

# Representations of key social traits modern family research paper examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **Representations of Key Social Traits Modern Family**

The new sitcom “ Modern Family” that has won several awards made its debut in the United States September 2009 (" About the show,"). The show revolves around three families, a traditional family, a mixed marriage, and a gay couple, that interact with one another throughout the course of each episode. Reasonably, Modern Family can be described as “ modern” since these families are interrelated, but the producers seem to be trying to communicate a combination of new and traditional elements as well. The title of the sitcom is misleading, which becomes apparent by taking a deeper look within the structure of each family. The three families never fully embrace new visions; rather they simply alter them to fit into a common ideology. Although an innovative idea of family is being communicated in Modern Family, but because the show relies on patriarchal structures, plotlines have been created within the three families that model traditional ideologies. In contrast to the title, this paper will be exploring conservative gender roles and stereotypes have been promoted in this sitcom.

## **Racial Representations**

Modern Family seems to promote the traditional family ideology that is dominated by the male by focusing on female gender stereotypes through its two leading female characters, Gloria and Claire. Since the mass media tends to interpose social change and reproduce “ assumptions about women’s ‘ appropriate’ roles” (Dow, 1996: 19), as a result an inaccurate image of Gloria and Claire is created. As seen in the show, neither Gloria Pritchett nor Claire Dunphy contributes to the income of their family, as a

result of which they are forced to rely on the earnings of their husbands. However, unlike the traditional stay-at-home-mom representation of Claire, who devotes her life to the domestic realm, Gloria's character is certainly promoted as a racial stereotype.

On *Modern Family*, Gloria's character, the familiar domestic Latina female figure, affirms the white masculinity that is nostalgically represented by this sitcom, and her character helps appease racial anxieties. Although middle-class whiteness is certainly recuperated by *Modern Family*, a unique moment of visibility is provided by the intricate representation of Latina motherhood. Sofía Vergara, who portrays Gloria, has admitted her performance of Gloria is inspired from the legacy of how Latina spitfire has been represented (Molina-Guzmán, & Tasker) since the 1940s, such as in the *Good Neighbor* films. Vergara produces moments of subtle humor by exaggerating her curvy physique and using her Colombian identity. The perceptions that many Americans have about Latin American women have been embodied by Gloria's character, i. e. she is portrayed as being "'passive', 'dependent on men' 'hot-tempered', and 'sexy'" (Correa, 2010: 427)

Using language comically is equally important to the spitfire archetype that Gloria portrays. Language further marks Gloria as an outsider, as someone who is different. The difference/foreignness of Gloria's character is brought to the foreground by a combination of grammatical errors, incorrect vocabulary, linguistic misunderstandings, and mockumentary delivery. Although most of the time the show contains subtle racial humor a misspoken or mispronounced word, a mischievous glance here and there, but Gloria maintains socioeconomic racial hierarchies by using humor to

discipline her Latindad. The nostalgic contemporary, “normal” familial domestic life and values are privileged by Gloria’s character, especially her traditional desire to be a caring wife and mother. It becomes evident that ethnoracial difference that is performed and portrayed by Gloria is central to Modern Family.

## **Sexual Identities**

Modern Family has been singled out for its depiction of gay characters. A gay-male marriage has been depicted in the show in which both partners are probable, refreshingly dimensional human beings. Unlike the typical silly, stereotypical portrayals of gay individuals, Cam and Mitchell’s characters do not have these flaws. Eric Stonestreet, the actor who portrays Cam (who happens to be a heterosexual male in real life, while his co-star, Jesse Tyler Ferguson is actually a homosexual), has praised the way in which his character’s family is treated as an equal to the two other families that Modern Family revolves around. Although it might seem that the show does obsess on the portrayal of two gay parents heading a healthy, loving, and stable “modern” family, but that normalization is limited. In order to embrace the joys of this well-portrayed gay family, there are also challenges that Modern Family has to overcome.

Modern Family seems to take an interesting approach on questions of gay identity and at times, opportunities to confront homophobia are missed out. For instance, in the episode “Earthquake,” Cam and Mitch dress up in costumes for a brunch. When the earthquake hits, Mitch says that if they died in those costumes and “if they find [them] in these outfits it's going to

be very bad for the gays.” This little self-aware line reflects the internal debates regarding reputation and perception of the gay community.

However, the episode takes a twist when Nathan Lane arrives to the party as Pepper Saltzman, Cam’s ex-boyfriend, who portrays an overdramatic “ gay” stereotype. Moreover, like this episode, themes of costumes parties are typically associated to Cam and Mitchell, the gay couple, as in Season 4, Episode 5 “ Open House of Horrors.”

