby they have adopted. Finally, Jay’s daughter, Claire Dunphy has three children with her husband, Phil Dunphy. This large family is the sitcom’s source of comedy as a film crew follows the three different families for an upcoming reality television show (“Modern Family”).

In the modern TV sitcom, as in TV’s early sitcoms, it is not uncommon for a parental figure to be missing from the family. The difference is that divorce, instead of death, is most likely the cause. During TV’s early years, divorce was frowned upon by the public; but because the stigma of divorce has largely disappeared from society, a program featuring a divorcee is readily accepted by viewers. Not only do viewers accept it, many can identify with it. With this change in social mores and attitudes, viewers are nonplussed at the idea of a single parent due to divorce and welcome them to their TV screens.

One modern sitcom in which a parent is single due to divorce is One Day at a Time. This series debuted in 1976 and featured Ann Romano. Ann married at the age of 17 and now, in her thirties, finds

herself divorced, and trying to raise two teenage daughters, Julie and Barbara. Although she was not the first divorced woman on TV, many consider Ann the most realistic because she struggled to find a job and fought for child support from her deadbeat ex-husband (O'Dell 1692).

Another divorced mother is the main character in Reba, which first aired in 2001. This domestic comedy features wisecracking but sensible Reba Hart as a single mother raising three children outside Houston, Texas. Reba's ex-husband, Brock, is a dentist who marries a much younger, bubble-brained woman named Barbara Jean after having an affair with her. Throughout its six seasons, Reba balances preparing her teenage daughter for motherhood, looking for love again, and acting as an unofficial, and most times reluctant, marriage therapist for her ex-husband and his new wife. Reba's nurturing culminates in a new kind of family.

Two years later, a future American classic, Two and a Half Men, first aired. Following his divorce, Alan Harper, low on cash, has to find a new place for himself and his young son, Jake, to live. He decides to move in with his brother Charlie, a womanizing, heavy drinking, jingle writer. Together, they act, for better or worse (usually worse), as Jake's role models. In this sitcom, Alan's ex-wife, Judith, is a recurring character; but she is not part of the household.

In 2006, The New Adventures of Old Christine began its run. Christine Campbell is a divorced mother who owns a women's gym. Christine lives with her son, Ritchie, and her brother, Matthew. Her ex-husband, Richard, is dating a woman also named Christine, a "newer" version of herself. During the show's five seasons, Christine runs the gym with her best friend, searches for love, and battles with non-working, stuck-up mothers at Ritchie's private school.

In modern TV sitcoms, if a spouse is missing, his or her role may or may not be recast. Unlike classic sitcom families, roles do not have to be filled because families no longer need to be nuclear.

In 1976, America was introduced to Alice. After Alice Hyatt's husband is killed in a trucking accident, she attempts to move from New Jersey to Los Angeles with her son, Tommy. Their car breaks down outside of Phoenix, and they take up residence in a small apartment. Alice takes a waitress job at Mel's Diner, which becomes the prime location of the show. Despite being widowed, Alice never

remarries during the show's run as she "refuses to be dependent on a man" (Huff 55). No male figure takes the place of Tommy's father. Although Mel and Tommy's basketball coach, Earl, appear in the series, these men do not take on the traditional father role.

Conversely, the plot of 1984's Punky Brewster revolves around an orphaned girl, Punky, being raised by her foster father, Henry Warnimont. Henry is a widower who works as a photographer. Although Punky does have women in her life, including teachers and her friend's grandmother, no woman ever replaces her mother. The mother role is left empty during the series.

The mother role also remains vacant in My Two Dads. This show, which premiered in 1987, centers on Nicole Bradford, whose mother has recently died. Twelve years earlier, Nicole's mother found herself pregnant after dating two men who happened to be best friends. With paternity undetermined, Joey Harris and Michael Taylor are granted joint custody of the girl ("My Two Dads"). No mother figure takes the place of Nicole's biological mother; despite having two father figures, no one takes on the traditional mother role.

As social mores and practices evolved, post-1970 TV sitcoms reflected those changes. No longer was a nuclear family required; no longer was there a need to create even the semblance of a nuclear family; no longer was death the only acceptable reason for a non-nuclear family. As the viewing public became more liberal in its views, TV sitcoms became more liberal in their portrayals of the family unit.

Chapter 2

Father's Role

Fathers in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It's the fall of 1960. You adjust the TV dial to find My Three Sons. On the black-and-white screen appear Steve Douglas and his son Chip dressed in suits. At Chip's grade school dance, father and son face a parallel problem. Both have an unwanted female suitor. Their dates leave to freshen up, and Chip questions his father. "That lady makes goof eyes at you too, huh, Dad?"

Adjusting his pocket-handkerchief, Steve answers, "Yes, she does, sort of."

"If she was a bug, would you step on her?" questions Chip.

"Well, let's put it this way, Chip. If anybody's going to be making goof eyes, I want to be the one to do it."

Chip thinks for a second. "But you have to be kind to her, don't you?"

"Well, yes."

"Because you're a gentleman?" asks Chip.

"That's right, Chip," confirms Steve.

Violin music begins to play. Chip looks down as if to soak in his father's words. "Dad, is it being kind to someone to pretend you like them when you don't?"

"No, I don't suppose it is, Chip."

"Don't you think we oughta do something about it?"

"Yes, I guess maybe we ought to; but we'll have to do it diplomatically," Steve suggests.

"Swell! When they get back let's kick them both in the knee and go to a baseball game!" Chip is happy at this idea. Laughter ensues.

“That’s not exactly what I meant. Well, as you said, we’ll have to do it like gentlemen. I mean, so we don’t hurt their feelings. Okay?”

Chip, disappointed, responds, “Okay.”

“Okay,” affirms Steve, putting his arm around Chip.

“It’s sort of fun being in the same kind of trouble together, ain’t it?”

“Isn’t it,” corrects Steve, growing a small smile (Tibbles).

Classic sitcom fathers, such as Steve Douglas, usually come in one of two forms - either the saint or the bumbler. As the saint, the classic TV father is just a little shy of perfect. He is successful, confident, and admired and loved by his wife and children, co-workers, and neighbors. He is a professional, usually a doctor or engineer. "All fathers keep employment hours that favor their involvement in the domestic scene....Because of their remarkable proximity, the fathers are made privy to all of their children's dilemmas and delights" (Leibman 120). As the final authority, very little can be done in the household without the father’s permission, yet he never abuses his power and is rarely harsh in his judgments. His "implicit power is rendered in the flow and content of familial conversation, in his omnipresence for both disciplinary and praise-giving occasions, in his frequent position at the center of the narrative, and in his visual and aural dominance" (Leibman 118). He is wise, ethical, and acts as an advisor, giving his children moral guidance. He prefers that the family member become aware of his or her errors, solve his or her own problems, and learn from his or her own mistakes rather than relying on him to solve the problem. On those rare occasions when the classic TV father does make a slight mistake or loses his temper, he soon recognizes his error and apologizes for it - another saintly thing to do.

Jim Anderson from Father Knows Best is one of the best examples of a saintly classic sitcom father. As the superlative in the title suggests, Jim Anderson, an insurance salesman, is the preeminent authority in the Anderson household. He is the "go to" man when anyone, wife or child, has a problem. He is there to give advice, to make others feel better, and to act as a moral compass. “He was the ideal father – whether he was counseling Bud about running away from home, advising Betty about her prom plans, or chatting with Kathy about a school paper” (Mitz 99).

Jim Anderson paved the way for other saintly television fathers like Steve Douglas on My Three Sons. The premise of the show revolves around Steve, a widowed aircraft engineer, and his interaction with his three motherless sons. “The boys have a problem, and [Steve Douglas], with his subtle wisdom, lets them work it out – but guides them with an invisible hand” (Hingley 11). Steve rarely encounters a situation he is unsure how to handle, and his sons rarely disobey his orders or fail to take his advice. If they do, they soon realize that their father, like Jim Anderson, knows best.

Just as Steve Douglas loves his sons, fellow widower, Professor Russell Lawrence loves his daughter Gidget. Gidget storylines frequently include Lawrence's older daughter, Anne, and his son-in-law, John Cooper, a psychology student, who are concerned that Professor Lawrence is not raising Gidget properly. Although Anne and her husband think that the professor's parenting skills need honing, they couldn't be more wrong: Lawrence and his daughter Gidget have a close, loving relationship. Gidget goes to him with her problems, and he points her in the right direction without directly telling her what to do. By the end of these episodes, Professor Lawrence shows that he handled Gidget and her problems correctly, which is no surprise to the audience, and proves that he can raise his daughter alone.

The other classic TV fathers tend to fall under the bumbler classification. These fathers are far from perfect. As bumlbers, these fathers make mistakes; and it's these mistakes that act as fodder for the situation comedy. Because these fathers are so lovable, they are easily forgiven for their missteps; the viewers are always aware that the hearts of these bunglers are in the right places even if their thought processes are amiss.

Chester Riley is a prime example of a bumblng father. As a blue-collar worker, an airplane riveter, Chester Riley lacks higher education and a great deal of refinement. Still, he is the breadwinner of the family; and provides for his wife and children as well as any factory worker of his day. Riley does, however, frequently get himself into sticky situations. Small problems are quickly magnified once Chester Riley becomes involved. "Each week Riley first became flustered, then overwhelmed by seemingly minor problems concerning his job, his family, or his neighbors. These small matters escalated to the verge of disaster once Riley became involved" (Bareiss 1360). Riley doesn't issue sage advice to

his offspring; he doesn't lead them to the answers; he is lucky to solve his own problems. Riley's tag line says it all, "What a revoltin' development this is!"

Another bumbler from an iconic fictional American family was Ozzie Nelson. The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet focuses on the Nelson family: father, Ozzie; mother, Harriet; and sons, David and Ricky. Weekly plotlines usually circled around Ozzie's family and a situation he misunderstands. "The genial, bumbling Ozzie was the narrative linchpin of Ozzie and Harriet, attempting to steer his young sons toward the proper paths (usually rather ineffectually)..." (Weisblat 27). Ozzie's involvement turns a small problem into a large one, briefly causing disorder in the household; but the problems are always straightened out by the end of the episode.

A more comedic version of the bumbling father is Danny Williams from Make Room for Daddy. Danny, the focal point of the show, struggles in each episode to balance his work as an entertainer with his family life. In contrast to many of the classic sitcom fathers, Danny wasn't afraid to raise his voice – not out of anger, but to be heard in a household where he often felt out of place. Because Thomas was, in real life, an entertainer and comedian, his character, Danny Williams, frequently spewed one-liners and played some scenes expressly for laughs, something not done by other classic TV fathers. Danny was often the butt of the jokes, his large Lebanese nose being a frequent target of derision.

These two types of classic TV fathers, saints and bumlbers, do, however, share many qualities. With rare exception, the father is the head of the household, the breadwinner, and the authority figure. He usually gives advice from his at home retreat – the living room, the den, or home office - the father's domain, a place to relax in his comfortable, well-worn chair, to smoke a pipe, to read the evening newspaper, or to finish work from the office. He works hard to provide for his loved ones, whether he works in an office or a factory, and he protects his family from harm. But first and foremost, both types of fathers, both saint and bumbler, love their families and are loved by their families - unconditionally.

Fathers in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

Now it's 1992. You turn on the TV. On the screen appears a comfortable family room and kitchen. Jill Taylor and her friend, Karen, are relaxing on the overstuffed sofa and chair, drinking water, and chatting. Jill's son Randy is setting out placemats and napkins on the dinner table. Tim Taylor walks in the garage door with a large, jagged piece of wood attached to his forehead. Jill briskly walks to him, trying to hold back her laughter but unable to control the growing grin. "What is this thing on your head?" Jill asks.

"It's a little piece of table," replies Tim casually.

"What happened?" inquires Randy.

"Oh, Mr. Negativity, Al, distracted me; and I got my head cemented to this table. They had to take a – a saber saw to get me off of that table."

Jill, with a bit of concern in her voice, asks her husband, "Don't you think you should go to the emergency room?"

"I was just there. They said I wasn't a *priority*," replies Tim while fidgeting with the piece of wood.

Jill's face remains completely straight. "Why? Was there a guy with a whole table stuck to his head?" Jill and Karen double over in laughter. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, honey. We'll be good," says Jill.

"You notice I'm not laughing," replies Tim, frustrated with his family's lack of concern.

"Yeah, yeah. Well, we'll be good. C'mon, c'mon, c'mon. Randy, set the table," Jill says, pushing Karen into the kitchen.

"Okay. Dad, bend over!" retorts Randy. Jill, Karen, and Randy laugh at another of Tim's plight (Finestra, McFadzean, and Williams).

The role of the father in modern TV sitcoms is not as stereotyped as it was in the classic TV sitcoms of the 1950s; the father is neither saint nor bumbler. No longer is the father the sole breadwinner; no longer is he necessarily the only voice of wisdom; no longer is he the recipient of his family's

unconditional love and admiration. In fact, the father is often portrayed as sloppy and lazy, with no idea about how to run a house, raise children, or please his wife. Modern sitcom fathers are rarely a source of wisdom to their children and usually aren't the best role models. It is common for the father to be a professional like Cliff Huxtable from The Cosby Show, but it is also just as common for him to be a blue-collar worker like Doug Heffernan from The King of Queens. The father may simply be unemployed, or he may frequently change jobs like Al Bundy from Married...with Children, who has held jobs ranging from a shoe salesman to a security guard, from a garbage man to an exotic male dancer. Like classic sitcom fathers, modern sitcom fathers commonly have a space to themselves such as a recliner in front of a big screen TV; but the family does not usually respect his space. Wives infringe upon their husbands' solitude by demanding that they run errands, help around the house, and look after the children. Overall, modern sitcom fathers are imperfect men.

Perhaps one of the most famous imperfect men of modern television is All in the Family's Archie Bunker. Archie is a rather uneducated laborer, and his family is not affluent. Archie is almost always grumpy and a bigot; he is insulting and disrespectful, not only to strangers, but also to friends and family with whom he disagrees. "Dingbat" is a term frustrated Archie routinely uses to describe his wife, Edith, both behind her back and to her face; while "meathead" is a derogatory label conservative Archie reserves for his liberal son-in-law, Mike Stivic. Archie's daughter, Gloria, Mike, and Edith push his buttons, and are not afraid to stand up to him.

Another modern sitcom father whose family gives him a hard time is Married...with Children's Al Bundy. Al has resigned himself to selling women's shoes after several other unsuccessful jobs. Without a college education, he lives in the shadow of his high school football glory days. This lazy patriarch "...likes beer, putting his right hand into his pants and watching sports on TV. He loves to be on the toilet for a long time..." (Carl). Also, Al isn't above physical aggression. Although he is the head of the household, his actions, and his inactions, cause his family to disrespect him; and his hard luck is the focus of many storylines.

Tim Taylor from Home Improvement is a caricature of the modern male. Tim and his wife, Jill, have three sons. Tim hosts a local home improvement show called Tool Time. Tim loves manly things - tools, sports, and cars; and he grunts as a sign of masculinity. He is of little help around the house, frequently breaking items in his attempt to fix them, and usually gives his sons advice that Jill disapproves of. In this show, the voice of wisdom comes from the other side of the fence. The Taylors' neighbor, Wilson, fills in for imperfect Tim, handing out pieces of advice to the family.

A final example of an imperfect father is Everybody Loves Raymond's Ray Barone. Ray is a newspaper sports writer with a wife, Debra, a daughter, and twin boys. Ray and Debra fight, in most episodes, about Ray's meddling parents who live across the street. Debra desperately wants Ray to stand up to his mother, but his inability to do so frustrates her. Debra also wants Ray to help more around the house, but he wants to watch the game on TV. He rarely takes responsibility and often fails to do what Debra expects of him. Ray's inability to detach himself from his parents, especially his mother, makes him the perfect son but the imperfect husband.

