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## **A Woman of the 60's Caught in a Contemporary TV Series: Claire Dunphy a Housewife in a "Modern Family"**

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## **Abstract**

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The character of Claire Dunphy from the TV series *Modern Family* is a married housewife with three kids who is fully dedicated to her home, husband and kids. The present analysis confronts the feminine model proposed by the character with the feminist conception of actual women during the first four seasons of the series. This allows establishing the kind of lifestyle and values that she transmits to the audience. By applying an ethical analysis model which questions about her anthropological spheres, Claire appears as a modern woman who chose her family over her career and has found in her current role, the feeling of a succeeding and loving life.

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**Keywords:** feminine, feminist, *Modern Family*, TV series, values

# Una Mujer de los '60 Atrapada en un Serie de la TV Contemporánea: Claire Dunphy una Ama de Casa en “Modern Family”

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## Resumen

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El personaje de Claire Dunphy de la serie de televisión Modern Family es un ama de casa casada con tres hijos que está totalmente dedicada a su hogar, esposo e hijos. El presente análisis se enfrenta el modelo femenino propuesto por el carácter con la concepción feminista de las mujeres reales durante las primeras cuatro temporadas de la serie. Esto permite establecer el tipo de estilo de vida y los valores que transmite a la audiencia. Mediante la aplicación de un modelo de análisis ético que cuestiona acerca de sus ámbitos antropológicos, Claire aparece como una mujer moderna que eligió a su familia sobre su carrera y ha encontrado en su puesto actual, la sensación de una vida éxito y amorosa.

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**Palabras clave:** femenino, feminista, Modern Family, serie de televisión, valores

**M**ust a woman sacrifice her freedom when becoming a wife and a mother? Becoming a mother means the end of a successful career? Moreover, does a married mother lose her state of realization and happiness?

The character of Claire Dunphy from *Modern Family* is a married housewife with three kids who is fully dedicated to her home, husband and kids. This context may seem to describe a character from the 60's series like "I Dream of Jeannie", "Bewitched" or even "The Monster Family". Betty Friedan considers that an example of the image of the "happy housewife" reinforced by television may be found on a sitcom called "I love Lucy", produced during 1951-1957 which a great audience. The main character of the show, interprets a funny housewife who is completely isolated of the professional or intellectual spheres of society (Friedan, 2013). It is by confronting the feminine model proposed by the character of Claire Dunphy in TV series which started to air on 2009 (*Modern Family*) with the current feminist conception that the great relevance of analyzing this character is noticed. Knowing if Claire is a positive (or negative) representation of this ideal becomes important because fictional characters often become conduct references to their audiences. Moreover, Claire Dunphy becomes one of the few representatives of the feminine role as a housewife in actuality.

This article analyzes with Professor Nicolás model and values that Claire Dunphy presents as a woman, wife and mother that opted to become a housewife. An evaluation was conducted to the first four seasons of *Modern Family* to analyze her as reactions and decisions in the different situations that she experienced.

### **The TV Series: A Great Entertainment Product**

TV series have a great importance in the history of television. The well-constructed and complex characters have a great impact in the popular culture, and the format of TV series helps the entertainment industry in the production and commercialization process. Series are fictional products narrated by episodes with a shared environment and/or characters in which the narrative involves continuous conflicts presented with open or closed endings for each delivery. In order to break down the relevance of these

products even more, some reasons of their positioning as star products are described on the following paragraphs. It can be stated that TV series are a source with a certain historic value on the cultural and social environment, because they allow us to know how the writers and showrunners perceive the world in which we live at a certain point in time, and with a specific point of view. This includes the values and vices included on the narrative, which are the main ingredient for creating conflict. Moreover, the conflict is generated by considering some relevant situation or topic that the authors pick up from the real world. Series become an opportunity window for researchers to understand a society, at the same time in which the series by themselves can reinforce or transform the values of a community.

Secondly, it can be established that series have gone further than any other “classic” TV production. They are born from an artistic propose, from a desire to communicate something about reality. Producers and writers become utterly interested on creating products of great quality, rather than just achieving certain rating numbers. The narrative complexity between chapters and seasons is a clear indicator of this matter, adding the fact that their running time is quite larger than any movie. Series allow the creation of three dimensional characters with which the audience cries and laughs along their way of transformation. Besides, the quality and deepness of TV series overcomes the story itself. Production values also play a very important part on this matter. Ambientation, photography, illumination, music, and so on is very cared and planned details. Visual and Audio quality becomes a milestone while producing a TV series to hook the audience into the story and to transmit a believable world, characters, and storyline.

All this production values and the complexity of the narrative appeal to a certain emotion in the spectator, which can be followed up by an identification or aspiration towards one of the presented characters;

TV characters generate feelings of empathy because they tend to develop in common scenarios or situations which allow us to live and perceive them as real. This empathy is a multidimensional process with different levels that can continue to increase with time.” (Nicolás, 2014b).

