

The following four-page essay is an example of an *A* paper turned in by a student. It provides thoughtful, detailed analysis of the question at hand, while using specific examples to support the writer's ideas. Some further formatting guidelines you should be following include:

- ~ Use specific, detailed examples from the show/text to support your analysis. This is crucial for writing successfully in this class.
- ~ Avoid using too much summary/exposition. Assume the reader (me) has seen the shows/commercials/texts/etc., and understands them intimately (because I have, and do).
- ~ Dispatch of any review-type language (ex: The show is a blockbuster extravaganza!).
- ~ Do not ask rhetorical questions, and do not raise questions you do not attempt to answer. Also, do not talk about what the text doesn't do, but rather, what the text *does* do. Be critical and express your ideas.
- ~ Use *italics* for all show titles, i.e. *Jersey Shore* not **Jersey Shore** or Jersey Shore.
- ~ Do not qualify your analysis (ex: I think, perhaps, probably, sort of, etc.). Do not be afraid to make statements and support them with examples/analysis.
- ~ If you refer to a character in the show, research their name (as well as directors, writers, etc.). www.IMDB.com is a great site for information about the shows (though not an outside source; see below).
- ~ Don't use quotes as stand-alone analysis, but rather, as support for your own thoughts about the texts. I'm interested in *your* perspective, not someone else's.
- ~ Do not simply copy down the readings/interpretations of your fellow students during the discussion and pass them off as your own. If we talk about something in class, I expect you to elaborate with your own perspective to support.
- ~ Use present tense for criticism (ex: *Jersey Shore* is a good example of... not, *Jersey Shore* was a good example of...).

You are also required to use **at least two** written sources to support your ideas in your papers. For each paper you are to use **a**) one of the chapters/essays read in class as a source, along with **b**) a source outside of the class materials that you have researched either in the library, or online. Wikipedia is not a source. In addition to your two written sources, you may also use other shows/texts as references. Be sure to cite your references appropriately using any citation method of your choosing (MLA Style, Chicago Style, etc.).

I do not accept physical papers, so please email all of your assignments to adam@apwadenius.com. Please send your paper in an editable format such as Microsoft word, Open Office, Text Edit, Notepad, or Pages. **No .PDF or .WPS files!** Adhere to standard formatting conventions (one-inch margins, 12 pt. font, double spaced, etc.). Your works cited page does not count as one of the 4-5 pages, and if you format your paper incorrectly (16pt. font, 2.5 spacing, etc.) I will simply reformat it as I'm grading and you'll be docked points for improper submission. Do not try to skimp on providing analysis. When saving your papers, format the file name thusly or I will not accept your paper:

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You are responsible for emailing me your papers by the start of class time on the assigned due dates. Upon receipt of your paper I will email back a response that I received it, and will email back your graded paper with comments, usually a week after I receive them. If I don't email you back, assume I have not received your paper, and re-send it to me. You are not bothering me if I receive your paper multiple times; it's better to be safe than sorry!

SAMPLE ESSAY

Discuss the representation of gender in an episode of *The Simpson's*. How does the episode perpetuate patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity? How does it function to normalize stereotypically masculine and feminine attributes and behaviors?

Perpetuation of Patriarchal Notions of Masculinity and Femininity in *The Simpsons*

The Simpsons, a subversive animated series, has been providing social commentary and criticism since it began 24 years ago. Story lines for the series are linked to current events and issues allowing it's creators to comment on life in post-modern society. The tone of the series is often sarcastic, critical and provocative. Watching The Simpsons allows one to explore elements, ideas and challenges of life in the consumer driven culture of our patriarchal society. In this episode, *Lisa Goes Gaga*, there are many situations in which patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity present themselves. The characters of Marge Simpson and Lady Gaga represent contrasting views of women and their roles in our society. Marge Simpson epitomizes the notions of the damsel in distress/good girl while Lady Gaga represents the femme fatale/bad girl. Lisa's character is an outlier, she is an outsider. Her current dilemma is caused by her ability to transcend social norms and her inability to fit cleanly into an established acceptable gender role. The male characters, Homer, Bart, Ned, Moe, and Nelson, among others, perpetuate stereotypes, gender roles, expectations and social norms for both sexes. Their actions reinforce the notion that men are dominant, active, aggressive and in charge.