Classic sitcom fathers. Modern sitcom fathers. They are as far apart in attitude and action, character and class, temperament and timbre as the calendar years that separate them. Classic TV fathers, no matter if they are a saint or a bumbler, are idolized by their families. Modern TV fathers are, instead, fallen idols, with human faults and frailties. Despite their differences, these TV fathers, classic and modern, have one all-important quality in common – they all love, and are loved by, their families. Whether perfect or flawed, whether educated or not, whether white collar worker or blue, these men are all endearing to their families, as well as to TV viewers, because they all act from a good place in their hearts.

Chapter 3

Mother's Role

Mothers in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It is October 1957. You tune in to watch the latest episode of Leave It to Beaver. Following the opening credits, the Cleavers' living room appears. Ward is relaxing in his chair, reading the evening newspaper. June is perched on the sofa, collecting scraps of fabric. She begins to look around. June stands, places the fabric on the coffee table, and continues her search. "What are you looking for?" Ward asks.

"I lost one of my wings," replies June.

"Oh," Ward says and returns to his newspaper. He looks up. "One of your wings?"

"Well, one of the Beaver's wings," June clarifies.

"That's even more improbable," Ward responds.

"I'm working on his costume for the school play. Miss Canfield has him playing an angel," June says while she picks up the sofa cushion in hopes of finding the missing wing.

"I'm glad to hear he's been promoted. Last year he played a dwarf," remarks Ward, and he goes back to his newspaper.

"Ah! Here we are - one wing," June announces, holding up the wing triumphantly.

Ward puts the paper down as June sits on the coffee table and begins to attach the wing to the costume. "Uh, by the way. How is, uh, how's Beaver reacting to his role? Does it offend his masculine dignity?" Ward inquires.

"I don't think so. I think it's upset him a little bit. Miss Canfield called this afternoon and said that he hadn't eaten lunch in school for three days."

"Well, did he take his lunch money with him?" asks Ward.

“Yes, his whole week’s allowance,” June replies.

“Huh,” Ward says as he ponders Beaver’s behavior.

The camera closes in on June. “I don’t like to have him going without his lunch.” June looks sad at the thought of her son going hungry. “I talked to him about it, but I didn’t get anywhere.” June tilts her head and looks imploringly at her husband. “Ward, would you?”

“Okay. All right. Sure, I’ll talk to him,” Ward says with a smile.

“Darling, thanks.” June gets up and kisses Ward on the cheek. “You’re so good at it” (Connelly, Manhoff, and Mosher).

Just as the classic sitcom father has his own space in the home, the mother has hers – the kitchen. The role of the mother in classic TV sitcoms is a stereotype of the times. She has no role outside of the home unless it is as a member of the PTA or as a participant in other civic activities. Her job is to take care of the children, cook the meals, and clean the house. The mother is the provider of comfort to the family, offering a bandage to heal a scraped knee, chicken soup to combat a cold, and a hug to ease a broken heart. No matter what she does, she does it with ease, grace, and poise. Although the mother often gives bits of behind-the-scenes wisdom, she seldom takes credit for her ideas. Instead, she leads her husband to believe that he has solved the problem. She is content to be the dutiful wife, allowing her husband to be not only the sole bread-winner of the family, but also the authority, the decision maker, and the disciplinarian. The classic sitcom mother has been taught by generations of mothers before her that this is her lot in life, that she will be judged on how white her whites are, how mannerly her children are, and how clean and tidy her house is; the classic TV mother aspires to these tenets, accepts them, and always succeeds at them.

In classic TV, the mother's perfection is reflected in her appearance. Just as her house is kept in immaculate order with almost effortless ease, so is her hair and attire. She wears pearls, high heeled shoes, and full skirts with petticoats when she cooks and cleans; and every hair is in place in her flawlessly coiffed hair when she does the laundry. Even as she goes about her daily routine as

homemaker, she appears to be ready to leave the house on a moment's notice; all she needs to add is a hat and a pair of little white gloves.

Harriet Nelson is the real-life and TV-life mother of Ricky and David Nelson and wife of Ozzie Nelson. The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet depicts the couple raising their two boys. In 1952, the country fell in love with this family; the show ran for an astonishing fourteen years. Harriet, like many of the TV mothers to follow her, was a housewife in charge of keeping the household running and her husband's ego shining. "Harriet represented the voice of reason..., rescuing Ozzie, and occasionally David and Rick, from the consequences of impulsive behavior" (Weisblat 27). She offered a source of comfort and stability to her family. "Harriet was always there with a pot of coffee and a plate of freshly baked brownies. She smiled wanly through every situation" (Mitz 65). Harriet launched the perfect mother image, while mothers after her would perfect it.

The quintessential perfect-little-homemaker and mother of classic TV is Leave It to Beaver's June Cleaver. June lacks her own identity; she is Mrs. Ward Cleaver and the mother to Wally and Beaver. She "exists only in conjunction with her sons" (Leibman 125). Very few episodes revolve around June, but in every episode she is there to care for, support, and love her family. She takes care of the household, cleaning in her pearls and cooking in her peep-toe heels. June has little to do with the decision making in the house. Instead, her husband disciplines the boys and gives advice. Mild-mannered and soft-spoken June Cleaver is nearly the perfect mother. "Mrs. Cleaver's only fault was that she was overprotective. But she was always ready with fudge and cookies, which seemed to be her most important function after childbirth" (Mitz 124).

In 1958, America was introduced to Donna Stone, wife and mother on The Donna Reed Show. Each episode went just as the opening titles suggest – Donna glides down the stairs to answer the phone, calmly and lovingly hands her children bag lunches as they head out the door, she gives her husband a kiss as he heads to work. Donna Stone is never exhausted from housework, her nerves never worn from impatient children. She never yells or becomes irritated. Everything gets done. Donna Stone is "pretty, prim, precise, proper, and all the other Ps – especially perfect..." (Mitz 133). Like most other classic TV

mothers, however, Donna seems unaware of her hallmark qualities and, instead, reveres her husband. “In each episode she is prompted to remind herself or her family of the importance of Alex, and how the Stone family need to continually recognize and applaud Dad’s contribution” (Leibman 127).

The year 1964 brought the “Donna Reed of Sorcery” into America’s living rooms – Samantha Stephens of Bewitched (Mitz 185). Samantha is a witch whose mortal husband, Darrin, orders that she abandon witchcraft in favor of the life of a suburban housewife. Being the obedient wife, Samantha tries to do as her husband insists; but despite her best efforts, she simply cannot contain her magical urges, thus providing the pivot point of many episodic plots. Samantha's days revolve around her husband and their two children. She spends her time keeping house, rearing the children, and supporting Darrin as he tries to succeed in the advertising business; however, as much as it pains her to disobey her husband, she repeatedly twitches her nose and resorts to witchcraft in order to achieve the perfection in these areas that is expected by the classic TV wife and mother.

Mothers in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

It is the spring of 2002. You are relaxing in your living room watching Everybody Loves Raymond. The episode begins with an exterior shot of the Barone house – a two storied, stone and ivory-sided house. Inside, Debra Barone, wearing jeans and a striped sweater, her hair in a ponytail, is struggling with her three children. It is time for twins, Michael and Geoffrey to take a bath. Pre-teen Ally is being little help to her mother.

“Come on guys. No-no-no. Baths are fun. You love baths!” Debra pleads with the shrieking boys. The twins begin running around the couch, and Debra attempts to cut them off. “There’s water. You get to be naked. Huh?”

With an exasperated Debra still chasing them, the twins jump onto the couch. Ally is standing back, enjoying her mother’s difficulties. “Jump, Geoffrey! Jump!” calls Ally. Geoffrey stands and then jumps on the couch cushions.

“No.” Waving her index finger, Debra turns to her daughter and declares, “Ally, listen. The only reason I let you get older is so you could help me.”

At this, Ally joyfully joins her brothers in running around the couch. “Off the couch. Off the couch,” Debra orders sternly. The boys jump from the couch to the floor and continue to run with Debra in hot, but futile, pursuit.

Through the front door walk Debra’s nose-y mother-in-law, Marie, and Marie’s two friends. “I told you it might be a little crazy,” Marie tells them. They chuckle, enjoying the antics. “Hi, dear!” she says in an overly gracious manner.

“Hi, Marie,” responds Debra distractedly. Ally and Geoffrey are on the couch fighting over a blanket, each yanking on an opposite end.

Seeming to ignore the mayhem, Marie continues, “I brought Hilda and Artie over because I wanted them to hear the kids do their knock-knock joke.”

“We hear it’s a hoot!” adds Artie.

“Okay, now is not the best time. I’m trying to get them upstairs,” a frazzled Debra explains. The children’s squeals continue.

“Knock-knock. Michael, knock-knock,” Marie says trying to get her grandchildren’s attention.

“Marie…” Debra says beginning to get annoyed.

“Let Michael say ‘knock-knock.’”

“Knock-knock! Knock-knock! Knock-knock! Knock-knock!” yells Ally as she hits Michael on the head.

“No-no-no. No knock-knock jokes right now,” Debra says while attempting to separate the two. Geoffrey picks up a pillow to hit his brother. “We’re going upstairs,” Debra announces as she pulls Ally from the couch.

“Geoffrey! Say ‘orange.’” Marie continues trying to get the boys to tell the joke despite Debra’s battle with the kids.

“Marie, please stop,” Debra demands adamantly. “We are not telling knock-knock jokes right now. We are going upstairs for our baths, all right? Thank you.” The room is silent. Debra returns to the kids. “Let’s go.”

Marie is stunned by Debra’s tone. The children and Debra head up the stairs. Speechless, and a bit embarrassed, Marie does not know what to say. “Well!” gasps Marie (Crittenden and Rosenthal).

Debra Barone is a modern sitcom other. Her role is much different than that of her classic counterparts. The modern sitcom mother is not confined to the kitchen. Her role is more than cookie baker and lunch packer. Many modern sitcom mothers work outside of the home; but there are, however, still stay-at-home mothers on TV. Whether they work or not, these mothers must juggle the stresses of everyday life and still manage to put supper on the table. The mother no longer wears a full-skirted dress and perfectly coiffed hair everyday; she relies on the comforts of sweatpants and the ponytail. The mother, just like June Cleaver and Harriet Nelson, is the provider of comfort to her children and husband. Her child rearing skills are often put to the test. She is comfortable advising her children, although she does not always have the answers to their questions. The mother is a source of stability to the family, the family relying on her for decision-making and knowledge. Although the modern mother is far from perfect, she, like her classic TV counterpart, is a source of stability to the family.

The modern sitcom mother trades the lifestyle of the traditional mother for that of a more liberated woman. Whether she opts for a job in the workforce or still stays at home, she no longer accepts the role of dutiful wife, virtually giving all power to her husband. Because she did this, however, because she takes on more roles and responsibilities, she experiences more stress in her life, has less time for herself, and becomes more frazzled. This new sitcom mother who takes on additional responsibilities, usually outside the home, still finds herself basically in charge of all the domestic chores, just like her classic sitcom counterpart. This sometimes leads her to be testy, unkempt, and unraveled. It also leads to a new dynamic in the home: the modern sitcom mother wants her modern TV husband to help with, what would have been considered in classic TV to be, "wifely" duties. The new TV mom wants her husband to help with the housework, go to PTA meetings, pick up the kids after school and take them to soccer

practice. The modern sitcom mom wants to share the power with her husband, but she also wants him to share in the household and child-rearing duties with her, something he isn't always willing to do. In fact, this conflict often provides the basis for entire episodes on modern TV sitcoms. Husbands and children can drive these mothers nuts.

One of the most well-known sitcom mothers of the 1980s is Elyse Keaton of Family Ties. Elyse and her husband, Steven, are former hippies and Peace Corps volunteers who find they are raising three conservative children. “To their amazement – and dismay – their kids are growing up to resemble the generation against which they rebelled” (Mitz 345). Elyse works as an independent architect, juggling work, a house, and a family. However, her job is made easier because she is able to work from home.

A couple years later in 1984, a famous comedy about an upper-middle-class black family debuted – The Cosby Show. This wholesome, yet groundbreaking sitcom featured the Huxtable family – father, Cliff; mother, Clair; and their five children. It is a “model of a strong, close-knit, parent-dominated unit” (Mitz 358). Clair and Cliff work as a team to teach their children moral values as well as to run the household. Clair is an assertive, no-nonsense lawyer, who, although she is never shown working, is able to balance her career with the care of her husband and children.

Another modern sitcom mother who struggles to balance motherhood with a career is Angela Bower of Who’s the Boss?, which premiered in 1984. Angela is a divorcee and mother to a young son named Jonathan. She is also the “high-powered but somewhat disorganized President of the Wallace and McQuade Advertising Agency” (Brooks and Marsh, “Who’s the Boss” 1516); and later in the series, she opens her own ad agency. Due to the demands of her job, Angela hires Tony Micelli as a domestic to bring order to her household. The fact that she hires a male domestic further dispels the male/female roles of classic TV. While Tony cooks, cleans, and runs the household, Angela climbs the corporate ladder. Her top priority, however, remains her son.

The priority of Home Improvement’s Jill Taylor is caring for her family...and making sure the house doesn’t burn down. As the wife of Tim “the Tool Man,” Jill takes on the added responsibility of looking out for her accident-prone husband; and she does it while also raising their three sons. Jill is

tasked with maintaining the household; however, the brunt of the many jokes is her lack of skills in the kitchen. Wanting to be more than a housewife, Jill returns part-time to the workforce, and later pursues a psychology degree, taking her out of the house and adding to the time constraints she faces. Frustrated, Jill requests Tim's help; but his "more power" attitude usually results in sparks and emergency room visits.

Classic sitcom mothers and modern sitcom mothers are just as divergent as their male counterparts. Just as the ponytail replaced the flip, blue jeans replaced the apron, and sneakers replaced the high-heeled shoes, so modern domestic sitcom mothers replaced the traditional mothers of classic TV. As the years passed and times and society changed, so did real mothers across America; and TV mothers reflected this change. The classic sitcom mother reflected the role of the woman during the years that it aired. Mothers on 50s and 60s TV kept house, cooked meals, raised children, provided comfort, and participated in civic activities. More importantly, they were content with their lot in life. As wife, mother, and homemaker, they had fulfilled all of their aspirations. Modern domestic sitcom mothers, on the other hand, wanted more. Although they accepted their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers, many of them wanted to work outside the home, while others simply wanted equal footing with their husbands. They, too, wanted to be included in the decision making process. They, too, wanted help running the house. They, too, wanted an audible voice. Regardless of this obvious difference between classic and modern sitcom mothers, for over 60 years, one basic similarity remained: these TV mothers all loved their families and were loved by them.

Chapter 4

Children's Conduct

Children in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It's 1958, and you're watching the premier of The Donna Reed Show. Donna Stone, whose apron protects her neatly pressed shirtwaist dress, is in her immaculate kitchen fixing breakfast for her family. "Mary! Jeff! You'll be late for school," she calls as she finishes cooking.

Jeff walks into the kitchen with a bounce. "I'm never late. Mary's the one. How can it take forty minutes just to get dressed? What does she do?" He takes his seat at the kitchen table as his sister, Mary, walks in. "I make it in five minutes flat."

"Well, any little boy can get dressed in five minutes flat," retorts Mary, gracefully taking her seat. "The difference is that girls wash."

"So, thirty-five extra minutes just to wash. How can you get so dirty just sleeping?"

"Never mind, Jeff," responds Donna from the stove.

Jeff takes a sip of milk. "Where's the man with the crib-side manner?"

Donna carries two plates of eggs and bacon to the table and sets them down next to a plate piled high with toast. "Your father is in his office taking a look at Eddie Barkley," says Donna.