The result of putting everything together is an active and interested spectator who will be following the story in a constant manner, increasing its loyalty. The fact that they are “in fashion” reinforces the statement about how convenient they become not just for spectators but for a business model as well. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that whichever the content of the TV series is, it becomes an important topic of which many start talking about. Within series we find the situation comedies or sitcoms for short. Their episodes are 30 minutes long (accounting commercial breaks), their basic genre is comedy and their stories take roots in conflicts that happen in everyday real life. Nowadays in sitcoms we can watch the use of the comedy of observation. Álvarez-Berciano (1999) indicates; “The comedy of observation is characterized by well-defined and believable characters with details that present social situations and universal concerns about our society” (Álvarez-Berciano, 1999, p. 87). They differentiate themselves from other types of series with their constant use of gags (visual jokes) and the mirror effect they create on the audience. This effect is important because it allows spectators to see themselves in one or all the characters of the show. This, as well, creates an emotional bond between the person watching and the character of the show.

### **Watching Series From a Perspectives Of Communication Theories and Cultural Industry**

Television is a mass media element that reflects reality and at the same time creates tendencies worldwide through its programs and their audiences. The general liking of series has grown along with their consumption because of the easy access the internet gives us to them. Watching the communicative process regarding TV series, three different actors can be identified with a main role: (1) Writers and producers, (2) advertisers and (3) the audience. This triple relationship becomes quite relevant when it's noticed that a classic conception of “transmitter” and “receiver” is not enough to absorb the whole consuming process of this audiovisual products. Each of the three actors is related with the two others in a triangle in which everyone depends on the other. In other words, this means that if one actor has a certain interest in communicating, selling or consuming a specific “something”, the

whole triangle will have to do a certain adjustment for the process to proceed fluently. Making these differences clear, the main interest of the three actors is described as follows. On one side, producers and writers always seek to generate likeable stories for the audience so they will want to actually see it. At the same time, advertisers have their main interest on finding their targets in the audience so they can actually place their products in front of the correct group of people. Finally, the audience is interested in consuming a content which guarantees a genuine entertainment. There are different communication theories that explain some of the reasons why we binge on T.V. shows and how their contents can affect or influence us. For the current investigation two theories were selected; Theory of Uses and Gratifications for explaining how media consumption can be applied to series. And Cultivation Theory explains how media content influence us. The Uses and Gratifications Theory allows us to establish the reasons why we consume series while the Social Learning and Cultivation Theories enlighten some of the reasons why it's necessary to analyze the television models that are presented to us within the series. Created by different investigators, being the most known J.G. Blumler and Elihu Katz, the Uses and Gratifications Theory sustains that each individual uses the media to fulfill certain needs that depend on each one's necessities and tendencies. When these needs are satisfied, the spectator obtains gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). There are four classifications in the theory. Each one is defined by the uses the individual can give to the media to obtain gratification (Blumler & Katz, 1974). They are the following:

1. Knowledge: when the media is used to obtain information about something. It can be to keep up with information on a daily basis, to learn about personal interests or to acquire general knowledge.
2. Entertainment: the human need which can be about: the search for a release from routine or boredom, a break from the daily pressure and problems or about letting go emotional energy or suppressed emotions.
3. Social Utility: using the media as a binding element between families and friends. The media can be a conversation topic or present themselves as a way to prevent loneliness.

4. Evasion: the opposite of being used to connect, media can also help us isolate ourselves from others whenever we feel the wish or have the urge to be alone.

In reference to entertainment series, such as *Modern Family*, the last three classifications (entertainment, social utility and evasion) are the most significant because, being recreational programs, their contents don't deliver the necessary information to satisfy the need for knowledge but they can satisfy the need for entertainment, social utility and/or evasion. The Cultivation Theory, on the other hand, was created by George Gerbner and Larry Gross. In it, both establish that there are certain values and images that are continuously present and repeated in the media's content and that a spectator that is continuously exposed throughout the years to them will gradually change his attitudes and conducts (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). In other article we found;

As successive generations grow up with television's version of the world, the former and traditional distinctions become blurred. Cultivation thus implies the steady entrenchment of mainstream orientations in most cases and the systematic but almost imperceptible modification of previous orientations in others; in other words, affirmation for the believers and indoctrination for deviants. That is the process we call mainstreaming." (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986, p. 24).

The prolonged exposition of media contents is something easily achieved these days. As it was mentioned before, whether it is by watching television, streaming on the internet or buying and renting our favorite shows, we are constantly exposed to the contents the series display; even after years of their original airing.

