MODERN FAMILY – CASE STUDY

A family portrait takes place in suburban California. A perfectly groomed backyard is the backdrop and all of the family members are dressed in white. The unity of color mimics the many American family portraits that came before this one. The mothers adjust their children’s clothes, fixing stray hairs, and situating family members into the perfect positions. The fathers are in the background waiting for direction from the mothers; after all, this portrait was their idea. To the naked eye this appears to be a typical day in the life of an American family, but if we use a cultural lens to zoom in on this scenario a little closer we begin to see this is no ordinary family photo. In fact, the parents of the Vietnamese toddler are a Caucasian gay couple, and the older man next to them is married to much younger, scantily-clad Colombian trophy wife. It doesn’t end there—we’ve only scratched the surface.

This is a scene from the Emmy award winning sitcom, Modern Family (2009). Modern Family falls within the genre of American domestic sitcoms. Blending the domestic sitcom with a humorous mockumentary style has gained this show much success among critics and television audiences. As the title suggests, the show attempts to portray modern families, but what exactly does that mean?

The word “modern” suggests a stray from the normative, something new, something innovative. Some believe the word modern has a positive connotation, a positive progression away from the normative. If we apply this definition to family we arrive at a new family, a family that has progressed from the traditional, nuclear family. At the surface, this is exactly the type of interrelated families that Modern Family creates on screen. There is a blended family made up of an older white male, a much younger Colombian trophy wife and her son from her first marriage. There is also a nuclear family consisting of a bumbling dad, an over-controlling mom, and their three children. Lastly, there is family of gay co-parents and their adopted Vietnamese child. These three families make up a larger and seemingly modern family.

It is certainly not the traditional family structure that we once saw in nearly all-domestic sitcoms. Although the family structures appear to be modern, the gender roles within the structures communicate something different. In the example above, we see traditional family roles played out. The mothers are concerned with family, their children, and capturing a memory that they will cherish forever. Overall they are nurturing, feminine, and devoted to raising their children. The fathers are unwilling
participants forced into the portrait without a care as to how it turns out. They are emotionally controlled, masculine, and devoted to their professional lives outside of the family. These behaviours reflect the dominant beliefs our culture shares about the role of the mother and the father.

The success that Modern Family created raises interesting questions regarding the messages communicated by the program and ultimately what those messages mean for audiences members in present day America. In what does the sitcom Modern Family communicate our culture’s dominant ideology about family? Ultimately for its label of Modern, the sitcom reinforces mainstream ideologies.

Modern Family Website

Check out the Sky Modern Family website to watch episodes, check out the cast list and scheduling etc.

http://www.sky.com/tv/show/modern-family

Modern Family – Scheduling

Modern family runs across a number of slots.

It has its prime slot to showcase its new episodes, see #1, but it also has a massive stripped scheduling slot where it runs across weekday evening slots to access the early evening light entertainment markets #4, as well as blocking out the weekend afternoon schedules for the family audience see #3

1. Modern Family: Shown on Sky 1, Sky 1 HD, Sky 1+1 - Monday 8.30pm (new episodes)
2. Modern Family: Shown on Sky 1, Sky 1 HD, Sky 1+1 Sunday 4.30pm (new episode catch-up)

Modern Family – Catch-ups

3. 2. Modern Family: Shown on Sky 1, Sky 1 HD, Sky 1+1 – Saturday 1.00pm, 1.30pm, 2.00pm, 2.30pm.
4. 2. Modern Family: Shown on Sky 1, Sky 1 HD, Sky 1+1 – Weekdays at 5pm

http://www.tvguide.co.uk/titlesearch.asp?title=Modern+Family

ABC – Modern Family’s American Homepage: http://abc.go.com/shows/modern-family