"What's the matter with Chicken Barkley?" Jeff asks.

"Honestly. You and those vulgar nicknames," Mary replies with disgust.

Donna returns to the stove to fill another plate. "I'm with you, Mary. Now, we'll know that just as soon as your father has had time to examine him." Donna sits down at the table with her children.

Slightly frustrated, Mary asserts, "Well, Dad will take time for that. Gee, I wish he could take just a little bit of time and spend it with us."

"Yeah," Jeff agrees.

“You know, I’ve about given up hope that Dad will ever be able to take me skiing.”

“Well, your father’s a very busy man,” responds Donna, defending her husband.”

“You know Grace McLean’s father? He takes her up to Mt. Owens practically every weekend,” states Mary.

“Well, Mr. McLean’s a school teacher with a five-day week. Your father’s a pediatrician with an eight-day week.” Donna takes a bit of her breakfast.

“Well, if Dad had any free time, he wouldn’t spend it skiing. He’d teach me how to play chess,” says Jeff. He turns his attention to Mary; a smile grows. “Now there’s a game you’d like. There’s men in it.”

“You know something, Jeff,” Mary replies, fed up with his immaturity. “If we get up to Mt. Owens, oh, you’re going to make a great abominable snowman.” She returns to her breakfast.

Donna steps in. “All right, you two. Stop squabbling” (Leslie and Roberts).

While the parents are the head of the household, their children are frequently the cornerstones of the storyline in classic domestic sitcoms. These children are respectful to, not only their parents, but to teachers, policemen, and all other adults. They have been taught to also revere their country, to exhibit good citizenship, and to respect the property and ideas of others. Children respect their peers – no name-calling, no fighting, and no judging. Siblings learn to get along, to solve their problems without raising their voices, to protect and care for each other. Children are raised with manners. Children never talk back to their parents or teachers. Sarcasm is never used. A curse word is never spoken. Children may not do exactly as they are told, but they are not utterly defiant. They are truthful, honest, and kind. Furthermore, they are taught that the family works as a unit and that everyone, including the kids, must pull his or her own weight. They know that the parents have the final say and that crying and whining are not acceptable and will not cause the parents to reconsider or change their minds; the parents have complete authority, and children are dutifully obedient.

Nowhere are these dynamics better seen than in the classic sitcom Leave it to Beaver. Theodore “Beaver” Cleaver and his brother, Wally, are the sons of practically perfect parents, Ward and June

Cleaver. Being the sons of consummate parents, however, does not lead the boys to be perfect sons.

Each episode finds Wally and "the Beav" getting into one predicament after another. Still, by story's end, the problem has been resolved, the boys have learned a lesson, and the parents have fulfilled their roles as advisors. It is the parents' guidance that has instilled values into the boys. It is the parents' guidance that has taught them to be well-mannered and respectful. "Beaver always [says] 'Yes, sir' and 'Yes, ma'am' to his parents. The kids always [come] up with cogent comments – 'I'd rather go look at a skunk than look at a girl,' Beaver once said – and set examples for the rest of us" (Mitz 125). Wally and his brother display other positive attributes. Most significantly, Wally and Beaver have perfected the brother relationship. Although the boys have their minor squabbles, they always settle them by episode's end. More importantly, they always come through for each other, even if it requires self-sacrifice. The relationship forged between Beaver and his brother Wally illustrates a bond that would forever stand. "You could tell because of the show's closing credits, when they were walking home from school, and Wally had his arm around Beaver" (Mitz 125).

Another character who appears regularly in the series is Wally's best friend, Eddie Haskell. Much to Ward and June Cleaver's dismay, Wally's best friend is a boy whose overly charming facade and extreme politeness cause the senior Cleavers to regard him with suspicion - and rightfully so. It is Eddie who attempts to lead Wally and Beaver off the course set for them by their elders, and it is Eddie who routinely picks on the Beaver. Still, Wally remains true to his friend. Aware that Eddie can be obnoxious, Wally, nevertheless, still cares for him, protects his pride, and tries to get him to do what is right, knowing that, inside, Eddie has a heart and can be hurt. He realizes that Eddie's brash actions hide a vulnerability; and staying true to his parents' teachings, Wally stands by his friend.

While Leave It to Beaver ends with the two brothers walking home from school together, The Andy Griffith Show begins with father, Andy, and son, Opie, walking home from the fishing hole together. Andy, the sheriff of Mayberry and a widowed father as well, is an upstanding, honest, fair-minded, and sympathetic man who tries to raise his son to be the same. Opie, like other children his age, doesn't like to clean his room, practice the piano, or do his homework; he would much rather catch frogs,

play cowboy, or hang around his father's office at the courthouse. Still, Opie is ever respectful. Most notably, Andy teaches his son to respect all human beings, including Andy's loveable deputy, Barney Fife. Although Barney is childlike and goofy and frequently less mature than Opie himself, Andy makes sure that Opie respects the inept, incompetent, and clumsy deputy. Andy ensures that Opie respects Barney, not just because he is an adult, but because he is a human being. In fact, Andy sees to it that Opie even respects Otis Campbell, the town drunk, for the same reason: he's a human being. Opie's best quality is that he listens to his father and Aunt Bee. On the rare occasion that he doesn't, a problem results, a problem that Andy capitalizes on to teach Opie a lesson about moral rightness.

While The Andy Griffith Show is based on the father-son relationship, The Patty Duke Show of 1963 centers on look-alike cousins, Patty and Cathy Lane. Cathy, the daughter of a news correspondent, has been raised in Scotland. Then, in order to attend school, she is sent to live with relatives in America. In Brooklyn Heights, she meets her Uncle Martin, her Aunt Natalie, her younger cousin Ross, and, most importantly, her look-alike cousin, Patty. Patty enjoys most of the things that other American teenage girls like – slumber parties, rock 'n' roll music, and boys. Scottish Cathy, on the other hand, is a prim and proper intellectual who doesn't share, or sometimes even understand, her cousin's interests. Their differences are obvious: the shy, reserved, sophisticated Cathy is the polar opposite of the fun-loving, vivacious, outgoing Patty. Although cousin Patty could never be described as a rebel, she does get into her share of mischief. Cousin Cathy, the mature, intellectual voice of reason, frequently tries to set Patty on the road to right. Somehow in the process, however, Cathy tends to get dragged into Patty's schemes, schemes which frequently call for the girls to pose as each other. Still, their antics revolve around such mundane activities as school dances, church raffles, phone usage, and dates. Despite their cultural differences, the girls' similarities far outweigh their differences. At no time, do they drink, smoke, swear, or transgress any of the major rules set in place by the Lane adults. Neither girl is involved teenage sullenness or self-centeredness. Both girls value family above all else and respect those around them, including Patty's younger brother Ross. Even though Patty and Ross exchange sibling barbs, they never

do it mean-spiritedly; the viewer always knows that they love each other. It's that love that binds this new family unit, Martin, Natalie, Patty, Ross, and Cathy, together.

It is that same type of love that helps form another family. In 1966, Family Affair debuted focusing on three recently orphaned children, teenager Cissy, and younger twins Buffy, and Jody, who move in with their single Uncle Bill and his gentleman's gentleman, Mr. French. Despite their lack of experience, the two men raise the children to be virtuous individuals. The children learn to share, to tell the truth, and to help their friends. Mr. French, who was not hired to be a nanny, teaches them to be neat, to pick up their toys, and to avoid spreading messes. The twins frequently look to sister Cissy for guidance and support, something she is more than willing to do. For a teenager, Cissy takes on an adult-like role, often stepping up to be a second mother to her younger siblings. As surrogate parents, Uncle Bill and Mr. French instill a sense of security in the children; and the children, who have been orphaned, uprooted, separated, and uprooted again, never act out due to anger or depression. The bachelor uncle, the gentleman's gentleman, and three orphaned children bond to form a family.

Children in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

It is 2002, and you turn on the TV to watch 8 Simple Rules...for Dating My Teenage Daughter. It is morning in the Hennessy household. Husband and father Paul is in charge of getting the children to school. His pre-teen son Rory is sitting at the breakfast bar. Teenage daughter Kerry trudges down the stairs toward the bar where her breakfast awaits. "Good morning, Care Bear!" Paul proclaims enthusiastically.

"Yeah? Prove it!" Kerry says defiantly as she plops into her seat.

"Someone's not getting any Mickey Mouse pancakes today," Paul says with a smile, trying to cheer up his daughter.

Kerry glares at him, and the smile slowly disappears from his face. Eldest daughter Bridget comes down the stairs. She is wearing tight-fitting low-rise jeans and a pink tank top, her midriff showing. “Uh, Bridget,” says Paul carefully. “Why are you dressed like that?”

“Must be casual sex day at school,” replies Kerry sarcastically.

Bridget retorts, “Hey! At least I get....” Paul looks at her. “...Look good,” finishes Bridget as she crosses her arms.

Paul turns the attention back to Bridget’s attire. “Okay, Cupcake. I think you missed the word ‘under’ in ‘underwear’ because I can see your bra and that slingshot you’re wearing under your pants.”

“It’s a thong,” Bridget states as if her father knows absolutely nothing.

“It’s floss,” responds Paul.

“I can’t wear anything else. Panty lines, hell-ooo.”

Paul mimics his daughter. “Panty lines, hello, are fine. Actually they were a pretty big deal in my day.”

“Well, we’re the thong generation,” declares Bridget.

“Well, maybe that’s why your generation is so angry. You’re always walking around with a wedgie.”

Bridget rolls her eyes and sneers. From the breakfast bar, Rory speaks up. “Hey, Dad. Did you know Bridget’s got underpants with leopard spots?”

“Hey! What are you doing snooping in my underwear drawer?” yells Bridget.

“Showing my friends,” replies Rory matter-of-factly.

Bridget clinches her fist and heads for Rory, prepared to hurt him. “God!”

“No-no-no-no-no-no.” Paul steps between his son and daughter, allowing Rory to make a getaway. He grabs Bridget’s shoulders. “Not the boy. Never hit the boy.” He turns her towards the stairs. “Go upstairs. Cover up!” Paul calls (Gamble).

While classic sitcom children are content to do as their parents, and even society, tell them, the children of the modern sitcom family are not. They thrive on challenging authority, frequently believing

that they know better than the adults and the world around them. They delight in "pushing their parents' buttons," and frequently, and purposefully, defy their parents and do the opposite of what their parents desire. In fact, in many ways, both overt and covert, they rebel. Many modern sitcom children also lack respect for their parents and elders. These children belittle their parents, talk back to them, use sarcasm, and are foul mouthed. Many believe that, if they complain and whine loudly enough and long enough, their parents will abandon their stance and give in to their wishes. The children believe that they, not their parents, are in control; and, in many cases, they are. These same modern sitcom children are also disrespectful of their peers. They make fun of and pick on both their siblings and classmates. No imperfection goes unnoticed, and every imperfection is ridiculed. Derogatory comments and name-calling are commonplace. Self-centered attitudes are also widespread among modern TV children. No longer are children "other oriented." No longer do the wants and needs of the family or the peer group or other individual family members come first. Modern sitcom children want their own needs to be gratified, and they want them gratified posthaste. Finally, these modern TV children flout social mores. They entertain themselves and each other make by making gestures and bodily noises that are both crass and crude. In many cases, they swear, drink, experiment with drugs, and indulge in sex. Disrespect, in many guises, seems to be the trademark of modern TV children.

One sitcom that challenges society's conventions is All in the Family, which debuted in 1971. On this show, Archie and Edith Bunker provide housing for their daughter, Gloria, and her husband, Mike Stivic. Conflict frequently arises between liberal Mike and bigoted and conservative Archie. Mike and Gloria are not afraid to disagree with Archie's outlook; in fact, they challenge Archie in much the same way that they challenge society. As flower children, Mike and Gloria are outraged by society's conservatism and Archie's closed-mindedness. Mike and Archie, especially, represent opposite ends of the generation gap. "Because both characters [are] extremely vocal in their viewpoints, heated conflict between the two [is] assured" (Gunzerath 58). As Mike and Gloria argue with Archie over everything from politics and religion to social and moral issues, it is apparent that these children, although grown, have little respect for Archie's views.

The two children on Married...with Children are also imperfect. Kelly Bundy is a self-proclaimed tramp. She taunts her younger brother, Bud, who desperately wants, but can never get, a girl. In fact, smarmy Bud is utterly girl-obsessed. This often leads to arguments and tension in the house. While Kelly mocks Bud about his nonexistent sex life, Bud retaliates by calling Kelly names such as “slut” and “bimbo,” referring to her promiscuity. In spite of their fighting and bickering, the siblings do care for each other. Although Kelly teases Bud, she protects him from outsiders who try to do the same. Both of the Bundy children lack respect for their parents, Peg and Al. Kelly frequently states that her mother is good at nothing and has done nothing with her life – exactly what Kelly wants to do with hers. Additionally, both children make fun of their father, Al, calling him “loser” and “nerd.” Bud and Kelly are not afraid to put down their parents or to disobey their rules.

The three children on the 1988 series Roseanne are not afraid to challenge authority either. Eldest daughter, Becky, is often short tempered with her parents and younger sister. She elopes against her parents’ wishes and marries a rebellious biker named Mark. Middle child, Darlene, is a tomboy who uses sarcasm and an overbearing attitude to get her way. She bosses everyone around, especially her boyfriend; and she snaps at her parents. Darlene frequently engages in name-calling - her mother is a "tramp," and her parents are "dweebs." She speaks rudely to her parents - her mother needs to "get a life." Likewise, Darlene is relentless in her use of sarcasm. This, combined with her inherent wit, adds a source of comedy to the series. When the girls are not fighting with each other, Becky and Darlene tease their younger brother D.J. All three children lie, yell, and fight; and when they aren't picking on each other, they're provoking their parents. They do things simply to anger their parents. For instance, in one episode Darlene dies her hair just to irritate "freak out" her mother. The Conner children reflect their parents' actions and attitudes. Therefore, like their parents, they are far from perfect.

Reba, which debuted in 2001, depicts the struggle of a broken family – a single mother, Reba, and her three children. Seventeen-year-old daughter, Cheyenne, discovers she is pregnant in the first episode. Later in the series, she becomes an alcoholic and admits to experimenting with marijuana once before her pregnancy. Sex, drugs, and alcohol are not on Reba’s approval list. Cheyenne is also

egocentric and somewhat immature. "Shut up, Kyra!" are words she frequently shrieks. Kyra, the middle child, is sarcastic and quick-witted. She likes to antagonize her sister, Cheyenne, and Cheyenne's husband, Van. Younger brother, Jake, is also a target of Kyra, as she routinely plays pranks on him.

Kyra can be manipulative in trying to get her way and defies authority. At times, when Kyra doesn't get her own way, she threatens to move out of the offending parent's home and into the other's. She threatens to move out when Reba decides to pay for Cheyenne's college tuition instead of Kyra's summer abroad. She does the same thing again when Reba forbids her to postpone her college plans in favor of touring with her rock band. Kyra tries to control her mother, or even hurt her, when she doesn't get her own way. Threatening to move out is one way of gaining the upper hand; moving out is one way of retaliating. The behavior of the children on Reba shows a lack respect, not only for each other, but also for their mother.

The main difference between the children of classic sitcoms and modern sitcoms boils down to respect, or lack thereof – respect for oneself, parents, siblings, peers, and community. Many of the behaviors modern sitcom children exhibit show their lack of respect. Swearing, fighting, teasing, and defying authority are all forms of disrespect. These children routinely challenge their parents and society as a whole. They act on their own beliefs, from the clothes they wear to the behaviors they engage in. They manipulate those around them, including their parents, in order to get what they want. They put their wants before the needs of others. Their behaviors also show a lack of self-respect; many modern TV children drink, "do" drugs, and are promiscuous. Modern TV parents have not established in their children the will to conform to acceptable behavioral patterns that classic TV parents instilled in theirs. In the classic sitcom household, absolutely no disrespect was tolerated. Authority lay totally in the hands of parents and society; children did not challenge it. Children acted on their parents' beliefs and conformed to social mores. They did nothing to bring embarrassment to themselves or to their families. They put others first and always remembered that they were to love just as they were loved - unconditionally.