The easy access to contents even allows us to watch sporadic episodes or entire seasons at any time, increasing our exposure as viewers of the images and values presented in the series. According to the Cultivation Theory, this makes us even more vulnerable to the transformation of our conducts and attitudes. What happens when we watch television is a decoding process of the message or messages that we receive from the



media. In other words, we give meaning to what we watch on the screen and because we are human and we are never completely separated from our environment these new messages come face-to-face to the messages we have received before (Morley, 1996). This encounter is called interdiscourse and in both messages, the new and the old, define if they complement or oppose each other. This development also implies a process of selection and reinterpretation (conscious or subconsciously) of each message received and concludes with what we know today: media reinforces stereotypes and previous dispositions in their audiences (Morley, 1996). Because television is unilateral, it has total control of the message it sends but it cannot control the way the audience decodes it, therefore as a transmitter it must give its messages a special structure that works by giving them a preferential or predominant way of interpretation (Morley, 1996).

Finally, because of these processes of translation and interdiscourse, every television show is co-created by the spectator because of the meaning it gives to each program. As a result this, we say that in its attempts to reflect reality, television actually ends up distorting it. Its attempt to send a specific message gets interpreted individually, according to the environment of each spectator. If we add the short duration and comical nature of Modern Family episodes to the equation, it is likely to think that this series (and others with a similar profile) can be seen more frequently due to their poor linearity and their job to entertain. Someone with just a little time to spare can choose to watch a series such as Modern Family more easily, even without having seen it ever before. When exposed to the values and images in the series, the possibility of the spectator to be shaped or altered by them increases. Nicolás states; “In the narrative of tv series we find a great photographic album to know a story; with the great advantage that this images have sound and movement. TV series centered on families allow us to know certain traits of “family prototypes” (Nicolás 2014a).

Moreover how women are shown on the T.V. screen is relevant. These misrepresentations can contribute to the definition of social image because they schematize and present (or ignore) certain problems to its worldwide audience. The problem resides in the exhibition of conflicts and real topics in an environment in which ethnic, social and gender differences lack of importance. Even in fictitious entertainment, the area in which is generally

easier to find an actualized female model because of the presentation of modern conflicts and situations of the daily life, stereotyped women are still predominant. This happens with special recurrence on sitcoms in which family tends to be the main subject. Being a woman, the “rock” of the family and under the formulation of the series wanting an immediate result with the least effort possible, it becomes important to analyze the current female model as it is represented on television. Having defined the background and history of television and its series, their importance and impact in audiences, it is necessary to give a summarized view of feminism and the history of the movement. Because the character analyzed is a woman, knowing the movement that defines all women in their social history is essential to know how the character reflects it.

### **The Feminine and the Feminist: Keypoint Statements**

The actual world has been witness of deep changes in many spheres of the modus vivendi originated from The Illustration and from the rationalist premises of the late XVII century. One of these changes is the growing participation of women in the cultural, scientific, political and economic environment. Feminism, a term which evokes heterogeneous stereotypes is created as an answer to solve the different social, cultural and economic articulation that the human being confronts because of the fact that one is born either man or woman. It implies a kaleidoscope of currents of thought and of social movements that seek to resolve the unequal situation of women in respect of men by questioning the ground of the social order that has been historically established in most cultures. The feminist movement was conceived during the 60's and 70's at Europe and the US, and has an antecessor the so called “first feminist wave” of the XIX century, identified with the suffragist movement. The social and cultural revolution of the “second feminist wave” was detonated in the US with the publication of “The Feminine Mystique”, in 1963, by Betty Friedan (1921-2006): a woman with Jewish origins who studied Psychology at the University of California, in Berkeley and who quits to a brilliant professional career to become a mother and wife, making it compatible with her activities as a writer for feminist magazines. A following a questionnaire applied to her

fellow companions, fifteen years after their graduation from Smith College, a feminine school of Massachusetts. She had the inquiry of writing a text to analyze the situation of American women during the postwar. Friedan is determined to propose a new working, cultural and economic model which favors the possibility for women to achieve conciliation between their personal and family life with their professional work. This feminism's major challenge relies in the blending of equality and difference, because it tries to unite two opposites. The union of both comes to a close in the delicate equilibrium between men and women (Friedan, 2003).

Equality between sexes is found in our qualities and virtues. We are both human beings and share the same intrinsic value; none is better or superior to the other. The difference is in the essence: femininity is different from masculinity and vice versa (Aparisi & Ballesteros, 2002). Less than three decades after, another women with Jewish origins, Judith Butler with studies of Philosophy on Yale, writes another text about the same subject: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published in 1990. This work detonates one authentic cultural revolution which echoes until present time in the so called "third feminist wave", also known as post feminism or gender ideology. Based on her personal experience and her poststructuralist philosophical conception, Butler states that the observable differences between men and women do not correspond to a determined nature, but to a cultural construction; so that women - the same as men - can constitute themselves according to a personal choice (Butler, 1999).

The character of Claire Dunphy is one of the cases that best come close to a balance between the feminine and feminism on a TV series. It is true that the character has a tendency towards one of these stereotypes; nevertheless it confronts actual dilemmas from a very realistic perspective which separate her from other stereotypes of being a mother, wife and woman.