The damsel in distress

Marge Simpson is the quintessential good girl. She is a stereotype of the TV moms of the 50s and 60s. She is helpful, silent and repressed outside the bedroom. She is the perfect domestic servant and subservient housewife. She is often seen in the kitchen and sits at the far end of the table during meals. Marge is a caring and concerned parent. It is clear that she is the primary care giver to her three children. Marge is slim and physically attractive. Her hair is perfectly coiffed and she wears a modest form fitting dress with matching accessories. Marge is a damsel in distress with limited agency. This can be seen in the conversation that Homer and Marge have with Lisa in her bedroom in an attempt to cheer her up. When they enter the room Lisa is reading the school paper. She is front page news. There is a large photo of her on the cover and a headline that reads "Top Student Hits Bottom". Marge tells Lisa not to make a big deal out of the situation. She says that she stopped reading after Top Student, suggesting that Lisa ignore the negative attention, too. Marge's advice to

her daughter demonstrates her lack of agency. When she puts herself into Lisa's position, she chooses to look away from the problem. Averting her eyes is the most minimal of efforts and the least active course of action that she could take in this situation. Marge's advice that Lisa adopt a passive role denies Lisa's feelings and her right to have them. It informs Lisa that she lacks the ability to change her situation through action.

Homer engenders the notion that men are dominant, active beings with agency. Homer's advice to Lisa, in the same situation, illustrates a masculine world view. It is proactive. Instead of telling Lisa to ignore her problem, Homer asks his daughter if she wants to play her saxophone. Playing her sax would allow Lisa to channel her feelings and give her the opportunity to express them creatively instead of repressing them. It instructs Lisa that she has the ability to soothe her sorrow, heal herself and change her situation through action. When Lisa explains that she wants to be left alone in her room for a couple of days, Homer suggests that they go to see Lady Gaga perform. Going to see Gaga perform would get Lisa out of her room and perhaps out of her own head. It would provide her with an opportunity for distraction from her sadness. Once again Homer's advice is about changing the situation through action.

The good girl

Marge plays to the stereotype of the good girl/wife in almost every scene. She is highly domesticated. Her house is neat and clean, her children are healthy and well dressed and dinner is on the table on time. She is a helpful, supportive and caring person. Marge rarely raises her voice and expresses her displeasure with groans and expressions rather than voicing her opinion. Marge believes in and loves her family. She is a dutiful and faithful wife. Marge's good girl image is challenged when Lady Gaga tries to console her in the kitchen. The two women are sitting at the kitchen table discussing Lisa's dilemma when Marge starts crying. Gaga tries to comfort Marge several times by touching her, but Marge pulls away. Lady Gaga then kisses Marge on the lips passionately. Marge's reaction is to call for her husband and have sex immediately. After sex, while lying in bed, Homer comments on how extraordinarily great it was.

Marge's reaction to her arousal reinforces her good girl persona. At the same time it denies her emotions, desires and an opportunity to further explore her sexuality. No mention is made of the kiss, nor the fact that it turned her on enough to seek out her husband and have sex immediately. This makes one think that, for the good girl, any and all physical or sexual contact is meant to occur in the

bedroom with her husband. The kiss scene harkens a stereotype of women drawn from the heterosexual man's pornographic imagination present in our patriarchal society. It depicts women as highly sexualized. They are aggressors, ravenous for sex, and screaming for their man when presented with pleasurable physical contact.