Chapter 5

Race

Race in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It is the fall of 1963. You tune in to watch the latest episode of The Dick Van Dyke Show. In this episode, Rob and Laura Petrie are recounting the day they brought their son, Richie, home from the hospital. Rob believes that he and Laura have a baby belonging to another couple. The baby looks like neither Rob nor Laura. The hospital made repeated mistakes, confusing Mrs. Petrie in room 208 with Mrs. Peters in room 203. Laura received Mrs. Peters' rice pudding while Mrs. Peters got Laura's blueberry tart. The Petries have the Peters' flowers and baby records. The Peters have the Petries' figs. After he and his dentist friend, Jerry, compare the baby's footprint to the Peters' baby record, Rob is convinced that they have the wrong baby. He gently breaks the news to his wife who thinks that it is utterly absurd.

Laura continues to sit on the couch. Rob kneels behind it. "Oh will you stop?" pleads Laura. She hits Rob's arm as if to say he is being silly. "Where did you ever get such a crazy idea?"

"At the hospital. That's where we got it," Rob says referring to the wrong baby. He points to the bassinette and walks to it.

"We got the wrong flowers," Laura says as she follows her husband to the baby.

"You forgot about the blueberry tarts and the rice pudding pretty fast, didn't you? Not to mention dried figs."

"Dried fi—?" Laura pauses. "Rob, this is our baby; and that's all there is to it," Laura insists adamantly, pointing to the baby in the bassinette.

"Honey, he doesn't even look like us!" Rob gestures to the baby, confounded by his wife's disbelief.

Laura examines the baby. “Rob?”

“You see!” proclaims Rob, thinking Laura finally believes this is not their child.

“All I see is our baby with a blue foot,” Laura declares suspiciously, looking at her husband.

“What is that, Rob?”

“Uh - ink.”

“How did it get there?” asks Laura. She is growing annoyed with her husband’s antics.

“Jerry and I put it on,” explains Rob.

“Why?” Laura questions.

“Well, just running a series of tests,” Rob replies. Laura nods at his absurdity.

“Rob, there are no series of tests in the world that are going to convince me that is not our baby.”

“Aw, honey. I don’t blame ya,” Rob says understandingly. He puts his arm around Laura. “You can’t face the facts.” The doorbell rings. “Poor kid,” says Rob sympathetically.

“Oh, Rob!”

“Well, honey, that’s probably the Peters now.” The doorbell rings again. “Brace yourself,” Rob remarks as he walks to the front door.

“Rob, nobody is taking this baby. Do you hear me? Nobody!” Laura moves the bassinette and stands in front of it protectingly.

“Laura, it would be better if you went to your room. I can handle this,” Rob commands imperatively. With a nod of his head and a point of his finger, he indicates that Laura head to the bedroom.

Laura continues to protect the baby. “I am staying right here.”

Rob takes a breath. He opens the door.

“Hi! We’re Mr. and Mrs. Peters.” Rob looks stunned. His head snaps to Laura.

“Uh, come in,” says Rob robotically. He is still in utter speechless shock.

Mr. and Mrs. Peters, laughing, walk in holding the box of dried figs.

The Peters are black (Denoff, Persky, and Reiner).

This classic scene from The Dick Van Dyke Show was unique in the annals of classic TV sitcoms because it featured a black couple and because it triggered one of the longest audience laughs in TV history. From its beginnings, television's landscape was mostly white. "According to television representation, the United States was a white nation, with some marginal 'ethnic' accretions that were at their best when they could simply be ignored, like well-trained and deferential maids and doormen" (Downing 1877).

Although two early TV sitcoms did, in fact, feature black characters, these characters tended to be stereotypical. Beulah was the first nationally broadcast sitcom starring an African American. Debuting in 1950, the series featured the antics of Beulah, a domestic and "Queen of the Kitchen," and the white Henderson family for whom she worked (Bodroghkozy, "Beulah" 254). Beulah was criticized as being a stereotypical "mammy" character and was cancelled in 1953. Amos 'n' Andy was, indeed, the first TV show with an all-black cast, although race was never a storyline. It presented dim-witted Andy Brown, the president of The Fresh Air Taxi Company of America, and his levelheaded partner, Amos Jones. "The basis for these characters was derived largely from the stereotyped caricatures of African Americans..." (Deane, "Amos 'n' Andy 106). The show was taken off the air in 1953, just two years after its premier due to mounting protests from the black community.

After 1954, African Americans virtually disappeared from the sitcom screen. That is why the aforementioned scene from The Dick Van Dyke Show, aired in 1963, was so unprecedented. The black character's appearance was just as startling to the viewing public as it was to Rob Petrie himself. Blacks rarely, if ever, appeared in classic TV sitcoms, even as background characters or extras. Most classic sitcom families were WASPs, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who lived in an all-white suburbia. No blacks worked at the plant. No blacks attended dinner parties. No blacks shopped in department stores. No blacks sat in classrooms. For the first two decades of its existence, classic TV focused solely on white families. Only whites appeared on the black and white TV screen.

In 1968, near the end of the classic TV era, a sitcom revolving around a black nurse premiered. Julia was the first show in nearly a decade to feature a black main character. Julia Baker, a widowed

mother, moves into an integrated apartment building in Los Angeles. Although Julia dates African-American men, she lives in an exclusively white environment. Her closest friends are the Waggedorns, a white neighboring family. In fact, “nothing in the Bakers’ lives indicated that they were in any way connected to the rich tradition of black culture and history” (Bodroghkozy, “Julia” 1233). Diahann Carroll, the actress who played Julia, said in 1968, “At the moment we’re presenting the white Negro. And he has very little Negro-ness” (Morreale 138). Racism was rarely an issue for Julia and her son, Corey. “Her race provided material for some mildly antiprejudice episodes and some cute banter with her enlightened boss, but little real conflict” (Jones 188). Julia was a bridge connecting the classic sitcom with the modern. It was a way to introduce blacks into television without resorting to offensive stereotypes. Julia was a black character that was not “too black.” She was not uneducated, did not speak ghetto English, and did not have an Afro. Julia’s character had to appeal to the white audience; they had to be able to identify with her. More importantly, they had to be willing to accept her. Although Julia was criticized for being too “white,” blacks benefited from it: Julia opened doors for blacks, it broke color barriers - it was a beginning.

Race in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

It is February 1974. The first episode of a new series called Good Times is on. The show begins with teenage Thelma making breakfast in the Evans’ small, rundown apartment in the Chicago projects. The kitchen is tiny and dirty. The oatmeal is burning. Thelma’s younger brother, Michael, is watching. Thelma waits anxiously for her older, James Jr. or J.J., to help her set the table, make the beds, and clean up.

“There you are!” Thelma proclaims, relieved to finally have help.

J.J. enters the apartment, sniffing the air as he makes his way to the kitchen. “Somethin’s burnin’. Ahhh! It’s only the breakfast again,” J.J. jabs at his sister.

“Don’t try shinin’ me on with that smile, James Jr. You look like an eel with the teeth of a shark,” Thelma says with a huff. She crosses to the refrigerator.

“Cool it, Thelma. I just been down seventeen floors for the mail. I got some dispensin’ here to do.” J.J. looks at the mail in his hands.

“Here’s somethin’ for Michael,” announces J.J. Michael gets up from his perch on a kitchen chair. J.J. announces the senders as he hands the letters to Michael. “Bulletins from the NAACP. The CORE. SNCC.”

“And the Pan-African Council. Thank you, kind sir,” Michael says, grabbing the final letter out of J.J.’s hand.

“Ah! Here’s a free sample for little sister. Afro-Glow Face Cream: for the look of beauty. I didn’t know they could bottle miracles,” J.J. remarks.

Thelma, who has been stirring oatmeal on the stove, puts down the spoon. She walks over to brother. “Look who’s talking. If you were born in Detroit, you’d a been recalled for being dangerously ugly,” she snaps.

Thelma tries to grab the sample, but J.J. holds it high in the air.

Michael jumps between them as they argue, “You just stop talkin’ to J.J. like that, and J.J. you give her the face cream!”

J.J. asserts, “Not till she shut her mouth ‘cause if her BB brain falls out, we ain’t never gon’ be able to find it.”

Thelma turns Michael toward her. “You hear the way he talks to me, Michael?”

J.J. turns Michael toward him. “Well, she call me the ugliest thing the --.”

Their mother, Florida, enters from the bedroom. She is wearing a peach terrycloth robe over her orange pajamas. The kids continue to argue. “Hold it. I said, hold it!” Nobody notices her. “HOLD IT!” Florida shouts. She rests her hands on her hips. Her children become silent. “Well, it’s comforting to know there’s still some respect for black power around here” (Monte).

When Good Times first aired, in its opening minutes, when Thelma was reading a copy of Ebony and her younger brother Michael was upset because he and his friend were playing cops and militants and his friend wanted him to be a cop, TV sitcoms took on a new complexion. Black characters changed both in type and number. Not only did more blacks appear on the TV screen, they were portrayed in a more realistic manner than Julia. Norman Lear, the producer of such shows as All in the Family, Sanford and Son, Good Times, and The Jeffersons, "...clearly meant to explore the black (and other minority) experience and examine the complexities of black-white relations in a changing world, where minorities have achieved formal recognition as equal citizens but remain victims of prejudice and economic oppression" (Taylor 82). Not all blacks were depicted as project dwellers, however. In many modern sitcoms, blacks were on an even footing with their white counterparts. Blacks were now well-educated. They held well-paying jobs. They lived in nice houses and high-rise apartments. They wore stylish clothes. The sitcom world more closely reflected the real world.

Good Times was the first show since Amos 'n' Andy to feature a primarily black cast. The show highlighted the parenting skills of Florida Evans and her husband, James Evans, who was constantly looking for work. Together, they taught their children – J.J., Thelma, and Michael – morals as well as determination in the face of difficulty and uncertainty. Good Times, in particular, sometimes found "...bitter humor among lower-status characters trying to cope with life in the ghetto while looking for a way out of it. Scripts featured ward healers, loan sharks, abused children and other facets of life on the edge, in sharp contrast to the comfortable middle-class world of Julia..." (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 345). As the show went on, fewer episodes focused on family values and overcoming obstacles while more and more episodes focused on J.J.'s antics including lying and stealing. More and more episodes also highlighted J.J.'s clownish behavior. "[J.J.] played off his blackness with self-loathing glee, tossing out jokes about watermelon eating and "the ghet-to" that were guaranteed to provoke shocked, nervous – and occasionally liberating – laughter" (Jones 218). J.J.'s actions brought more than laughter to the show - it also brought criticism. There was concern that his cool, laid-back attitude, his buffoonery, and his law breaking depicted the stereotypical black male attributes of laziness and criminality. Despite

this arguable fault, Good Times introduced the viewing public to the world of low-income blacks trying to survive in the projects.

While Good Times centered on blacks who were struggling to get by, other modern sitcoms centered on blacks were who far more successful and affluent, blacks, like George Jefferson on The Jeffersons, who "were movin' on up." The owner of seven profitable dry cleaning stores, George Jefferson became a millionaire and moved to a "de-luxe apartment" on Manhattan's East Side. "George was intolerant, rude, and stubborn; he referred to White people as 'honkies.' He was a short, mean, bigoted popinjay who balked at manners" (Deane, "The Jeffersons" 1217). His wife, Louise, a former housekeeper, was forever apologizing for George's poor conduct. Their quick-witted maid, Florence, was not afraid of George and enjoyed putting her boss in his place (Deane, "The Jeffersons" 1217). "The Jeffersons lived among a kaleidoscope of characters, including...the Willises - TV's first married couple in which one character was black and one was white" ("The Jeffersons"). Although The Jeffersons featured the first financially successful black family, it was not without criticism. Some believe that the show resorted to negative stereotypes. This criticism notwithstanding, The Jeffersons helped set "a new tone for prime-time television, exploring issues that TV had scarcely touched before, while it proved that programs with blacks in leading roles could indeed be successful commodities" (Deane, "The Jeffersons" 1217).

While The Jeffersons centered on a black family who was "movin' on up," The Cosby Show centered on a black family who had already "arrived." Cliff Huxtable, an obstetrician, and his wife, Clair, an attorney, care and provide for their five children. They taught their children important lessons about taking education seriously, helping the less fortunate, and making the right decisions. Although the show did, at times, tackle such issues/topics as dyslexia and teenage pregnancy, it rarely addressed issues of race. An upper-middle class black family, the Huxtables were a unique family on TV. As Darnell Hunt points out in "The Cosby Show":

In contrast to the families in other popular situation comedies about blacks - for example, those in Sanford and Son (1972-77), Good Times (1974-79), and The

Jeffersons (1975-85) - the Huxtables were given a particular mix of qualities that its creators thought would challenge common stereotypes of African Americans. These qualities included a strong father figure; a strong nuclear family; parents who were professionals; affluence and fiscal responsibility; a strong emphasis on education; a multigenerational family; multiracial friends; and low-key racial pride. (Hunt 607)

Presenting the Huxtables in this way, however, proved to be a double-edged sword. At the same time, some praised The Cosby Show for depicting a successful, upper class black family, while others criticized it saying this successful, upper-class black family was not realistic. Almost predictably, The Cosby Show was criticized for being “too white,” stating that the only black part of the show was the jazzy soundtrack and the art hanging on the Huxtables' walls. “Some observers described the show as a 1980's version of Father Knows Best, the Huxtables as a white family in blackface” (Hunt 607). However, Jim Anderson and Cliff Huxtable are very different fathers. Jim Anderson would have never told Bud, “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.”

By the end of the decade, another African-American family made its debut on television. The Winslows on Family Matters were a middle-class family living in Chicago. Father, Carl, was a dedicated police officer and mother, Harriette, worked at the Chicago Chronicle. They have three children, Eddie, Laura, and Judy. Before the first episode, the Winslows also welcomed Harriette's sister, Rachel, and her son, as well as Carl's mother, affectionately known as Mother Winslow, into their home. Midway through the first season, the Winslows meet their nerdy neighbor, Steve Urkel, who soon becomes the star of the show. Family Matters, although a comedy, occasionally addressed serious issues such as racism, alcoholism, death, and gun violence. As the show progressed, more episodes were based on Steve Urkel, his inventions, his crush on Laura, and his interaction with Carl. By the end of its run, Steve's actions had become outlandish; and his inventions, far-fetched. Family Matters had transformed from a show that was, in many ways, realistic into a show that was farcical. Despite this drastic change, Family Matters

became the second longest running sitcom, behind The Jeffersons, featuring a predominantly black cast (“Family Matters”). Reginald VelJohnson, who played Carl Winslow, said in 1997, “They [the viewers] believe in what we put out there. It’s a human quality that everybody can relate to. It’s a universality that transcends all races” (Johnson 61).