### **Analyzing Claire Dunphy of Modern Family: Method and Case Method and Research Questions**

The Analysis of Claire Dunphy was realized according to an Ethical Analysis model developed by professor Nicolás (2014a; Nicolás et al,

2014). In a prior stage, the general facts about the series are considered. The core of the analysis model implies two main categories: Anthropomorphic and Anthropological. The Anthropomorphic category includes four indicators: The character as person, role and actant; decision making; social virtues and vices; Metanoia main stages: Setting Up the character, lifestyle, and empathy. The Anthropology category includes -four indicators- Cognitive empathy, Emotional empathy, Assessment empathy and Projective empathy.

The anthropomorphic study which, to the character as a person: being a man or a woman. This is understood as a fictional character which has the form of a person. This means that they live conflict; as a consequence the character has a process of decision making which implies the use of intelligence and will. This also gives the character the ability to self-develop by the acquisition of social virtue and might also have a metanoia to either evolve - as a hero - or to self-destruct as a villain.

On the other hand the anthropological study refers to the viewers' perspective, this being the empathy generated with the character. This process happens given the ability of creating social bonds like friendship and either suffer or enjoy with a significant other.

The description of the categories for the analysis is presented as follows:

## **General Analysis**

State the general facts of the series as a whole product. This includes a fact sheet which is composed of the title, a synopsis, the main actors list, and production and distribution facts.

- 1.1. Series classification
- 1.2. Genre
- 1.3. Identifying information
- 1.4. Production and programming years
- 1.5. Distribution channels
- 1.6. Producers and writers description

## **Ethical Analysis**

1. Anthropomorphic analysis
  - 1.1. The character set up
    - 1.1.1. The character as a person
    - 1.1.2. The character as a role
    - 1.1.3. The character as an actant
  - 1.2. Decision making
  - 1.3. Social virtues and vices
  - 1.4. Metanoia
2. Anthropological analysis empathy
  - 2.1. Cognitive empathy
  - 2.2. Emotional empathy
  - 2.3. Assessment empathy
  - 2.4. Projective empathy

### **Anthropomorphic Analysis**

To address the construction and trajectory of characters, the scheme of Francis Vanoye (1996) is followed. He has systematized in the definition of types of characters: the character as a person, actant and role; round or flat characters; classical or modern characters; archetypal, stereotyped, Brechtian, etc. Given the fact that the interest of the present work is to analyze characters of TV series, the first approach is towards their construction and typology to later understand their decision making and their dramatic arc, which in an analogy with the hero's way, will define if its transformation happened towards something better or vice versa. Current series tend to the exploitation of the humanized anti-hero, as noted by García-Martínez (2014);

[...] the most representative traits of what is known today as an antihero refer to a mixture of hero and villain characterized by moral ambiguity, a certain Machiavellianism to achieve certain goals, and the contradiction between their ideals (if any) and actions. Admirable traits (professionalism, intelligence, courage) are mixed with other despicable characteristics (violence, meanness, deceit, cruelty).

1.1.1. The character as a person

Physical and psychological description according to the context.

1.1.2. The character as a role

The social role represented by the Character. Social conceptions.

1.1.3. The character as an actant

Role in the development of the story.

We will describe with more detail following items; decision making, social virtues and vices and metanoia due its relevance.

### **Decision Making**

Characters need to have personality which implies two features: to live according to certain values - as it will be established on the next number (1.3) - and being coherent. Characters should be built under the paradigm of the “character as a person”, this is, they live in a determined social context, and they have a personality, and are defined by their physical conditions. This makes them deep enough to be potentially evaluated upon their values and their decision making once a certain obstacle is brought into place. Confronting external factors is the reflection of this values which are proven by their actions. As Robert McKee mentions; “the true character is discovered by the decision making we take under pressure, the bigger this is, the deeper revelation will be and the natural essence of the character will be more truthful.” (McKee, 1997, p. 101). This section will present characters “as” people at the moment when the decision making process occurs.

### **Social Virtues and Vices**

This point is based on the study of social virtues expressed in classical thought, mainly in the Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle (1955). This part of the analysis consists on identifying the characters’ sociability radicals such as piety, observance, honor, obedience, veracity or truth or friendship. The following chart shows the spheres of action of virtues and vices by Aristotle (1955, p. 101):

Table 1.  
*Aristotle's Ethics Table of Virtues and Vices*

<b>Sphere of Action or Feeling</b>	<b>Excess</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Deficiency</b>
<b>Fear and Confidence</b>	Rashness	Courage	Cowardice
<b>Pleasure and Pain</b>	Licentiousness/Self-indulgence	Temperance	Insensibility
<b>Getting and Spending (minor)</b>	Prodigality	Liberality	Illiberality/Meanness
<b>Getting and Spending (major)</b>	Vulgarity/Tastelessness	Magnificence	Pettiness/Stinginess
<b>Honour and Dishonour (major)</b>	Vanity	Magnanimity	Pusillanimity
<b>Honour and Dishonour (minor)</b>	Ambition/empty vanity	Proper ambition/Pride	Unambitiousness/undue humility
<b>Anger</b>	Irascibility	Patience/Good temper	Lack of spirit/irascibility
<b>Self-expression</b>	Boastfulness	Truthfulness	Understatement/mock modesty
<b>Conversation</b>	Buffoonery	Wittiness	Boorishness
<b>Social Conduct</b>	Obsequiousness	Friendliness	Cantankerousness
<b>Shame</b>	Shyness	Modesty	Shamelessness
<b>Indignation</b>	Envy	Righteous indignation	Malicious enjoyment/Spitefulness