The femme fatale

Lady Gaga is a highly skilled entertainer. She is a woman clearly in charge of her own destiny. She exploits her sexuality by dressing in costumes and outfits that emphasize her physical attributes. She is bold, brash and brave. She is an attention seeker who wishes to draw and hold the gaze of onlookers. She is a woman with agency who uses her body to achieve her goals. But, she is still a woman in a man's world and must function within its status quo. The first time we see Gaga on the train she is announced by a male conductor. She enters the train car dressed in a bikini. She is immediately lifted by robotic arms, dressed in a metal bustier and adorned with a wig. A male assistant adds the final touch to her outfit with a finishing mist of hairspray. When Gaga learns of Springfield's low self-esteem she suggests that they stop and try to cheer them up. Her manager tells her that it is his job to protect her from awful places like this. Gaga insists that they stop her manager says "but" Gaga answers "no buts" and turns away from the camera exposing her own butt in a thong.

While it is clear that Gaga is the boss, she is also fetishized object that is controlled by men. The conductor controls her arrival, informing onlookers of what to expect. Her doll-like quality and the submissive stance she assumes while being dressed by the machine objectify and dehumanize her. The assistant looks like a janitor, an average blue collar guy. The disinterested way that he adds the final touch to her outfit speaks of routine, ownership and business as usual. His finishing spray is a stamp of approval. He is marking his territory and making this doll shine. The manager is there to protect Gaga. It seems that despite her many skills, and psychic ability, she is incapable of properly protecting herself and needs his guidance. Men are clearly in charge of this woman's body, but she is powerful enough to use it to get the things she wants.

The bad girl

Lady Gaga's character shares many aspects of the "bad girl". She is independent, outspoken and sexually open. She is self directed and self absorbed. She is the epitome of modern day pop stars. Gaga is slim, blonde, and extremely attractive. She has large breasts, a thin waist and long slim legs. She is a powerful scantily clad femme fatale, a fetishized woman with agency who is both revered

and reviled by men. There is no doubt that Springfield loves Gaga. The town gathers in the train station to welcome her. They carry signs and chant her name. When she appears and begins to speak Moe aggressively demands that she perform in song, and make it theatrical. She complies with a performance that involves three costume changes and a flight over the crowd wearing a flame-throwing bra, a bikini bottom and thigh-high platform boots. Men ogle her during her fly over, Grandpa Simpson professes his love. In a later scene, Ned Flanders approaches Gaga, dressed incognito in a hoodie and jeans, as she is entering the Simpson house. He accuses her of taking innocent children and turning them into “ladies of the night” and complains about the amount of skin that she exposes in her performances. He becomes confused when he realizes that Gaga’s philosophy and intentions are the in line with the teaching of Jesus Christ. He then accuses her of being the devil. Gaga responds by unzipping her hoodie, exposing her pointy flame-throwing bra and sets Ned’s mustache on fire. Ned calmly blows it out and gets in the last word of the argument by saying that the joke is on her, since he needed it trimmed anyway.

Comparing these two situations illustrates a double standard for women in a patriarchal society. While it is acceptable for men to ogle at and exploit a woman’s body for their purposes, it is not acceptable when a woman decides use her own body for her own gain. In the first scene, Gaga is an object of desire. She willingly complies, when Moe aggressively demands a performance. She pulls out all the stops, going above and beyond, literally, to entertain those present. Lady Gaga is further objectified by the outfit that she wears which splits her body into parts which dehumanizes her. In the second scene, Gaga is the object of criticism and scorn. Ned insults, criticizes and belittles her. He accuses her of being a bad influence, complains about the way she uses her body and refuses to admit that they share similar philosophies. Ned tells us that this intelligent, talented, independent and free-thinking woman of agency is the devil. Gaga is wearing the pointy flame throwing bra in both scenes. The way that the bra/outfit is used in the different situations is representative of how female artists bodies are exploited.⁵ During the concert the flaming bra is an erotic prop designed to titillate, entertain and excite all watchers. It is an object of delight and the crowd applauds. During the argument with Ned, it is a defensive weapon which Ned plays down, dismissing it’s effectiveness.