At the same time as black families became more common on TV sitcoms, it became more common for shows to have black supporting characters. Blacks became characters, major or minor, on shows featuring predominantly white casts. For example, 1981’s Gimme a Break centered on Nell Harper, a black housekeeper for the white Kanisky family. Knowing that she is sick, Margaret Kanisky asked Nell, as a favor, to be her family’s housekeeper. After Margaret passes, Nell makes good on her promise, helping to take care of Margaret’s husband, Carl, and her three daughters. Later in the show, Carl dies as well, and Nell continues to raise the children on her own. African Americans also played supporting characters such as neighbors, co-workers, friends, and even spouses. In 1993, Dave’s World, a show focusing on the daily life of newspaper columnist Dave Barry, premiered. Dave’s best friend from college and current neighbor, Sheldon Baylor, was a wealthy black plastic surgeon in Miami. Over a decade later, on The New Adventures of Old Christine, which debuted in 2006, Barb Baran is Christine’s black best friend. Together, the two women own a ladies-only gym that they later attempt to turn into a spa. Just as blacks appeared more frequently in starring roles and in supporting roles, so they appeared more frequently as background characters. Blacks now appeared as background characters in classrooms, workplaces, shopping malls, and crowd scenes. Blacks were now being recognized by TV as members of society. Even though blacks were making their presence known on the TV screen, other minorities still lag behind, still went unnoticed.

As blacks and whites mixed on television, interracial relationships became more prevalent. Some shows focused on mixed families. Case in point: Diff’rent Strokes of 1978. Philip Drummond, a wealthy businessman, quite willingly takes in the two sons of his black housekeeper upon her death. The boys, Arnold and Willis, quickly adjust to their new life, and new family, which includes a white “sister” named Kimberly. Five years later, a similar scenario is the basis of another sitcom, Webster. Webster, a seven-

year-old black orphan, is taken in by his white godfather, a former professional football player named George Papadapolis and his wife, Katherine. George and Katherine learn to become parents to their new son. While some sitcom parents had a different skin color than their children, some sitcom husbands had a different skin color than their wives. The first interracial couple was the Willises from The Jeffersons. White Tom and black Helen are the parents of Jenny, the wife of the Jeffersons' son, Lionel. Although the viewing public, for the most part, was willing to accept this union, George Jefferson referred to his new bi-racial daughter-in-law and her brother as "zebras." A comment such as this, written for a laugh, showed that racial tension was relaxing, and that people of all colors, and even mixed colors, were now being portrayed and accepted on the TV screen.

Following 1970, the number of domestic sitcoms featuring black characters increased dramatically. No longer was American television an all-white world. Black families, black supporting characters, and mixed families became more common. However, every black show was criticized for something. It was too "white" or too "black." It was too family oriented or too issue oriented. It was too realistic or too unrealistic. It was too in touch with black problems or too out of touch with black problems. Its characters were too stereotypical or too unconventional. Every black faction wanted to be represented on the TV screen, and every black faction wanted the TV screen to be its forum. If lower class blacks were portrayed, upper class blacks complained that blacks were being depicted negatively. If upper class blacks were portrayed, lower class blacks complained that black issues were not being addressed. It seemed that blacks sitcoms couldn't win, but they remained on the air and ultimately changed the course of TV history. These sitcoms stood at the edge of a new frontier, broke the color barrier, and advanced the blacks' position in America. More than that, many of these shows taught Americans that we are more alike than different. Even white upper-class Americans could find something to relate to on a sitcom featuring a lower-class black family. These black shows also share another commonality - both with each other and with their white counterparts; family members always love one another. This emotion was never criticized. Rich, poor. Ghetto, penthouse. Educated, uneducated. Militant, peaceful. It made no difference: love was always at the heart of these shows.

Chapter 6

Issues Addressed

Issues Addressed in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It is 1965, and you tune in to watch a new sitcom - Gidget. Gidget, teenager Francine Lawrence, is wearing a light yellow angora sweater and matching yellow pants. From her femininely decorated bedroom, Gidget calls her best friend, Larue, to discuss a problem she is having with her older surfer boyfriend, Jeff. Sitting on a pink satin bedspread, Gidget falls back on her bed, letting her head hang off the side.

“Larue! Will you please not argue? I need your help. I’m utterly destroyed!”

“Don’t tell me you broke up with Jeff,” declares a pajama-clad Larue as she sits cross-legged on her bed.

“No, just the opposite. I still have his ring.” Gidget puts one foot on the opposite knee.

“And this destroys you? I should have such destruction,” responds Larue.

“You don’t understand, Larue,” Gidget says as she rolls onto her stomach. “Of course, it’s wonderful having his ring. But suddenly, driving home, it hit me that I’m all this younger than he is.”

Wide eyed, Larue questions her friend’s revelation. “He found out you’re only fifteen-and-a-half?”

“Oh no. I’m still sixteen to him,” Gidget ensures as she sits up. “The point is, he’ll be going back to Princeton next week; and going steady may be fine for him at his age, but it just doesn’t seem right that I should sit around for the whole year and die on the vine.” Gidget ponders this for a second. She lies back and puts her feet on one of the bedposts. The camera focuses on her feet as Gidget states, “Actually, it wouldn’t be fair to him. I mean, what man when he gets married wants to have as a wife some unsophisticated dodo who’s never been around, met people, or anything?”

“I guess you’ve got a problem.” Larue nods in agreement. “What are you going to do about it?”

Gidget sits up once more so her legs dangle over the foot of the bed. “I’m not sure yet. I’ve got to do some heavy thinking.”

There is a knock on the door. “Honey!” calls Gidget’s father, Professor Lawrence.

“Just a minute,” Gidget yells to door. Gidget refocuses on Larue and quietly says into the phone, “Gotta hang up. Visit from the parent. Talk to you tomorrow” (Flippen and Kohner).

Gidget is embroiled in romantic difficulties with her Moondoggie. Beaver tries to raise an alligator in his bathtub. Dennis replaces Mr. Wilson's dahlia bulbs with sweet potatoes. Billie Jo steals Bobbie Jo's boyfriend. Tabitha turns a classmate into a butterfly. These are the types of issues that provided the basis for classic domestic sitcoms. All problems are simple and limited to the confines of the home. This is true, in part, because the domestic sitcom family of classic TV is totally interdependent. The family members eat dinner together, attend church together, support each other, and share their problems and joys. The family of classic sitcoms “is a self-contained entity that can solve all crises on its own” (Leibman 153). It is the role of the parents to help the child find a solution to these problems, thus furthering the learning process. “The father speaks from age and experience; his concern is to guide his children through problems so that they will learn from their errors but not be destroyed by them. In most cases it is the father who, by his actions or by his direct explanation of what has happened, points the moral that we take from domestic comedy” (Newcomb 56). Not only are family problems solved within a single episode, they are the only problems mentioned. State, national, and world events or problems are never referenced, not even in passing, yet alone discussed in depth. The family is concerned solely with family matters, as if nothing is happening in the world on the other side of their white picket fence. Watching a classic sitcom gives the viewer no indication of current events. Jokes are never made about politicians, celebrities, or the state of the economy. “No threatening world impinged on these early TV families, not the bomb or the cold war; not 1960s Vietnam, riots, protests; not sex or drugs” (Edgerton and Rose 115). Beaver does not practice for air raids while at school. Jim Anderson does not have wounds from the War. A President’s name is never uttered, and a Presidential

assassination is never alluded to. The outside world rarely intrudes on life inside the home. The classic domestic sitcom also carefully avoids certain topics. Topics that became common in later years were taboo in TV's early sitcoms: homosexuality, alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse, and, in particular, sex. In early sitcoms, married couples don't sleep in the same bed. Rob and Laura Petrie have separate beds as do Ozzie and Harriet, Ricky and Lucy, and all other early sitcom couples. Even the word "pregnant" was vetoed in favor of the word "expecting" before Lucy gave birth to Little Ricky. Social mores of the day, as well as the censors, dictated what could and couldn't be aired. As a result, the problems that were faced by early sitcom families were as simple as the lives they led. Each week, a new episode, based on familial problems, was presented. Within the next thirty minutes, the family resolves the problem and becomes stronger because of the experience. More importantly, and a lesson is learned; a moral is taught.

I Love Lucy is a prime example of the issues addressed in classic domestic sitcoms. The show premiered in October 1951 and featured Lucy Ricardo, a housewife, and her husband, Ricky Ricardo, a Cuban bandleader. Discontented with her life as a homemaker and yearning for the limelight of show business, many episodes revolve around Lucy trying to get into Ricky's act - much against Ricky's wishes. Even the birth of Little Ricky didn't dissuade Lucy from her stage aspirations. Shortly after Little Ricky's birth, she strapped him to her back in a papoose and appeared in Ricky's show as an Indian squaw, much to Ricky's dismay and disbelief. The Ricardos' landlords and best friends, Fred and Ethel Mertz, usually become mixed up in Lucy's schemes. Plots that do not include Lucy's pursuit of stardom focus on some other harebrained scheme, whether it be to meet a famous movie star, to make a million dollars, or to fool Ricky into buying her a mink stole. There is an episode in which Lucy and Ethel switch jobs with Ricky and Fred, leaving the men to do household chores while the women take jobs at a candy factory. Lucy and Ethel do battle with a racing conveyor belt and end up stuffing their blouses, hats, and mouths with chocolates. In another episode Lucy bakes her own bread. Bungling as usual, Lucy mistakenly adds thirteen cakes of yeast to the dough. The loaf rises in the oven, explodes from its confines, and pins Lucy against the wall, forcing Ethel to use a saw to cut her friend free. In yet another

episode, Lucy and Ethel, in pursuit of the ultimate Hollywood souvenir, pry loose and steal John Wayne's footprints from the sidewalk in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre. By the end of each episode, the scheme has been foiled, and the truth comes out. "Lucy Ricardo's attempts at rebellion are usually sabotaged by her own incompetence" (Anderson 1159). Lucy returns to her cooking and cleaning until the next episode in which she hatches another scheme.

A decade later in 1961, Americans were introduced to Hazel. "Throughout television history, the representation of the American family is often made 'complete' by the presence of the family housekeeper figure" (Kim 1070). This is true in the case of the Baxter family which is completed by their live-in maid, Hazel Burke. Hazel "is characterized as 'meddling' and as causing 'misadventures' in her attempts to run the household..." (Kim 1070). Many episodes center on Hazel and her involvement in the home life of her boss, George Baxter. Although they are both stubborn, George routinely gives in so that Hazel "wins." Plot lines are simple. Hazel tries to convince George to let Harold keep a stray dog. Hazel finds out her recipes have been published without her consent. Hazel puts together a luncheon for Dorothy's friends on her day off. Hazel paints a crosswalk on the street and winds up in court. First and foremost, however, Hazel's duty is to the care of the Baxter family. Hazel goes far beyond the simple duties assigned to a maid. She sees to it that Mr. B. doesn't eat too many desserts - whether he likes it or not; she sees to it that Missy can entertain, work, or relax without any thought to household duties; she sees to it that little Harold washes behind his ears, speaks respectfully to adults, and kisses his mother good night. As a "second mother," Hazel tries to instill manners, virtues, and a sense of right and wrong in the youngest Baxter. She feels that her job isn't just to take care of the house, but, more importantly, to take care of the family that lives in it. There is no need for controversial or gritty topics in this show. It's Hazel's big heart for "her family," her friends, and her community that often leads to the high jinks that drive the show. As in the other classic sitcoms, any problems that arose because of Hazel's well-meaning intentions are resolved by episode's end.

Unlike the Baxters, the Munsters are not the typical American family, although they think they are. In 1964, The Munsters debuted. The Munster family includes Herman, a Frankenstein-like monster;

his wife, Lily, a vampire; their son, Eddie, a werewolf; Lily's father, Grandpa, a mad scientist and Count Dracula type; and Lily's truly attractive niece, Marilyn, the black sheep of the family. "Not only did this family look like monsters, they were monsters – albeit friendly, unassuming ones" (Brooks and Marsh, "The Munsters" 928). Episodes tended to revolve around the Munsters dealing with the outside world; believing that they were the normal ones, they could never understand why people acted so strangely around them. "The effect their physical appearance had on the rest of the world was always predictable, often hilarious, and occasionally poignant" (Brooks and Marsh, "The Munsters" 929). The family was constantly concerned about poor Marilyn, loved, but unattractive by their standards, and her inability to keep a boyfriend. Family members are often subjects of Grandpa's experiments. One time, Lily and Herman unknowingly take a love potion. In another episode, Grandpa gives Eddie a potion to make him grow, but Eddie grows a beard instead. True to form, no matter the scenario, the problem is solved within the given thirty minute period. Also true to form, this show ignores the world outside with its wars, its race riots, and its assassinations. Instead, the series deals solely with the everyday doings of these gentle, good-hearted misfits.

Gidget, debuting a year later in 1965, deals with the everyday doings of Francine Lawrence, a typical teenage girl, better known as Gidget. Boy-crazy Gidget meets her surfer boyfriend Jeff, or Moondoggie, at the beach which is a common setting for her adventures in addition to her home and school. Gidget is frequently joined by her quirky, offbeat friend Larue as she deals with the daily struggles of an American teenager. These situations, some common and some unusual/unconventional, form the basis of most storylines. Gidget develops a crush on Larue's cousin and acts more mature to impress him. Gidget's surfboard is stolen, and the gypsy trying to sell it puts a curse on her. A Swedish college student stays with the Lawrences and ends up stealing Gidget's boyfriend's attention. Gidget puts a neighbor boy's dead pet alligator in her family's freezer. There to guide Gidget through her teenage angst, antics, and adventures is her father, Professor Russell Lawrence. He gives her moral instruction; and by the end of each episode, Gidget has learned a lesson from her experiences. Gidget's well-intentioned sister, Anne, and her husband, John, often add to Gidget's problems by meddling in the

relationship between Gidget and her father. For example, Anne reads Gidget's diary and misunderstands an entry, thinking it is racier than it really is. In another episode, Anne and John hire a man to keep an eye on Gidget while she attends a surfing tournament. Obviously, the topics tackled by the Lawrence's are simple and light-hearted; and all episodes end on a happy note.

Issues Addressed in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

It is January of 1971, and you are watching All in the Family. Archie Bunker has just found out that his meathead son-in-law has written a criticizing letter to the President. Archie begins questioning Mike about the letter's contents.

Mike explains, "It's like Gloria said. I wrote about a lot of things, uh, pollution, uh, race relations, the war in Vietnam."

"The war in Vietnam? You better let me see that letter, buddy," Archie declares as he grabs for letter.

Mike steps back to elude Archie's grasp. He walks around Archie's recliner with Archie following. "No, no. No, no. This is sealed. It's private, and it's personal between the President and me.

Archie becomes irritated. "I demand to know the contents of that letter," orders Archie as he points to the letter in Mike's hand.

Unwavering, Mike reaffirms, "And I says it's between Nixon and me."

Archie points his finger at Mike correcting him, "President Nixon."

"What's wrong with plain 'Nixon?'" asks Mike. "Look in the paper. They do it all the time. Nixon this. Nixon that."

"That's their business; but in this house, we show the proper respect. You don't like President Nixon, you call him *Mr.* Nixon," Archie asserts.

"Or Tricky Dickey," Archie's wife, Edith, chimes in. Archie looks past Mike to Edith. Matter-of-factly, Edith says, "You was calling him that eight years ago."

Archie crosses to his wife. "Eight years ago he was a civilian. Now, he happens to be Commander-in-Chief of the United States; and he's doing a good job of it too." Archie looks to Mike who is shaking his hand, insinuating that Archie's opinion is questionable. "Let me tell you somethin', wise guy." Archie crosses to Mike who has his arm around Gloria. "Mr. Nixon didn't get us into Vietnam. He inherited it, just like he inherited inflation and integration and pollution." Archie looks at Gloria. "Or are you gonna tell me Mr. Nixon invented pollution?"

"No, but what's he doing about it?" demands Gloria.

"Well, what's he doing about it?" mimics Archie.

Gloria becomes aggravated. "Oh Daddy, stop it. There isn't a major city in this country where the drinking water isn't below safe standards." She places her hands on her hips while Mike nods in agreement.

"Oh well now let me ask you this," pushes Archie. "Washington D.C., being one of your major cities, would you say the drinking water there is becoming unsafe?"