López Aranguren (1979) provides important principles for the study in the anthropology field, human dimensions and lifestyles. Based on this, the conditions of the decisions made by characters can be studied, the operationalization of the social virtues mentioned and, if applicable, the character's metanoia understood in the sense of learning and transformation.

## **Metanoia**

Metanoia a Greek concept that can be translated as change of opinion or repentance is a rhetorical form to refer the change in a given trajectory regarding a certain situation. This means, choosing a specific path to address conflict. Talking about a fiction environment, this concept may be considered as the transformation of a character. We can recognize two different kind character, one which addresses personality traits, related to the “way of being”; and another one which addresses attitude changes, related to their “way of doing”(Cassetti & Di Chio, 1991, p. 178).

This concept relates with the proposal of the Russian Vladimir Propp (1971): The hero's journey. This narrative trajectory traced by Propp was first used to analyze Russian short stories, and later on, was adopted on movie screenplays and TV. The archetype of a hero - as it is well known - is a figure that is ready to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others. This means that he should have certain personality traits, motivations, positive qualities and universal motivations so that the spectator may feel identification (Vanoye, 1996).

Joseph Campbell in “Hero with a thousand faces” presents the common elements found on myths which narrate the adventures of a hero. Along his writing, 17 stages are found divided in three main categories that were later retaken by different authors. The following chart shows the proposal from Campbell (2001) and Vogel (2007) on this matter.



Table 2.  
*The Hero's Journey Comparison*

<b>Act</b>	<b>Joseph Campbell (2001)</b>	<b>Christopher Vogel (2007)</b>
<b>I. Departure</b>	1. The Call to Adventure 2. Refusal of the Call 3. Supernatural Aid 4. Crossing the Threshold 5. Belly of the Whale	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure 3. Refusal of the Call 4. Meeting with the Mentor 5. Crossing the Threshold to Special World
<b>II. Initiation</b>	6. The Road of Trials 7. The Meeting with the Goddess 8. Woman as Temptress 9. Atonement with the Father 10. Apotheosis 11. The Ultimate Boon	6. Tests, Allies and Enemies 7. Approach to the Innermost Cave 8. The Ordeal 9. Reward
<b>III. Return</b>	12. Refusal of the Return 13. The Magic Flight 14. Rescue from Without 15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold 16. Master of Two Worlds 17. Freedom to Live	10. The Road Back 11. The Resurrection 12. Return with the Elixir

The dramatic arc traced by transformations, changes or variations that affect the storyline and the characters is studied by the shown model under the light of the metanoia concept. Metaonia can be understood from two perspectives: internal and external. The first dimension refers to the need of change for narrative development, actioned by the conflict. The second

dimension refers to the emotional aspect that the process causes on the audience. The recipient who consumes an epic or dramatic content, hopes that the hero or the anti-hero “learns the lesson”, moving a mechanism of identification.

For this to happen it's important that the transformation suffered by the character includes winning and losing battles, progress and setbacks, because this same process happens to the audience: the more realistic the character is, the more identification will be felt by the audience (Seger, 2000). To analyze the metanoia of the character, our proposal is to divide the dramatic arc into seven stages considering how a bad habit can turn into a good one:

1. **The Battlefield:** It refers to the situation in which the character is anchored in the bad habit. This can be exemplified with selfishness and self-sufficiency, represented by Harvey of the series “Suits”.
2. **The war starts:** It refers to the decision of the character to address and confront this external conflict that causes his vice. This leads him to engage an internal fight. This is exemplified by Pete Ross deciding to fight his alcoholism in “House of Cards”. Narratively speaking, this is the first plot point which leads to the development of the story if the classic model of the three acts is followed.
3. **Beating the own enemy:** This is the moment in which the main character notices how his habit impulses him to act in a certain correct way. It is at this moment in which the internal fight can be clearly observed. Following the prior example, this is represented by Pete Ross rejecting an invitation to drink at a social event.
4. **Holding the fight:** Through the development of the story, we see that most of the time the dramatic arc is placed here, when the main character needs to hold on to the fight in order to acquire a habit which was not part of his regular life before. For example Finn from “Glee”, changes his role of being the popular kid in school when entering the “Glee” club and turning into the new defensor of the bullied kids of school, no matter the consequences.
5. **Gaining ground:** During this stage, the character starts to react spontaneously according to his new acquired habit. An example would be

Will McAvoy from “Newsroom” who starts acting in a more empathic and friendly way with his team by chapter three.