Crime and punishment

Lisa Simpson is an outlier. She is a good student, a helpful daughter and a caring person. She is intelligent, sensitive and non-judgmental. Lisa is a bookworm and a thinker. She has a mind of her own. She is an outspoken young woman with a strong sense of justice. Often times, these qualities

marginalize her, putting her at odds with her peers. They define her as an outsider and make her unpopular. Lisa's unpopularity is a reminder of what happens to girls who don't conform societal norms and gender roles. Lisa has agency, but at times she is unable to use it because she is too emotional leaving her vulnerable to dominant male characters.

In contrast, Lisa's brother Bart is a mediocre student, a practical joker and wise guy. He is often insensitive, bordering on cruel, to others. He is an active boy's boy who is outspoken, opinionated and self-driven. He is aggressive and dominant. He even has a side-kick, his best friend Millhouse. Bart is a leader and is popular with other students. There are a few scenes involving Lisa which perpetuate a world view in which men/boys are active and in charge of the fate of women. One of them takes place in front of the school when Bart picks up Lisa's notebook, figures out that Lisa is the "Truth Teller" and outs her to everyone. Even though she begs him to give back the notebook, he does not. Instead he decides to announce his discovery to everyone. Lisa is helpless. Nelson comments that Lisa's lie is like his mother sticking money into her own g-string. Jimbo then brands her with a cruel nickname. Lisa's reaction is to cry and run away. In another scene, Homer calls to Lisa saying that he is coming to make things better. While Homer is talking, Lisa has an epiphany. She realizes that she is going to be ok, despite the fact that she has completely tuned Homer out. Her revelation lifts her from her sorrow and she runs off to find and thank Gaga.

In both scenes, the male characters are the catalyst for change and action in Lisa's situation and emotional state. In the first, Bart reveals Lisa's secret, which makes her more unpopular causing her to run away crying. In the second, Homer's mere physical presence is enough to rally his daughter to find a solution to her problem and run off happily. Clearly Lisa's fate is determined and directed by the men surrounding her. The comments made by Nelson and Jimbo are punishing and cruel. They speak to the place of women in a patriarchal society. Nelson compares Lisa's ghostwriting on the blog to his mom putting money in her own g-string. This comparison is belittling and dehumanizing. Lisa ghostwriting contained true, positive, facts about her personality and qualities as a human being. She wrote them under a pseudonym so that her peers would read them and realize that she was a good person. The analogy with Nelson's mom turns women into objects. It informs one that self esteem for women is related to your body and how much money and male attention it generates. It fosters the belief that women are commodities to be enjoyed and rewarded, or punished, by men. Jimbo's nickname brands Lisa. It turns her into a spectacle and a scapegoat. Dehumanized, she is teased and mistreated by her schoolmates. Her punishment far exceeding her

crime. This is reminiscent of the type of treatment that independent, self-directed, resourceful women who step outside of the lines face in our society.

Conclusion

This episode of the Simpsons contained many different representations and notion of gender roles. The story line allowed one to explore the female stereotypes of the damsel in distress/good girl and the femme fatale/bad girl. Marge Simpson perpetuates the notion of the obedient good girl while Lady Gaga represents the independent bad girl. Marge represses her feelings and quietly groans, while Gaga shouts hers out from the stage in her songs. This episode also allowed us to see the problems that women face if they do not adhere to popular notions of gender. Lisa's dilemma illustrated the difficulties facing women who do not fit into a specific gender role or with social norms. The male characters in this episode were dominant, aggressive agents of action. They defined the boundaries of the roles for women, from Moe demanding that Gaga entertain him, to Ned Flanders calling Lady Gaga a devil. They were powerful enforcers of standards with the ability to sway popular opinion, using public humiliation as punishment for transgressors. With Bart announcing Lisa's lie to the comments made by Nelson and Jimbo, the males characters in this show perpetuated the notion that men are clearly in charge of women's fate.

WORKS CITED

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