"Well, yeah," Gloria confirms.

"Well, that's where I got both of you, because if the drinking water in Washington D.C. is becoming unsafe, do you think that Mr. Nixon would let Tricia drink it?" (Erwin et al.)

Mike writes a letter to President Nixon criticizing his positions on pollution, race relations, and Vietnam. Fonzie's birth father makes an appearance at Christmastime. Kevin and Winnie are invited to a notorious make-out party. Ray buys an erotic board game to add spice to the bedroom. Mitchell is perturbed when Cameron cannot show affection in public. Modern domestic sitcoms, like its classical TV predecessors, deal with many simple, everyday problems; but often times the problems dealt with by modern sitcoms tend to be more serious, more sexually charged, and more consequential. Also, in modern sitcoms, the world outside the family is acknowledged. References are made to current events, world affairs, and people in the news. Problems such as unemployment, prejudice, child abuse, poverty, alcoholism, war, global warming, eating disorders, and divorce are recognized. These topics do, at times, work their way into the plot lines; but usually they are simply mentioned in passing. Sometimes, when

the topic is light enough or absurd enough - such as Britney Spears lack of panties or Lindsay Lohan's brushes with the law - they become the butt of jokes. Nevertheless, current events are alluded to, in one way or another, in many modern family sitcoms. In addition, topics that were taboo in the '50s and '60s are now common in modern day sitcoms. Homosexuality, sex, masturbation, PMS, gay marriage, and interracial marriage have all been the topics in episodes of modern domestic sitcoms. Because some of these topics are so serious, they can't be tackled within one thirty-minute episode. Instead, they are part of a running story line week after week. For example, Debra's and Marie's constant vying for control, and Ray's inability to stand up to his mother, arise in nearly every episode of Everybody Loves Raymond. In the same manner, Reba's difficulty to accept and get along with her ex-husband's new wife, Barbara Jean, the woman who broke up her marriage, is a problem that lasts throughout the first seasons of Reba.

Issues or conflicts that last for a number of episodes, if not an entire season or even seasons, set modern sitcoms apart from those of the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, because some of these issues are so serious and complicated, fathers and mothers are not always able to lead their children to the answers. In fact, sometimes the parents themselves don't know what the answers are. As a result, family members at times experience depression or anxiety, something their earlier counterparts never faced. Ozzie Nelson and Jim Anderson never went to the bar to drink away their troubles like Dan Conner and Charlie Harper do. The modern world is more complicated, and so are the problems its sitcom families face.

One domestic sitcom unafraid to tackle controversial topics is 1972's Maude. The show features Maude Findlay, a woman in her late forties, and her fourth husband, Walter. Living with them is Maude's divorced daughter, Carol, and Carol's son, Phillip. Maude and her family are quite different from the classic sitcom family. "If...Maude and Walter Findlay had moved in next door to Harriet and Ozzie Nelson, you can be sure Ozzie and Harriet would have moved out" (Mitz 251). Some episodes of Maude are based on simplistic problems or events including John Wayne's appearance at a party, Maude's contest of a speeding ticket, and Walter's attempt to move to the Canadian woods with his wife. In addition, Maude presents many controversial topics, and "got herself in some R-rated antics" (Mitz 251). Most famously, Maude discovers she is pregnant and decides to get an abortion. The show also

deals with other sexual issues – birth control, menopause, and vasectomies. In other episodes, Walter faces depression following his business's bankruptcy, and confronts his alcoholism, and suffers a nervous breakdown. The combination of episodes led Maude to become “one of the first sitcoms to create a televisual space where highly charged, topical issues and sometimes tragic contemporary situations could be discussed” (Fry 1440).

One Day at a Time of 1975 is another domestic sitcom to address serious issues. The show follows Ann Romano, the recently divorced mother of two teenage daughters, Barbara and Julie. Ann struggles to find a job, to pay her bills, and to raise her girls. Ann also struggles in her love life. She falls in love with a married man who leaves his wife for Ann, but she is unwilling to commit to him. Late in the series, Ann's fiancé is killed in a car accident leading Ann to temporarily care for his son. Barbara and Julie face their share of topical issues in the series. In one episode, Julie protests high Arab oil prices; and in another, she wants to quit school. Julie feels pressured to have sex with her boyfriend. Barbara and Julie try to sneak beer into a party. Barbara's friend attempts suicide by taking pills. “Throughout the series, Barbara and particularly Julie dealt with issues of birth control, sexuality, virginity, alcohol, and drugs with an honesty and forthrightness that Gidget and other previous TV teens never dreamed of” (O'Dell 1690).

Another domestic sitcom featuring a divorced mother is 1993's Grace Under Fire. This show features Grace Kelly and her three children as they start a new life following her divorce from her abusive, alcoholic husband, Jimmy. Grace's ex-husband appears occasionally throughout the show and causes her difficulties and distress. For example, due to Jimmy's failure to pay his taxes, Grace's pay is seized. Grace's children also provide a number of issues for her to deal with. Her son, Quentin, gets into fights at school and must see a psychologist. Daughter Libby shoplifts. A son given up for adoption years earlier contacts her. Grace faces issues, and sometimes danger, at her workplace as well. She works at a refinery. It was at the refinery that one of Grace's fellow employees was killed in an explosion, thus shaking Grace's composure as well as the refinery itself. As a result of this explosion, the refinery temporarily closes and Grace has to take on two jobs, one at a pharmacy and one at a bar, to

make ends meet. It was also at the refinery that an armed and angry former employee once held Grace and other workers hostage. Grace also manages to entangle herself in other people's personal issues. Some of these personal difficulties are quickly and easily solved, such as taking Libby to buy her first bra. Others are much more complicated and serious. For instance, Grace's neighbors, Wade and Nadine, try to conceive a baby; and after consulting a fertility clinic, they ask Grace to donate an egg. At the refinery, she takes the side of a janitor who is HIV positive and in danger of being fired. In yet another episode, she tries to help a fellow domestic abuse victim. As Grace Under Fire acknowledges and addresses such topics as spousal abuse, alcoholism, divorce, single parenting, violence, financial hardship, infertility, and AIDS, it fits the pattern of modern family sitcoms.

Some of these same topics and many others are addressed in Modern Family which debuted in 2009. This sitcom documents the lives of the extended Pritchett family. The patriarch, Jay Pritchett, has recently married a much younger Colombian woman, gaining a pre-teen stepson, Manny, in the process. Also featured is Jay's daughter, Claire Dunphy; her husband, Phil; their children and Jay's gay son Mitchell Pritchett; his partner, Cameron; and their adopted Vietnamese daughter, Lily. Although the issues of the characters are presented humorously, some of the issues were considered too controversial for classic domestic sitcoms. For example, in retaliation to a remark Jay made earlier, Mitchell suggests that one of Jay's friends might be gay. Later in the episode, Mitchell and Cameron discuss Jay's initial inability to accept his son's homosexuality. In another episode, Mitchell suspects that he fathered a son eight years ago after seeing his ex-girlfriend with a boy of the right age. It turns out, however, that the child is in actuality her dwarf husband. Sex is also the topic of an episode in which Claire and Phil's children attempt to treat them to breakfast in bed on their anniversary and inadvertently walk in on them having sex, and another in which Claire finds nude photos on the family computer. Modern Family undertakes these issues as well as more lighthearted ones. Gloria gives Manny's "girlfriend" a makeover, Claire organizes a family portrait, and Gloria and Manny learn to ride bicycles. By including a May-December marriage, a homosexual marriage, a blended family, and a gay adoption, and by dealing with contemporary issues, Modern Family proves that it exemplifies just that - a modern family.

Modern domestic sitcom families and their classic TV counterparts face many of the same problems; but modern families also address much more difficult topics, topics that censors and societal norms prohibited classic sitcom families from exploring. Sex and sexuality, mental disorders and physical disabilities, politics and religion are topics that classic TV shies away from but modern sitcoms embrace, presenting them, usually humorously, in order to show current world events and for shock value. In modern TV sitcoms, "public attention was focused on changes in family structure, in particular on domestic distress. The television family in this period echoed these concerns, in sharp contrast to the relative harmony, unity, and integration within the wider society of television families in the 1950s and 1960s....The 1970s television family became a forum for the articulation of social conflicts of all kinds....Not only 'private' troubles but also the 'public' problems of youth, class, race, and gender are drawn into the family frame...(Taylor 65)." On the other hand, classic sitcom families' problems and issues are confined to the family as a whole or to family members as individuals. Problems are quickly solved with little dispute or conflict. "No matter how serious the problem, no matter how critical the conflict faced by the child, the problem will emerge as solved...There remains the magic of the wise father, the counseling mother, the obedient child. The sense of completeness, of the happy ending, is the popularity factor" (Newcomb 57). Classic TV sitcoms clearly present life in a positive manner; it showcases happy little families living in happy little homes. The larger world spinning around them is never referenced. Unlike modern domestic sitcoms that mention politicians, pop icons, national policies, and world affairs, these classic shows virtually ignore the world going on outside the home. This is what makes classic sitcoms timeless but modern sitcoms timely.

Chapter 7

Values

Values in Classic Domestic Sitcoms

It's 1960, and you're watching the latest episode of The Andy Griffith Show. Six-year-old Opie and two of his friends have been playing cowboys outside the courthouse. After becoming bored with the game, they decide to push Andy's sheriff's car in front of a fireplug. Barney, the deputy, sees the illegally parked car and writes Andy a citation. Andy allows Barney to give him a trial in which he is found innocent. Opie, wearing a fringed cowboy shirt and jeans, his cowboy hat pushed back on his head and his holstered guns hanging at his hips, walks into the courthouse looking for his father. Andy opens the door and steps out front, Opie trailing behind.

"Still can't figure out how my car got in front of that fireplug," says Andy.

"I know how, Pa." Opie says.

"You do?" Andy questions as he puts his hands in pockets.

"Yeah. Steve 'n' Tommy 'n' me pushed it there. You gonna arrest 'em? I think you could get a confession out of 'em," Opie replies.

"Well, uh, why shouldn't I arrest you too?" asks Andy.

"I didn't push very hard," Opie responds matter-of-factly.

"Oh, I see. Yeah that does make a difference," agrees Andy, trying to hold back a smile. "Well, uh, how come they pushed my car in front of the fireplug?"

"Oh, just for a joke, Pa. We got tired of playing cowboys, and we just had to do somethin'."

"Oh, I see. Well, seein' as how they meant no harm and no harm was done, why, we can just forget it," Andy says understandingly. "You want to?"

“That’s good, Pa, ‘cause they’re my best friends; and I promised I wouldn’t tell on them. Well so long, Pa.”

“So long, Opie.” Andy and Opie begin to walk off in opposite directions. “Hey, uh, wait a minute,” calls Andy. Opie turns around and walks back to his father, holstered toy pistols bouncing on his hips. “What, uh, what was that you said about your friends and you promised you wouldn’t tell on ‘em?”

“I said that they’re my best friends, and I promised I wouldn’t tell on ‘em.”

Andy sits down on the hood of the car. “Well, uh, if they’re your best friends and you promised you wouldn’t tell on them, well, uh, how come you did?” Andy wonders.

Opie thinks for a second. “Well, I guess I just figured you oughta know, Pa. Well, so long, Pa.” Opie starts to walk away.

“Wait. Wait a minute now,” Andy requests. “I wanna tell you somethin’. I appreciate you bein’ loyal to your Pa and tellin’ on your friends, and most of all I appreciate that you couldn’t let somethin’ look like it was my fault when you and your friends done it. Well, that shows mighty fine character. Mighty fine.”

“It does, Pa?” Opie places his hands on the fireplug and leans against it.

“It sure does,” confirms Andy, “and if I had a Mighty Fine Character medal layin’ around I’d sure pin it on you.”

“Sure like to wear one, Pa.”

“But now, on the other hand, Opie, when you make a solemn promise to a friend it ain’t right to go back on it. No-o. Never let your friend down. Never break a trust. And when you give your word, never go back on it. You...you understand that, do you?”

“Okay, Pa. You can trust me” (Stander).

This scene from The Andy Griffith Show displays some of the many values reflected in classic domestic sitcoms – loyalty, trustworthiness, respect for others. Family values, like classic sitcoms themselves, are pure and unblemished. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. There are few gray areas.

Classic TV sitcom families believe in God and go to church. They wave the American flag and are loyal to their country. They obey the law and respect authority figures. As classic sitcom episodes demonstrate, fault is never found, nor looked for, in these areas. Classic sitcom families also believe that family is a priority and that parents are responsible for not only their children's physical needs, but also their children's moral and ethical development; and they believe that parents can best do this by setting good examples and by living what they preach. Through the parents' actions and speech, traditional values are championed and passed down to their children. Classic sitcom parents are proud to instill in their children the American work ethic; children are taught that hard work is essential for success. Children are taught to help the less fortunate, tell the truth, use good manners, value education, go to church, respect others, be responsible, and, always, always, do the right thing. These sterling values, combined with the happy, stable marriages at the hearts of these early sitcoms, result in wholesome, heartwarming fare. Classic domestic sitcoms present ideal families, built on love, sharing unadulterated family values.

Traditional values are at the heart of classic family sitcoms. Few sitcoms, if any, show this better than The Andy Griffith Show which debuted in 1960. Andy Taylor is the central character in this series. As sheriff in Mayberry, it is his job to uphold the law. As father to Opie and mentor, cousin, and friend to deputy Barney Fife, it is his job to foster time-honored values. Set in a small town, small town values are readily apparent in this sitcom. Characters believe in God, country, and respect for one another. This is seen in episode after episode. In one episode, a businessman's car breaks down outside of Mayberry on a Sunday morning. He walks into town only to find deserted streets: the citizens of Mayberry are at church. After services are over and the citizens return to their homes, he is dismayed that the local garage is closed and that the mechanics refuse to work on his car until morning. At first angered by this inattention to his needs, the businessman soon finds himself enjoying the front porch comforts associated with a Sunday afternoon in a rural town that believes that Sunday truly is a day of rest. In another episode, Opie enters the 50-yard dash at the Sheriff's Day race. He dreams of winning; he prays to win. Barney coaches him and assures him that he would take home the medal. Opie, however, doesn't win; he

comes in last. Upset that he doesn't get the medal he so coveted, he returns home in a funk. It is then Andy's place to impress on the downcast little boy the importance of being a good loser. In another episode, Andy is upset when he hears that his son, Opie, only donated three cents to a charity drive at school. When Andy tries to teach his son about the importance of giving to the less fortunate, Opie explains that he is saving his money to buy his girlfriend something. Assuming that his son plans to buy this little girl a toy or trinket of some sort, Andy lets his disappointment be known. It is only later that he learns the truth: Opie was saving to buy his girlfriend the winter coat that her family couldn't afford to get her. Evidently, earlier teachings had made an impression on his son; and Andy had the right to be proud of his boy. These are typical episodes seen on The Andy Griffith Show, episodes that reflect small town beliefs, episodes that reflect American values.