6. Turning point: The hero is tested in a definitive way. There is a clear clash between both tendencies: the bad habit (being eradicated) and the new one which starts to become a second nature, a new operative habit. Talking about structure, this is the plot point of the second act. Emma at the end of the first season of “Once Upon a Time”, needs to decide whether to change her independence and irresponsible habits to acquire her role as a mother.

7. The hero's medal: When the character has finally learned the lesson and acquired a new good habit, for him and for the ones around him. This matches with the arrival of the ending of the storyline, and following Campbell's scheme this is the returning to the community with the elixir, which is not an external good, but a positive proposition to the community. For example, Clark Kent at “Smallville's” finale running at the rooftop to uncover his uniform of superman, being a savior of humanity.

### **Anthropological Analysis**

To fully understand the kinds of empathy which are developed in the spectator with fictional characters, four different categories are stated as follows: cognitive, emotional, assessment, and projective. The description of each kind is described by Nicolás (2014a) and Nicolás et al. (2014) as follows:

1. Cognitive empathy (2.1): It consists on understanding the main characters and their circumstances, to “put yourself into his shoes”.
2. Emotional empathy (2.2): It refers to the affective implications with the characters; this means, to feel worried about his problems, to experiment joy when luck strikes, and so on. Emotional empathy goes past the possible existence of a fully positive or negative morality code.
3. Assessment Empathy (2.3): This is the approval of the character in a general manner. It could be stated like: “I like this character, and so, he is good. Not because of a moral judgement, but because of the positive feeling it transmits”.
4. Projective (2.4): It's the ability to imagine and “become the main character” the “what if”. This fantasy allows the spectator to anticipate

situations that characters will confront, or infer what the consequence of their actions will be.

The strength of the character will be defined by the type and amount of empathy achieved with the spectator. For this to happen, the character disposes of a long way of narrative which allows the presentation of several resources to convince him about how or what he thinks.

### **Research Questions**

Research Questions defined for this study are the following;

RQ1. Must Claire sacrifice her freedom and when becoming a wife and a mother?

RQ1.1. How is the relation between Claire and Phil?

RQ1.2. How is the relation between Claire and her three children?

RQ2. By becoming a housewife, does Claire have a frustrated life?

RQ3. Does Claire lose her state of realization and happiness?

RQ4. Does Claire experiment a positive metanoia?

### **Case of Study: Modern Family**

Modern Family (2009- to date) is an American Television Series which narrates the family life of Jay Pritchett and his two adult kids: Claire and Mitchell. Claire is married to Phil Dunphy, and she is mother of three kids: Haley, Alex, and Luke; while Mitchell lives with his couple, Cameron, and their adopted baby, Lily. On the other hand, Jay is married to his second wife, Gloria Delgado-Pritchett. They both live with Manny, Gloria's son IMD (2014).

The series is presented in mockumentary style, with the fictional characters frequently talking directly into the camera. The series premiered on September 23, 2009 and was watched by 12.6 million viewers Early on. The show has won many awards, including the Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy Series in each of the past five years. It also won the Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series – Musical or Comedy ABC (2014).

“Modern family” was inspired, according to their creators Christopher Lloyd and Stephen Levitan, by their own families and friends. It was them who inspired the creation of the 11 main characters. With time, the 24 different writers that the show has had have also included some of their family life experiences (Egner, 2014).

The universe of analysis is composed by the 96 episodes of the first four seasons of Modern Family (Lloyd & Levitan, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012). Notes were taken regarding Claire’s actions while front facing conflicts presented to her as a mother, wife, and woman, searching for the presence of values and anti-values of the character. In “Modern Family”, Claire Dunphy is head of a traditional American family; she is a married woman, dedicated to her home, and lives with his husband (Phil) and their three kids: Haley, Alex, and Luke.

The character of Claire Dunphy is portrayed by the actress Julie Bowen (2014), who in real life is married to Scott Philips and is mother of three: Oliver, John, and Gustav. Actually, Bowen states to have found some helpful information regarding her kids education while working (being Claire) as she is also mother of three.

## **Results: Clare Dunphy A Multifaceted Character**

### **RQ1. Must Claire Sacrifice her Freedom and When Becoming a Wife and a Mother?**

At a first glimpse, the character may seem antiquated but, as being set on current time, the character of Claire Dunphy joins the feminine and feminism by answering actual prevailing questions with traditional values and a modern state of mind. Along the series different elements of her personality traits, which allow to see the same character from different perspectives?

#### **RQ1.1. How is the relation between Claire and Phil?**

Regarding the fact that Claire loves her husband, and that they have a lot of interests in common, Phil’s naïve way of being as a father tend to make her

lose her temper. Even so, Claire's patience is always greater. Even though Claire is so competitive and always enjoys winning, in the episode "Run for Your Wife", Claire demonstrates that she can beat Phil in a race, but lets him win out of pity.