## **Gender Roles**

Gender roles can be defined as “ traits, behaviors, and attitudes socially prescribed for women and men in a given culture” (Davidson & Moore, 1996: 48). Gender roles inform the members of a family as to how they should act and respond to others. In Modern Family, the notions of familial dynamic are loosely explored by persistently challenging gender roles in three tightly orbiting families. In the Pritchett family, the assigned gender roles are functional although there is a touch of conflict. Jay Pritchett is the patriarch, the head of the family. He provides for the leader, and he does it quite effortlessly. Gloria plays the predictable role of a house wife, and the complex role of a mother, since she is seen constantly worrying about the well-being of her son, Manny. So far, the gender roles in the Pritchett family complement each other and are comfortable, but the touch of conflict arises with Manny. Instead of playing the expected role of a deferential son, Manny is portrayed as gentle metrosexual, disguised as a preteen, which is the opposite of his expected gender role.

Although Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Pritchett (Jay’s son), who had adopted

a cute Vietnamese baby girl, are a liberal yet unconventional gay couple, but like any other family, even they follow the traditional gender roles. Although they are both men, Cam serves as the “mother figure” while Mitchell earns the bread and butter for the two of them. Although the territory of gay parenting is unexplored, however, they negotiate it with mutual affection and precariousness. They portray their assigned gender roles quite straightforwardly. During the day, Mitchell is very fast-paced law firm, while Cam stays at home; busy taking care of the baby. Oddly, although Cameron and Mitchell cannot be considered a conventional “nuclear family,” but the most conventional gender roles are displayed by them.

Finally, the Dunphys are the perfect example of a traditional nuclear family with pretty straightforward assigned gender roles. Phil is the goofy head of the family and Claire is the logical, rational mom, who counters her husband with a sense of superb homemaking competence. This sappy and silly portrayal of the parents is rounded by their three children. The assigned gender roles portrayed by them are adequately healthy although a bit unexpected. The affection within in the family is supplied by Phil, while the structure is provided and maintained by Claire. Since Phil acts like a kid himself, so occasionally Claire must treat him like one. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, the Dunphys are a closely knit family, sharing genuine affection and support. Contrary to the title of the show, it is evident that gender roles portrayed on Modern Family are prominently traditional.

## Conclusion

Moreover, the US sitcom Modern Family actually inaccurately portrays the impact and reality of women in the American society in the attempt to promote traditional family values.

Now that Modern Family has been critically reviewed, the old fashioned values of family that are hidden beneath the show's mislead title have been easily revealed. Regardless of the reason behind its success, the show may claim to be "modern" but in all honestly it is not. Modern Family could have easily been aired in the 1980s, an era in which contemporary family values were making a return to television. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Modern Family is a show of the 21st century where are far more independent and liberal, yet the show continues to stereotype the women in the show as housewives and mothers in an old-fashioned manner. 5 These clichés do not adequately portray the American women of today, nor do they represent the genuine ambitions of American women. However, by doing so, and along with the "contemporary" depiction of racial stereotypes and gender roles, it is absolutely obvious that Modern Family is not so "modern" after all. By constantly repeating racial/female stereotypes, sexual identities and gender roles, Modern Family promotes the longstanding ideological concept of traditional family towards the audience (Lauzen, Dozier & Horan, 2008: 201-202).

## References

About the show - modern family. (n. d.). Retrieved from <http://beta.abc.go.com/shows/modern-family/about-the-show>

<https://assignbuster.com/representations-of-key-social-traits-modern-family-research-paper-examples/>

Dow, B. J. (1996). Prime-time feminism: Television, media culture, and the women's movement since 1970 (feminist cultural studies, the media, and political culture). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Molina-Guzmán, I. (n. d.). Latina wisdom' in ' post-race' recession media. In D. Negra & Y. Tasker (Eds.), *Gendering the Recession*. Duke University Press.

Dunn, J. (n. d.). Sofia Vergara spills all: The Smurfs and modern family star opens up about being a young mom and surviving divorce and cancer. Retrieved from [http://www. redbookmag. com/fun-contests/celebrity/sofia-vergara-interview](http://www.redbookmag.com/fun-contests/celebrity/sofia-vergara-interview)

Correa, T. (2010). Framing Latinas: Hispanic women through the lenses of Spanish-language and English-language news media. *Journalism*, 11(4), 425-443.

Davidson, J. K., & Moore, N. B. (1996). *Marriage and family: Change and continuity*. (1 ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Lauzen, M., Dozier, D. M., & Horan, N. (2008). Constructing gender stereotypes through social roles in prime-time television. *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(2), 200-214.