Homespun beliefs and American values are also evident in The Beverly Hillbillies. Premiering in 1962, The Beverly Hillbillies centers on widower, mountain man Jed Clampett and his family: daughter, Elly May; mother-in-law, Granny Moses; and cousin's son, Jethro Bodine. An instant millionaire after oil is discovered on his land, Jed is encouraged to move his family to Beverly Hills where they'd enjoy a better life. Their naiveté and country ways, however, prove for a poor fit. Many of the episodes are based on the Clampetts' misunderstanding, or total lack of understanding, of the high-class city world around them. The simplest of objects confound them: the doorbell, the telephone, the pool table. People try to take advantage of them. Greedy Mr. Drysdale sees them as a bank account. Snobby Mrs. Drysdale tries to oust them at every opportunity. Honest John sells them New York's Central Park. Through it all, however, the Clampetts do not abandon their country ways or beliefs. Jed still whittles; Granny still makes lye soap; Elly May still climbs trees and looks after her "critters." Through it all, the Clampetts continue to believe in their fellow man. To be sure, some of the story lines are somewhat ludicrous as Granny makes a tonic that will restore hair growth or Jethro wants to be a "double aught" spy; but beneath it all lies simple, unsophisticated virtues and values. In an early holiday episode, the Clampetts are downcast because they just don't seem to have the Christmas spirit. After a little soul searching, Jed decides that they don't have the Christmas spirit because they aren't helping anyone like they used to back

home in the hills. With that in mind, they decide to help someone, namely Mrs. Drysdale. Seemingly oblivious to their own wealth, these millionaires get jobs in a department store to raise money to buy her something. When they see Mrs. Drysdale donating some of her clothes to a charity rummage sale, they mistakenly believe that she is in need and use their newly earned money to buy back her donated clothes as a Christmas gift. In a similar storyline, the Clampetts believe one of their favorite silent movie stars, Gloria Swanson, is broke and destitute. They immediately visit her in her home to offer whatever help they can. Of course, Swanson, who is planning to move back East, is not in financial straits and is simply selling her home in order to fund an actors' charity. She is so touched by the Clampetts' offer, however, and their resolve to help her that she accepts a role in a silent movie made just for her by Jed Clampett's studio. In another episode, Granny and Jed see the 68 million dollars in Drysdale's bank as a burden. When three college girls come to the door collecting money for N.E.E.D.Y., a phony foundation for needy UCLA college students, Jed gives them his entire fortune and happily packs up his family and heads back to the hills. Later, after learning that Jed gave them his entire fortune, they return the money to him. This pleases banker Drysdale, but Jed sees the money as a curse he and his family will have to continue to endure. The Clampetts were totally unimpressed, unmoved, and unchanged by their wealth; they were just as happy, if not happier, living in a squalid cabin in the hills. Unaffected by the glitz and glamour of Beverly Hills, the Clampetts adhere to the values of those hills. Honesty, generosity, compassion, forgiveness, respect for one another, love of country (even if it's the Confederate States of America) - these all provide the basis for episode after episode of The Beverly Hillbillies. These virtues are seen in the everyday actions and attitudes, thoughts and deeds, of this family of straightforward, uncomplicated country bumpkins, lacking in sophistication but overflowing in principles.

In 1969 another family sitcom premiered, The Courtship of Eddie's Father. Eddie's Father told the story of Tom Corbett and his small son, Eddie, who were, as the theme song said, "best friends."

After Tom's wife passed away, Tom and Eddie were left alone. Working as a publisher and raising a young son left Tom with little time to find a new wife for himself and a new mother for Eddie. Eddie, in particular, was eager to find someone who could fill both these roles, and a number of episodes center on

his search. Many other episodes showcase values. In one such episode, Eddie finds a bank bag containing \$10,000.00 in new bills. The generous boy then anonymously sends a crisp hundred dollar bill to each of the adults he loves most: his father; Mrs. Livingston, their Japanese housekeeper; Norman, Tom's co-worker; and Tina, Tom's secretary. Before Eddie can send some of the bills to his friends, however, Tom discovers who the benefactor is. He convinces Eddie to return the money to the bank. The next day, however, Eddie's classmates ridicule him and his father for their honesty. In fact, Tom's friends ridicule him too. That evening, Tom stresses to Eddie that he himself, Mrs. Livingston, Norman, and Tina think he did the right thing. More importantly, he says that Eddie made his mother in heaven proud. In another episode, it is Tina who teaches a lesson to Eddie. In this case, Tom has to go on a business trip to Las Vegas at the same time Eddie would be portraying Abraham Lincoln in the school play. Eddie is at first upset that his father can't attend; but Mrs. Livingston explains the necessity of Tom's trip, and Eddie acquiesces. Soon after, however, Eddie overhears Norman talking about some of the fun times he and Tom are going to have while away. This sends Eddie back into his huff, and he begins to sulk again. Tina then firmly sums things up for Eddie. She explains that attending the business meeting is Tom's responsibility and that portraying Lincoln is Eddie's responsibility. Eddie is disappointed, but he accepts this; and both father and son meet their responsibilities. In yet another episode, Eddie writes a will. After Tom and Norman find the will in a sealed envelope, curiosity gets the better of them and they open the envelope - so they can make a copy of the will for safekeeping, of course. Expecting to see whom Eddie left his aquarium to, they are taken aback when they read Eddie's bequests. He first bequest is somewhat expected but with a twist. Eddie left his aquarium to his school so his father, Norman, and Mrs. Livingston wouldn't fight over it. It is his second bequest that is totally unforeseen and heart-stopping. He left his father, Norman, and Mrs. Livingston to each other so they would always have someone to love. Love. Love between father and son. It's at the heart of this show. While Tom opens himself to new love, he bonds with his son, Eddie, and tries to instill in him positive values and principles: a sense of responsibility, respect for adults, honesty, generosity, compassion, trust, and, most of all, love.

Values in Modern Domestic Sitcoms

It is 2006, and you turn on the TV and find The New Adventures of Old Christine. Christine Campbell and her brother, Matthew, are eating submarine sandwiches at the kitchen table when Christine's ex-husband, Richard, and his girlfriend, "New" Christine, bring eight-year-old Ritchie home. The three of them are dressed in nice clothes; Ritchie is wearing a suit. He explains to his mother that these are his church clothes. Christine is shocked. Ritchie continues to explain that his dad and "New" Christine took him to church and that he loves church. Christine feigns enthusiasm for her son and then sends him to change into his play clothes so that she can talk to Richard.

"You took him to *church*?" Christine questions in astonishment as she stands up from the kitchen table. "You took *our* son to *church*?" She places her hands on hips.

Richard tries to dismiss Christine's anger. "Look, he wanted to go. We were going anyway. It didn't seem like such a big deal."

Christine can't believe what her ex-husband has said. "What? You were going anyway? What? You go to church now? Why? Just because your cute, young girlfriend does?" She motions to "New" Christine.

"Hey!" cries "New" Christine, offended. Then she thinks for a second and changes her attitude. "And thanks," she says with a smile.

"You should've asked me," Christine says to Richard while she picks up the submarine sandwich from her plate, walks to the trash, and throws it in the garbage can with annoyance. "Unbelievable!"

"New" Christine turns to Richard and says, "I don't understand what's going on."

"Christine has this thing about church," Richard responds.

Christine contests Richard's claim by telling "New" Christine, "It's not a *thing*." Christine looks at Richard. "Richard, you and I talked about it; and we made the decision that Ritchie was going to have his spiritual education at home and not in a CHURCH." She walks by them with a huff and into the living room.

“Watching 7th Heaven is not a spiritual education,” argues Richard.

“It is if you burn incense,” Christine insists, placing her hands on her hips once more.

“Christine, it’s not a big deal,” pleads Richard.

“Wha- You went behind my back. That’s a very big deal,” Christine asserts. “Man, your poor parenting decisions never cease to amaze me. First, you want to take him to a Rolling Stones concert; and now, you’re taking him to church! There isn’t a court in this land that wouldn’t give me full custody of that boy *right now*.”

New Christine steps up. “What exactly is your problem with church?”

“Yeah!” presses Richard.

Christine glares at him. “People who go to church only like other people who go to church. Plus, they hate gay people. And I hate *anyone* who hates” (Crittenden and Lizer).

This scene from The New Adventures of Old Christine depicts some of the values reflected in modern domestic sitcoms – Alan Harper lets his son Jake do something that is wrong simply because it is easier for him; Jimmy Chance raises his daughter Hope, the result of a one-night stand with a wanted felon; Al Bundy uses a credit card under the family dog’s name. Family values are not always as honorable and exemplary as those found in classic sitcoms. Modern sitcom families may not go to church or worship God. They may disagree with and put down their country's policies and politicians. Family members may disrespect authority figures and even feel that they are above the law. In stark contrast to their classic equivalents, modern sitcom family members may not put the family first. They are far more likely to be self-absorbed, doing what they want rather than what is best for the familial unit. Parents are not the best role models and often teach their children to “do as I say, not as I do.” Poor role models and hypocritical role models often confuse children. Conflicting actions and speech often give way to children with loose morals and questionable ethical codes. Although parents pay lip service to teaching their children right from wrong, they are frequently so self-absorbed with their own emotions, interests, situations, and problems that they fail to follow through on these teachings. They are unwilling to self-sacrifice for the betterment of their children. As a result, modern sitcom parents tell their children

to do what is right, to be good citizens, to tell the truth, and to be responsible; but they aren't willing to take the time and effort to enforce these lessons. Ergo, children do not have good manners, they don't go to church, they lie, they're lazy, they settle for less than their best, and they fail to take responsibility for their actions; and modern sitcom children, reflecting their parents' actions and attitudes, are self-centered. Although modern sitcom parents ostensibly pay homage to traditional values, they do not hold their children any more accountable to them than they hold themselves. This is not to say that traditional values are totally absent from modern family sitcoms, it is simply to say that modern sitcom characters deviate from them as soon as following them gets difficult. They find it easy to ignore or stray from values where their earlier counterparts found it more difficult, if not inconceivable and unconscionable, to do so. Traditional values are lost amid, or overshadowed by, the alcohol, drugs, sex, and vulgarities found in many modern American domestic sitcoms.

Unconventional family values are at the center of *Roseanne*, which debuted in 1988, featuring the Connor family. Roseanne Conner is the queen of her blue-collar household. She and her husband, Dan, work together to raise their children – Becky, Darlene, and D.J. Roseanne and Dan are not the perfect parents. They do not have all the answers. They aren't always nice to each other. Their children annoy them. Set in Lanford, Illinois, Roseanne does not share many of the values portrayed in small town classic sitcoms. In one episode, the Connors get a call from school stating that D.J. has been caught with obscene reading material. Both Dan and Roseanne assume that it's one of Dan's Playboy magazines, and Dan goes to the school to meet with his son's principal. At first, Dan is relieved that the magazine is actually a crude underground comic book; but he becomes disturbed when he finds out Darlene is the dark comic's creator. Worried by this, Dan shows the comic to Roseanne who is rather blasé about it, stating that the longer they don't know what Darlene is thinking, the better off they are. Later, after discovering Roseanne's sister, Jackie, has been abused by her boyfriend, Dan vengefully finds her boyfriend and beats him up. Dan resorts to violence to get back at Jackie's abuser. When D.J. later questions his dad about this violent behavior, Dan is unable to explain why it was acceptable. In another episode, Roseanne and Jackie order a new stove for their diner and are shocked when it is delivered: they

have been charged twice the quoted price. The next day, a second stove is delivered in error. Feeling cheated by the high price of the first stove, Roseanne decides to accept the second stove and then sells it to make up the lost money. The next day, a third stove is delivered. Roseanne, Jackie, and co-owner Leon want to keep the stove; but D. J., who has begun to attend church, challenges his mother and the ethical implications of her decision. After much debate, and cornered by her son's accusations and protestations, Roseanne reluctantly gives in and refuses delivery of the third stove. However, she and Jackie agree that if a fourth stove appears they will definitely keep it. In this case, it is the child that points out that the parent is doing the wrong thing; and the mother grudgingly does the ethical thing, declaring that next time she won't.

Two and a Half Men is another modern sitcom that renounces traditional family values. In this show, which premiered in 2003, newly divorced and financially strapped Alan Harper moves in on his swinging jingle-writing brother, Charlie. Alan's young son, Jake, stays there too unless it's his turn to live with his mom. Neither Alan nor Charlie is a good role model for Jake. Charlie is a womanizer who spends his nights with loose women and prostitutes; he parties; he drinks; he gambles; he uses drugs. Although Alan chastises Charlie for this inappropriate behavior, he himself indulges in much the same behavior, although more covertly. He seems to think that drinking and engaging in sex with multiple women is okay as long as his son isn't privy to his activities. As Jake ages, however, he is more and more savvy when it comes to his father's and uncle's disreputable activities. In one episode, Charlie must watch Jake after Alan is injured after a fall from the roof. Jake immediately asks his uncle to take him out to Clucky's for chicken. Charlie refuses, and Alan warns him that Jake "won't shut up until he gets what he wants." That being true, Charlie and Jake are soon sitting in Clucky's eating fried chicken. When Jake decides that he should have ordered Cajun chicken rather than regular, Charlie refuses to order more. In the next scene, however, Jake is sitting in Uncle Charlie's car munching from a bucket of Cajun chicken in his lap. Charlie again refuses when Jake wants to stop at the video store on the way home. Charlie informs his nephew that he may be able to bully his parents into giving him what he wants but that he won't be bullied - that's it. Jake then points out that without the video game Charlie will have to entertain

him personally all weekend. The next scene finds uncle and nephew in the video store. Charlie becomes so aggravated, he drives Jake to his mother's house in hopes she will watch him. She, however, hides inside the house until Charlie gives up and takes Jake home. Neither Charlie, nor Jake's mother Judith, want to spend time with him; and the adults would rather give in to Jake's demands than teach him a lesson. It's clear that Jake is not a priority with the adults in his life. In another episode, Jake calls his father and explains that he has a sore throat and a runny nose and feels he should spend the weekend with his mother instead of visiting him. Alan tells his son he hopes he feels better and hangs up the phone. When confronted by Charlie, who has overheard the conversation, Alan readily admits that he knows that Jake was "lying through his teeth" because he probably had a party to go to or something or he had a hangover. Jake's blatant lying was accepted, however, because Alan wanted "a little me time." That "a little me time" turned into a weekend of masturbation. As Jake is shuttled back and forth between parents, neither of whom seem to take the time to enforce the rules they've set for their son, he seems to flounder. He does so poorly in school that his father wonders if he'll still be living at home when he's thirty - more importantly, will he still be in the fifth grade? As seemingly concerned as Alan is about his son's lack of academic progress, and all-around stupidity, he never seems to take the time and effort to study with the boy. It is easier to make demeaning comments about his son than to work with him to correct the problem. As the series progresses, Jake begins to model his uncle's and father's behaviors. He enjoys porn, he likes to drink, he's obsessed with "boobs". Add his fascination with bodily noises, his amusement with all words sexual, and a high laziness quotient to all this, and you have the embodiment of modern family sitcom values, passed by the Harpers from one generation to the next. The Harpers have their own set of unconventional values; and, because of these values, Jake adopts his own set of unconventional values – he sets his standards low and meets them routinely.

Airing in 2006, The New Adventures of Old Christine chronicles the daily life of new divorcee Christine Campbell. Adding to the confusion, Christine's ex-husband, Richard, has a new girlfriend, also named Christine. Christine lives with her son Ritchie and her adult brother Matthew. From the beginning, it is obvious that Christine is self-obsessed and neurotic. It is also obvious that she'd like to

find love again just as Richard has; but, if love is elusive and unattainable, she will settle for a relationship that is purely sexual. It is this desire for male companionship that drives many story lines. Near the beginning of the series, after Christine learns about the existence of “New” Christine, she sets out to find a sexual partner of her own. Hearing that a local market is a hot spot for hooking up, she pushes a cart through its aisles, clumsily approaching men. Finally, after she has given up and pushes her cart back to the entrance, she meets Stan. The next scene finds her sharing a bed with her newfound man. During the course of the series, Christine sleeps with her ex-husband, her ex-brother-in-law, her son's teacher, and “New” Christine's father, among others. Christine also dabbles, briefly, with illicit drugs. In one episode, she and her business partner, Barb, find a joint in a purse that someone left at their gym. Wanting to prove that she's cool, Christine decides to smoke weed for the first time. Although she thinks she has gotten stoned and acts the part, the reefer was actually too small to have any impact; so Christine goes out in search of a buy so she and Barb can get high. Christine's questionable values also appear when she and Barb actually make a profit from their gym. Barb wants to give her share of the money to charity while Christine, selfish as well as materialistic, wants to buy herself a two thousand dollar dress with her share. In the end, Barb also abandons the charity and buys a popcorn machine with her money; and Christine, as could be predicted, buys the expensive dress - and she buys it in a size 0, definitely too small, just to spite the sales clerk. These episodes are representative of the values purported on The New Adventures of Old Christine. Lack of religion, loose morals, marijuana, and selfishness are not the values espoused by classic domestic sitcoms.