Phil's character is an extremely comic representation of how little men can be involved on home chores such as the kids' education or the process of running the house. His relationship with the kids is also comical as it is key to him being friends with his children. Then again, besides his reactions may be somehow exaggerated, more than one could be identified with his role of father-friend in the family.

Yet not everything is negative, because both parents (Phil and Claire) complement each other. All that drama and over reactions that Claire might expose is balanced by the relaxed nature Phil has. Also, Phil constantly reminds Claire that their children should learn to achieve things on their own, encouraging her to be less overprotective.

From homework to family vacations, Phil is always a great support for Claire, who always tends to forget - because of her stressed life - to seek moments for relaxation and to let kids decide things on their own, no matter than the consequences are not always positive for them.

It could be stated that the daily hard work of educating the kids relies on Claire's shoulders; while Phil contributes randomly. This doesn't seem like an actual "team work" as a marriage should be. Even so, both reflect important values in their relationship such as authenticity, friendship, generosity and gratitude. A forgiving attitude can also be noted on both characters accepting the other just as they are.

All in all, Claire as a wife is part of a team in which she absorbs most of the home chores and education of the kids' responsibility, while her relationship with his husband is loving and empathic.

### **RQ1.2. How is the Relation between Claire and Her Three Children?**

As a mother, Claire is constantly tested. Her three children are very different between them and even though she encounters different challenges with each one of them, the constant challenge is to make them all open up

with her so she can understand them better and even help them with the situations they each face.

Out of her three children, it is Haley, the oldest, who gives her the hardest time. On top of her constant trying to connect with her, Claire remembers her own reckless youth and fears that her daughter, who is beautiful and popular, could make the same mistakes.

Also, the relationship Hailey begins with a senior boy (Dylan) and her eventual departure to college, turn into a situation that constantly puts to test Claire's patience and their mother-daughter trust.

Claire has some vices like -being perfectionist and control freak- this damages in a particular way the relationship she has with Haley. In "Earthquake", Claire and Haley have an argument about going to a party. When a small earthquake hits, she is locked in the bathroom with a plumber and grounds Haley through the door. As the two are screaming, Haley calls Claire a "psycho control freak", and the plumber gives her parenting advice. Claire realizes that she is just like her mother and Haley is like her after referring to her mother as a "psycho control freak", and apologizes to Haley. However, even if this relationship can turn out to be pretty conflictive, by the end of the third season, a slight change can be seen, probably due to Haley's maturing behavior, especially in her way of treating and communicating with Claire.

The challenge with her second daughter, Alex, is more focused on the communication between them both. Alex stands out from her siblings due to her independence and willing to achieve academic excellence. The mother-daughter relationship finds obstacles thanks to Alex's independence; however, it is her who shares intimate moments of support, friendship and motivation with Claire.

The relationship between Alex and Claire might not consume as much time as the one with Haley, but it is a much healthier one, based on friendship and authenticity. Even if in many occasions Alex resists to trust and come up to Claire, when she does, they both allow themselves to be honest with each other.

Finally, with Luke, her youngest child, the challenges are based on his development and growth. Because Luke is incredibly absentminded and

shares his personality greatly with his father, Phil, Claire is constantly worried about his son's future and correct development of her youngest.

Even if the relationship between Claire and Luke is smaller than the one he has with his father, Claire is constantly trying to interact more with Luke. She even tends to be smoother with him than with his older sisters.

The case with Luke is similar to Alex's because Luke lives most of her adventures with Phil or Manny (Gloria's son), leaving Claire out. Still, Claire is always making an extra effort to bond and talk with him. In many occasions, she even helps him when he is in trouble or needs to solve something.

As a mother, we can see Claire often showing many social virtues and not only puts them to practice, but at times she tries to cultivate them in her children. She is trying to find a balance between loves for them and educating them in discipline. This search for balance is often obstacle by the lack of support shown by Phil when educating them. Still, generally, Claire manages to do both things by herself.

## **RQ2. By Becoming a Housewife, Does Claire Have a Frustrated Life?**

The chapter "Moon Landing" written by Bill Wrubel and Directed by Jason Winer (Season 1, Episode 14) was aired on February 2010. This particular episode, talks about the decision Claire made on choosing family over her professional career, which positions it as one of the most important episodes for the analysis. On Moon Landing, Claire feels like a loser when she catches up with an old friend from work, Valerie. Claire had decided that she wanted to be a stay-at-home mom and she felt a bit smug that Valerie seemed to be jealous. It turns out that Valerie was now an executive at Claire's old company, and Claire probably could have had that job if she had stayed around. And then Valerie was given another promotion in Paris. Claire had it wrong: Valerie wasn't jealous of her, Valerie pitied her. Now Claire wants to bring her back to her house to show everything that she missed: the kids, the house, having only one lover instead of four. Claire brings Valerie to meet the family, but perhaps the timing was a bit off. Haley was throwing Dylan's stuff out the window, Luke was trying to understand the appeal of Jägermeister, and Alex was trying to kill a rat.



