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### Television in the Family Circle

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... [I]n postwar years the television set became a central figure in representations of family relationships. The introduction of the machine into the home meant that family members needed to come to terms with the presence of a communication medium that might transform older modes of family interaction. The popular media published reports and advice from social critics and social scientists who were studying the effects of television on family relationships. The media also published pictorial representations of domestic life that showed people how television might—or might not—fit into the dynamics of their own domestic lives. Most significantly, like the scene from *Rebel without a Cause*, the media discourses were organized around ideas of family harmony and discord.

Indeed, contradictions between unity and division were central to representations of television during the period of its installation. Television was the great family minstrel that promised to bring Mom, Dad, and the kids together; at the

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same time, it had to be carefully controlled so that it harmonized with the separate gender roles and social functions of individual family members. This meant that the contradiction between unity and division was not a simple binary opposition; it was not a matter of either/or but rather both at once. Television was supposed to bring the family together but still allow for social and sexual divisions in the home. In fact, the attempt to maintain a balance between these two ideals was a central tension at work in popular discourses on television and the family.

### The Family United

In 1954, *McCall's* magazine coined the term "togetherness." The appearance of this term between the covers of a woman's magazine is significant not only because it shows the importance attached to family unity during the postwar years, but also because this phrase is symptomatic of discourses aimed at the housewife. Home magazines primarily discussed family life in language organized around spatial imagery of proximity, distance, isolation, and integration. In fact, the spatial organization of the home was presented as a set of scientific laws through which family relationships could be calculated and controlled. Topics ranging from childrearing to sexuality were discussed in spatial terms, and solutions to domestic problems were overwhelmingly spatial: if you are nervous, make yourself a quiet sitting corner far away from the central living area of the home. If your children are cranky, let them play in the yard. If your husband is bored at the office, turn your garage into a workshop where he'll recall the joys of his boyhood. It was primarily within the context of this spatial problem that television was discussed. The central question was, "Where should you put the television set?" This problem was tackled throughout the period, formulated and reformulated, solved and recast. In the process the television set became an integral part of the domestic environment depicted in the magazines.

At the simplest level, there was the question of the proper room for television. In 1949, *Better Homes and Gardens* asked, "Where does the receiver go?" It listed options including the living room, game room, or "some strategic spot where you can see it from the living room, dining room and kitchen." At this point, however, the photographs of model rooms usually did not include television sets as part of the interior decor. On the few occasions when sets did appear, they were placed either in the basement or in the living room. By 1951, the television set traveled more freely through the household spaces depicted in the magazines. It appeared in the basement, living room, bedroom, kitchen, fun room, converted garage, sitting-sleeping room, music room, and even the "TV room." Furthermore, not only the room, but the exact location in the room, had to be considered for its possible use as a TV zone.

As the television set moved into the center of family life, other household fixtures traditionally associated with domestic bliss had to make room for it. Typically, the magazines presented the television set as the new family hearth through which love and affection might be rekindled. In 1951, when *American Home* first displayed a television set on its cover photograph, it employed the conventionalized iconography of a model living room organized around the

fireplace, but this time a television set was built into the mantelpiece. Even more radically, the television was shown to replace the fireplace altogether, as the magazines showed readers how television could function as the center of family attention. So common had this substitution become that by 1954 *House Beautiful* was presenting its readers with "another example of how the TV set is taking the place of the fireplace as the focal point around which to arrange the seating in the room." Perhaps the most extreme example of this kind of substitution is the tradition at some broadcast stations of burning Yule logs on the television screen each Christmas Eve, a practice that originated in the 1950s....

As the magazines continued to depict the set in the center of family activity, television seemed to become a natural part of domestic space. By the early 1950s, floor plans included a space for television in the home's structural layout, and television sets were increasingly depicted as everyday commonplace objects that any family might hope to own. Indeed, the magazines included television as a staple home fixture before most Americans could even receive a television signal, much less consider purchasing the expensive item. The media discourses did not so much reflect social reality; instead, they preceded it. The home magazines helped to construct television as a household object, one that belonged in the family space. More surprisingly, however, in the span of roughly four years, television itself became the central figure in images of the American home; it became the cultural symbol par excellence of family life.

Television, it was said, would bring the family ever closer, an expression which, in itself a spatial metaphor, was continually repeated in a wide range of popular media—not only women's magazines, but also general magazines, men's magazines, and on the airwaves. In its capacity as unifying agent, television fit well with the more general postwar hopes for a return to family values. It was seen as a kind of household cement that promised to reassemble the splintered lives of families who had been separated during the war. It was also meant to reinforce the new suburban family unit, which had left most of its extended family and friends behind in the city.