Classic and modern domestic sitcoms depict values of the era in which they are televised. Classic sitcoms present a family that believes in traditional values. Parents teach their children to be upstanding and moral, thus creating future virtuous adults. In more recent times, this precedent has changed. Modern sitcoms, though seemingly based on traditional values, tend to digress from the classic standard. Unlike classic sitcom characters, modern sitcom characters are self-interested. Parents are frequently too wrapped up in their own problems to teach their children right from wrong. The adults of modern sitcoms are sometimes even more immature than their children, and the children must encourage their parents to

make ethical decisions. To this end, parents are not always the best role models for their children; and children fall into the same pitfalls of the adults around them. However, this does not mean that parents do not want what is best for their children. They simply are too involved with their own affairs to do right by their children all the time. No matter the values reflected in the sitcom, both modern and classic sitcom parents still love and care for their children.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

It is obvious that classic domestic sitcoms and modern domestic sitcoms share similarities as well as differences, that they both have strengths as well as weaknesses. It is these differences that cause some critics to choose one over the other. But does a choice have to be made? Don't both classic and modern domestic sitcoms have merit?

Modern domestic sitcoms do have much to offer. It is true that modern sitcom families are more diverse in nature and structure than their classic counterparts. In modern day domestic sitcoms, white, middle class heterosexuals living in nuclear families aren't the only fare. Today's domestic sitcoms include characters of various races and incomes. They include single-parent families and biracial couples. They include homosexuals. They include women who work outside the home and men who take on household duties. They include children who question the adults and the world around them. These changes didn't come quickly or easily, however. They evolved through years and years of networks "pushing the envelope." Through modern TV, positive changes are being made in society. Just as TV reflects society, so society reflects what it sees on TV. If tolerance and acceptance are seen on TV, that same tolerance and acceptance will soon pervade society. Exposure breeds approval and even imitation. In addition, modern domestic sitcoms, unlike their classic TV predecessors, open the dialogue for subjects such as premarital sex, gay rights, and politics. Once these topics are open for discussion, there is a new awareness; and people begin to think and talk about what they have seen on their TV screens. These topics are more socially relevant than Hazel helping an elderly couple find a new maid.

Critics may see the strengths of the modern TV sitcom as the weaknesses of its predecessors. Many scholars argue that classic domestic sitcoms present idealized and, therefore, unrealistic families. Their first attack on classic TV sitcoms is leveled at the mother. June Cleaver and Donna Reed are often lambasted for doing housework in their high heels and perfectly coiffed hair; and

it's a valid criticism to some extent. Women in the 50s and 60s didn't scrub floors and clean toilet bowls while wearing nylon stockings and full-skirted dresses. Their houses weren't spotless; their kitchens didn't gleam; and their work wasn't effortless. However, one thing must be kept in mind: television is make-believe. Just as doctors, lawyers, policemen, and teachers probably cringe when witnessing the unrealistic portrayal of their professions on the television screen, the viewer still gets the general impression of the medical field, the court system, law enforcement, and the teaching profession. The details may be off base, but the generalities are on the mark. Why should the depiction of mothers be any more true to life? Because sitcoms are make-believe, viewers are willing to forgo reality and accept these depictions without thought to authenticity. The portrayal of the mother on classic TV sitcoms is no exception. To the viewer, it doesn't matter what she wears; it doesn't matter whether or not she holds a job; it's what she is on the inside that counts. That's where classic sitcom mothers are realistic. They love their families, and they do all they can to take care of them. Classic or modern, this is a reality shared by all TV mothers; and it's something the viewer can identify with - white pearls or brush hair rollers with pink picks. Classic TV is also criticized for portraying women as mere housewives, "by minimizing their importance to the outside world and insisting on their status as housewives and mothers" (Leibman). Raising children, however, is the most important job a woman, or a man, can have; and classic sitcom parents do it well. Let it also be noted that the women in classic TV sitcoms are content with their roles as wives and mothers; they never yearn for jobs outside the home. If they had wanted jobs and were denied the experience because of their gender, then criticism would be more valid. They shouldn't, however, be criticized for being stay-at-home mothers by choice any more than their twenty-first century stay-at-home counterparts. Let it also be noted that these classic TV mothers are not bound to the home. They are involved in activities outside the home. They may not have 9 to 5 jobs, but they aren't shackled to their homes either. They are involved in community work, charitable organization, PTAs, and women's groups. These stay-at-home women do contribute to society in their roles as wives, mothers, and citizens.

Classic domestic sitcom fathers are also the targets of detractors. Criticized for being educated, middle-class office workers and criticized for being too perfect and all-wise, these men suffer at the mouths of critics as do their TV wives. The same counter-argument applies to them, too, however. It doesn't matter that Jim Anderson and Ward Cleaver don't work in factories or dig ditches for a living. That's all surface detail. What's important is what's inside. Beneath the white gloves and fedoras TV mothers and fathers who want nothing more than to raise well-rounded, caring, moral children. Yes, your mother may not wash the floors in a can-can petticoat and pearls (she may not even wash the floors at all), and your father may not push papers in an office; but classic TV exhibits values that are still alive today: patriotism, religion, education, and respect for adults.

Some critics think the children of classic domestic sitcom families are as unrealistic as their sitcom parents. Critics believe that classic sitcom children, like their parents, are too perfect, that they are too goody-goody; but this isn't true. Classic TV children frequently defy their parents; but they defy them on minor, everyday directives. They come home late from school, carelessly lose their haircut money, fight with a sibling, or refuse to take dancing lessons. Their transgressions are numerous, yet relatively insignificant, just like the transgressions of most children then and now. These children have been taught by their parents, by word and deed, to respect others, to practice good manners, to avoid vulgarities, and to do the right thing. No, they don't question authority; but in the model world of the classic sitcom, there is no reason to. Policemen are still "our friends"; adults are still irreproachable; and world problems don't exist. Critics also charge that the children in classic sitcoms live in a world as unrealistically perfect as they themselves are. As Ella Taylor states in Prime-Time Families:

The small mishaps of Beaver Cleaver and Ricky Nelson played themselves out unclouded by financial troubles, street violence, drug abuse, or marital discord.

The television children of the 1950s and 1960s inhabited a universe in which mild sibling quarrels were quickly but fairly adjudicated by sage, kindly parents equipped with endless reserves of time and patience - marital teams offering clearcut rules for moral guidance. (Taylor)

It is acceptable, however, that societal and familial problems don't act as backdrops to classic TV sitcoms; if they did, they would impinge on the escapism that classic TV supplies. Although the classic sitcom backdrop is perfect, classic sitcom children are not; they are simply closer to perfect than their modern day counterparts; and their misdeeds are far less serious. Classic TV children are realistic. Although there are children in the world who have sex, who use drugs, who suffer from eating disorders, or who break the law, most children, like the children of classic TV, are not involved in such serious matters. Classic TV children, like their real-world equivalents, sometimes deviate from the path their parents prefer they take; and they make mistakes and learn from them – something all children, no matter the decade of their birth, must do.

Detractors scoff at classic TV family sitcoms saying that they are unrealistic, but this isn't true. Many families, even in today's world, are much more like the Cleavers and the Stones than the Harpers and the Campbells. There are, living in America, nuclear families with two married heterosexual parents raising children with traditional values in mind. Even modern families that don't perfectly fit the classic mold can identify with many other attributes of the classic sitcom. Again, the petticoats and suit jackets of the 50s and 60s may be unrealistic, but the differences stop there. Other than clothing, we aren't so different from our classic TV forefathers. Many people worship weekly, many people support our troops and pledge the flag, many people see education as a way to a better life, many people believe in monogamy, and many people put their families above all else. This is accepted behavior in America. This is what most Americans strive for, and this is what classic domestic sitcoms showcase.

Classic TV sitcoms are also attacked for their lack of racial, ethnic, and economic diversity. Virtually all characters on the early sitcoms were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This is another point that critics are quick to point out. True, other races, ethnicities, and economic groups were absent from the TV screen; but these viewers found other ways to relate to classic sitcom characters. As Jimmie Millville writes in "Early Sitcoms Offered Values Modern Society Lack":

As an American lad of African ancestry in those days, I rarely saw any actors or actresses on sitcoms that looked like my friends, my neighbors or me. But what

were very evident and strongly presented by those early sitcoms were responsibility, respect, family values and respect for God. And since my elders had already instilled these values in me as a child, I connected with those early sitcoms on that basis...There was more right than wrong with most of the early sitcoms, even though non-whites were seldom if ever represented. But the message of common sense values, traditional family structures and morality were pervasive in the early shows, and these messages knew no color, race, gender or ethnicity. They were positive messages for all Americans. (Millville)

Although the families of classic sitcoms are middle-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the issues the families deal with are universal, as are the lessons taught in each episode.

Critics also contend that classic domestic sitcoms fail to present relevant, timely issues. However, the issues modern domestic sitcoms deal with frequently add sordidness and unsavoriness to the shows. "Instead of simple gags, moral-of-the-story lines and cheery homespun humor, viewers today are given TV's versions of 'real life,' complete with gritty and streetwise situation that are saturated with raw sexual messages" (Millville). This is not the case with classic domestic sitcoms. Instead, classic domestic sitcoms provide escapism for viewers. No matter the viewers' home situation, classic sitcoms give them a brief escape, where all problems can be resolved in half an hour. Classic domestic sitcoms are "feel good" fare. This is one of the strengths of classic family sitcoms. True, many factions of the American public are never seen on classic TV: the poor, the blacks, the gays. True, there are problems and realities in the world that classic TV neglects. "...There were families back then that suffered from alcoholism, drugs and abuse. But unlike today, early sitcom producers seemed more inclined to present a positive face on marriage, religion and families" (Millville). It is this positive attitude that makes classic domestic sitcoms uplifting. These sitcoms, in turn, are embraced by many viewers as comfort TV, much as mac 'n' cheese is regarded as comfort food. Let it be stated, too, that the lack of relevant issues help make classic domestic sitcoms timeless. By ignoring the

outside world, without referencing current events or people in the headlines, classic domestic sitcoms provide positive, timeless entertainment - shows that can be understood and enjoyed by viewers of any day and age.

The strengths of classic domestic sitcoms far outweigh the criticism levied by detractors. Classic TV gave viewers, especially young ones, something to strive for. Get an education. Get a job. Marry. Stay married. Have children. Teach them morals and ethics. Raise them to be productive, self-sufficient human beings. Even if you came from a broken home or one with an alcoholic parent, even if your parents didn't demonstrate proper behavior, Jim Anderson and Steve Douglas were there to pick up the slack. They were role models, a moral compass; they showed young people what they should aim for. Can the same be said for Married...with Children?

Classic TV sitcoms also advocated ideals, values, and mores that modern domestic sitcoms shy away from and, at times, ignore completely. The traditional family values demonstrated in classic domestic sitcoms are the overarching positive characteristic shared by sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s. Although it may not be obvious from today's TV screens, there are still families of differing structures, races, and socioeconomic statuses living in America that believe in, strive for, and maintain traditional values. Just as times have changed, domestic sitcoms have changed; but are current American ideals and moral attitudes being represented accurately in today's shows? In other words, do shows like *Roseanne* reflect any of the values Americans hold dear? Do we watch shows like these, in part, because they are out of the norm and are in opposition to America's mores? If we saw people act like Roseanne Conner or Al Bundy in public would we be appalled? Probably. If modern sitcoms, like *Two and a Half Men*, accurately portray American life, what does that say about our culture? Are their behaviors ones that we want to promote? As stated previously, modern sitcoms do, to some degree, reflect our times more than classic sitcoms; however, modern domestic sitcoms tend to neglect, if not distort, long-held social mores. This change in values is clearly evidenced by some of the episode titles. While episodes of classic domestic sitcoms bear titles like "Nothing but the Truth," "Pickles for Charity," "Character Building" (The Donna Reed Show), "Lesson in Citizenship" (Father Knows Best); "The

Sunday Drive" (My Three Sons); "Riley's Good Deed" (The Life of Riley); "Never Name a Duck" and "Oh, How We Met on the Night That We Danced" (The Dick Van Dyke Show), episodes of modern domestic sitcoms carry titles like "Twenty-five Little Pre-pubers Without a Snootful," "Frankenstein and the Horny Villagers," "Rough Night in Hump Junction," "Three Hookers and a Philly Cheesecake," (Two and a Half Men); "How I Hate Your Mother," "Supertramp," (The New Adventures of Old Christine); "D-I-V-O-R-C-E," "Becky, Beds, and Boys," "A Stash from the Past" (Roseanne); and "All I Want for Christmas Is My Dead Uncle's Cash - a.k.a. Silent Night, Holy Crap" (Yes, Dear). These titles alone reflect the change in values from classic TV to modern. The behaviors exhibited on many TV shows today are the antithesis of acceptable behavior. Funny, maybe. Realistic, no. Do we want our children to mimic the dysfunctional behaviors they see on TV? What do modern sitcoms teach our children? The values of truth, honesty, respect, faith, and education or the vices of alcohol, sex, drugs, disrespect, and vulgarities? Are these behaviors typical of our society as a whole or just a small segment of it? This is where classic domestic sitcoms excel. They represent positive values shared and espoused by the majority of American families. Parents can be happy knowing that classic domestic sitcoms impart traditional morals to their children. "These positive values, which are markedly lacking in many of the popular shows of today, are why classic TV series are still going strong, even with audiences who were not even born when they were first aired" ("Why"). Another reason classic domestic sitcoms are still valuable is that they provide family friendly entertainment. Entire families can sit down and watch these shows, unafraid of obscene language, violence, crassness, and sexual explicitness or innuendo. They give families the opportunity to bond in front of the TV screen and to discuss, not what is wrong, but what is right with the behavior on the screen in front of them. None of this is to say that classic domestic sitcoms are better than their modern counterparts. Rather, it is to defend classic domestic sitcoms. There is, despite critical condemnation, still value in, and a place for, classic domestic sitcoms on TV. The most important aspect of these shows is what the viewer gets out of them: positive role models and strong family values.

Nothing in this world suits everyone, everything has its critics, and classic domestic sitcoms are no exception. Classic sitcoms are not perfect, but even a flawed diamond has great value. Imperfection is no reason to deem classic domestic sitcoms inferior to modern or, worse, to deem classic domestic sitcoms worthless altogether. Critics need to examine the positive qualities of classic domestic sitcoms and extol upon their merits as well as criticize their faults. Classic domestic sitcoms are deserving of accolades. They have withstood the test of time because what they offer the viewer in terms of core values and heartening entertainment is timeless.

According to Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, a "classic" is "something of recognized value," "something that serves as a standard of excellence." Is it any wonder that those old black and white TV shows that were the core of the new medium of TV, the forerunners of today's modern programming, have come to be known as "classic TV?" Yet just as the prop plane led to the jet, the Tin Lizzie led to the hybrid car, so the classic sitcoms led to the sitcoms of today. Unlike the prop plane and the Tin Lizzie, however, classic TV shows are not obsolete or antiquated. They still have something to offer the TV viewer: wholesome TV viewing filled with positive role models and traditional family values. While sharing a similar broadcast format, the domestic sitcoms of yesteryear and the domestic sitcoms of today are vastly different yet they share one basic tenet: family members love each other.

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