And that's before Phil got stuck in the port-a-pottie outside with the water turned off in the house. The good news is, Valerie finds the rat, which isn't nearly as gross as Haley and Dylan making up (and making out). Claire freaks out at them and leaves, but later, she feels bad and all she wants is to be at home with her family and when she returns home everyone is happy again. She appreciates that they let her slide on yelling at them when she was trying to impress Valerie. Finally, Claire decides to make her home and family her professional career. This professional perception of her role as a housewife also allows her to develop her natural leadership. This is clearly shown by the concern she has for her community, even by running for the Council. (Modern Family: Season 2, Chapter 11. Season 3 Episode 4. Season 3 Episodes 5,8, and 13) Besides the prior makes make her go hysterical because of the chaos, she constantly concludes that her decision was right.

### **RQ3. Does Claire Lose Her State of Realization and Happiness?**

After analyzing the first four seasons of the series, it can be said that Claire lives an average life of a stay-at-home mother. She confronts the perks of behind a wife, an educator, an administrator, an entrepreneur, a personal coach and psychologist, a team player, a community influencer. As it was priory stated, Claire is sure that her decision of devoting her life to her family was the right thing to do; she acknowledges this to all the loving, care, accepting and realization opportunities that only a family can offer.

### **RQ4. Does Claire Experiment a Positive Metanoia?**

During the pilot episode (Season 1 Episode 1) Claire narrates that she had a crazy youth. Moreover, a different moment of the series refers certain moments of her teenage life in which the lack of values and the reign of excess is clarified. Later on, Claire is presented as a home-stay-mom with all the perks this role implies.

Nevertheless analyzing her metanoia is quite interesting because it's not presented following a lineal sequence throughout the episodes. She is

presented in a later stage, while by the use of conversations the spectator is able to discover the prior stages of her transformations.

By the beginning of the series, it could be stated that Claire is on the fifth stage: Gaining Ground. In which she has embraced her figure as a wife and mother, yet she struggles with her daily conflicts.

By describing her metanoia process in a linear way (from 1 to 7) the story is as follows:

1. First: Claire is a teenage kid with no apparent limits, she enjoys to party and having no worries at all. This could be described as her battlefield.
2. Second: Later on, the war starts when she finds out about her pregnancy (Haley) before getting married to Phil. At this moment, her immaturity has to change for her child's sake.
3. Third: Almost immediately she has to beat the own enemy by deciding whether to keep her professional career (she worked on a hotel) or to start her family as a home-stay-mom.
4. Fourth: Claire's holding the fight is represented by all the years that have passed ever since she got married to Phil. Her daily life is now about being a mother and a wife.
5. Fifth: This leads to the present point in the story, in which Claire is now better experienced at her tasks, and regardless the fact that she stresses out because of the daily life problems, she is happy with her decision. It is also important to mention that *Modern Family* being a sitcom it is necessary to keep Claire, and the other characters, without major transformations which allow the storyline - and the comedy- to proceed fluently.
6. Sixth: A turning point was presented in the mentioned chapter "Moon Landing" when she clearly states that she sees her life as a positive outcome. The maturity of the character is noticeable if compared to its beginning.

Yet, the series is still running, so the final stage of the metanoia cannot be presented. The hero's medal could be awarded to Claire at the end of the series, but in summary we could said that Claire experiment a positive metanoia.

## **Conclusions**

As a woman, Claire Dunphy is a strong and energetic character. She is a natural leader and accepts herself as she is. She could be considered as a 60's stereotyped housewife on the current times; but Claire has virtues and vices which land her in the real world, by confronting the same obstacles than any other woman would have to go through today.

Also, Claire being considered as a woman has a predominance of social values above anti values. Regardless of her anti values such as dysfunctionality, lack of limits (back during her youth) and some ambiguous values, she presents her positive motors of action more frequently. These are authenticity, gratitude, generosity and piety.

Claire just as many other contemporary women, enjoys the pillars that the feminist movement brought to the actual society (a college degree, an employment, and the possibility of running for a public office), nevertheless, it could be said that as a character she is shown more a s a feminine model towards equality between men and women, rather than being a radical feminist.

Being part of a family is never easy, and this is the greatest feature of the series. It represents the perks lived by a family in which ups and downs are present, but never overshadow the love and loyalty existing between the three families that coexist in the series. It is also considered that the present article may contribute to the development of the studies of lifestyles presented on TV series, which is not a very developed subject. The key contribution is the proposed Analysis Model. A model which allows analyzing relevant aspects about the character through the application of anthropomorphic and anthropological categories, resembling the character and a person by studying virtues and vices and the transformations they present. The presented model is being applied by undergraduate and graduate students who analyses contemporary and successful TV series, which means that in a near future more analysis about lifestyles on TV series will be published.

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