

The Simpsons vs. The Sopranos

by

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Dysfunctional families are the stuff T.V. shows are made of. Two good examples of this are *The Simpsons* and *The Sopranos*. The relationships between the fathers and their children, their psychologist, and their own parents have interesting parallels.

For many years T.V. dad was the guy with all the right answers for his kids, but over time this image has taken on a more realistic, fallible quality that is worth examining. In the HBO drama *The Sopranos*, Tony Soprano is an intimidating mobster but his children regard him as silly, not a force to be reckoned with. On *The Simpsons*, Homer is a nuclear plant worker with a patriarch who is a fumbling “baboon” according to his daughter. Outside his family, well as in, Homer gets no respect. Yet, they have strong relationships with their children. Tony has a son and a daughter. Homer has a son and two daughters.

At one point in the first episode of *The Sopranos*, Tony has a serious conversation with his daughter that conveys not only Tony’s mental state right then, but also the connection between father and daughter. At the time, she is only concerned with a trip her mother has forbidden her to take. She is still able to put that aside and understand what her father is marveling at, this gives her a deeper understanding of the man himself.

On the other hand, Homers conversations with his children often give only comic relief. Like when Homer asks Bart (his son) if he would have gotten to do anything fun had he been elected class president and Bart says, “NO.” Homer asks him if he would have had to do any extra work and Bart says, “Well, yeah.” Homer then

advises Bart to, “Let the baby have his bottle.” Meaning Bart probably is better off not being elected class president. Although earlier in the show when Bart is unconcerned with winning saying, “It’s only a popularity contest.” Homer asked him, “What’s more important than popularity?” Yet he usually does the right thing without appearing to go through any of the thought needed to arrive at the correct line of action.

The conversation between Homer and Tony and the psychologists they speak with show interesting differences between the two characters. In the episode “Bart gets an F,” Homer speaks with the school counselor about his son doing poorly in class. All that Homer hears is, “Blah, blah, blah, blah.” In comparison *The Sopranos* show Tony’s interactions with his psychologist as serious and difficult. The process he goes through enlightens him about his life and mental state.

Both Tony and Homer have difficult relationships with an elderly parent. In Homer’s case, his father, Abe is kooky vet who is put in a home only because of his age and is basically forgotten about. NO remorse or uncertainty shows regarding his decision and Abe’s main purpose on the show is proving humor. In contrast, Tony’s mother Olivia is a difficult woman who resists the idea of going to a home with a vengeance. Tony is conflicted about the decision, but he feels it’s best for his mother (not himself.) Her character adds drama to the show, as well as comedy. Both shows touch on a topic most Americans face (elderly parents, nursing homes) but they put out two different images of how people deal with it.

The Sopranos and *The Simpsons* are both widely popular family T.V. shows, although neither is a show that many people would consider appropriate for the whole family. However, both shows touch on real life issues that many other shows ignore.

Homer is a blundering dad and Tony is a more serious dad. Both have strong relationships with their kids and difficulties with an aging parent. Whether you view the comical satire of *The Simpsons* or watch the black humor and drama of *The Sopranos*, you will see representatives of the American family. For better or worse.