The emergence of the term "family room" in the postwar period is a perfect example of the importance attached to organizing household spaces around ideals of family togetherness. First coined in George Nelson and Henry Wright's *Tomorrow's House: A Complete Guide for the Home-Builder* (1946), the family room encapsulated a popular ideal throughout the period....

But one needn't build a new room in order to bring the family together around the television set; kitchens, living rooms, and dining rooms would do just as well. What was needed was a particular attitude, a sense of closeness that permeated the room. Photographs, particularly in advertisements, graphically depicted the idea of the family circle with television viewers grouped around the television set in semicircle patterns.

As Roland Marchand has shown with respect to advertising in the 1920s and 1930s, the family circle was a prominent pictorial strategy for the promotion of household goods. The pictures always suggested that all members of the family were present, and since they were often shot in soft-focus or contained dreamy mists, there was a romantic haze around the family unit. Sometimes artists even

drew concentric circles around the family, or else an arc of light evoked the theme. According to Marchand, the visual cliché of the family circle referred back to Victorian notions about domestic havens, implying that the home was secure and stable. The advertisements suggested a democratic model of family life, one in which all members shared in consumer decisions—although, as Marchand suggests, to some extent the father remained a dominant figure in the pictorial composition....

Much like the advertisements for radio and the phonograph, advertisements for television made ample use of this reassuring pictorial convention—especially in the years immediately following the war when advertisers were in the midst of their reconversion campaigns, channeling the country back from the wartime pressures of personal sacrifice and domestic upheaval to a peacetime economy based on consumerism and family values. The advertisements suggested that television would serve as a catalyst for the return to a world of domestic love and affection—a world that must have been quite different from the actual experiences of returning GIs and their new families in the chaotic years of readjustment to civilian life....

The transition from wartime to postwar life resulted in a set of ideological and social contradictions concerning the construction of gender and the family unit. The image of compassionate families that advertisers offered the public might well have been intended to serve the “therapeutic” function that both Roland Marchand and T.J. Jackson Lears have ascribed to advertising in general. The illustrations of domestic bliss and consumer prosperity presented a soothing alternative to the tensions of postwar life. Government building policies and veteran mortgage loans sanctioned the materialization of these advertising images by giving middle-class families a chance to buy into the “good life” of ranch-style cottages and consumer durables. Even so, both the advertising images and the homes themselves were built on the shaky foundations of social upheavals and cultural conflicts that were never completely resolved. The family circle ads, like suburbia itself, were only a temporary consumer solution to a set of complicated political, economic, and social problems.

In the case of television, these kinds of advertisements almost always showed the product in the center of the family group. While soft-focus or dreamy mists were sometimes used, the manufacturers’ claims for picture clarity and good reception seem to have necessitated the use of sharp focus and high contrast, which better connoted these product attributes. The product-as-center motif not only suggested the familial qualities of the set, but also implied a mode of use: the ads suggested television be watched by a family audience....

Even families that were not welcomed into the middle-class melting pot of postwar suburbia were promised that the dream of domestic bliss would come true through the purchase of a television set. *Ebony* continually ran advertisements that displayed African-Americans in middle-class living rooms, enjoying an evening of television. Many of these ads were strikingly similar to those used in white consumer magazines—although often the advertisers portrayed black families watching programs that featured black actors. Despite this iconographic substitution, the message was clearly one transmitted by a culture industry catering to the middle-class suburban ideal. Nuclear families living in single-family homes would engage in intensely private social relations through the luxury of television.

Such advertisements appeared in a general climate of postwar expectations about television’s ability to draw families closer together. In *The Age of Television* (1956), Leo Bogart summarized a wide range of audience studies on the new medium that showed numerous Americans believed television would revive domestic life. Summarizing the findings, Bogart concluded that social scientific surveys “agree completely that television has had the effect of keeping the family at home more than formerly.” One respondent from a Southern California survey boasted that his “family now stays home all the time and watches the same programs. [We] turn it on at 3 P.M. and watch until 10 P.M. We never go anywhere.” Moreover, studies indicated that people believed television strengthened family ties. A 1949 survey of an eastern city found that long-term TV owners expressed “an awareness of an enhanced family solidarity.”...

Typically also, television was considered a remedy for problem children. During the 1950s, juvenile delinquency emerged as a central topic of public debate. Women’s magazines and child psychologists such as Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose *Baby and Childcare* had sold a million copies by 1951, gave an endless stream of advice to mothers on ways to prevent their children from becoming antisocial and emotionally impaired. Not only was childrearing literature big business, but the state had taken a special interest in the topic of disturbed youth, using agencies such as the Continuing Committee on the Prevention and Control of Delinquency and the Children’s Bureau to monitor juvenile crimes. Against this backdrop, audience research showed that parents believed television would keep their children off the streets. A mother from the Southern California survey claimed, “Our boy was always watching television, so we got him a set just to keep him home.”...

### Seducing the Innocent

More than any other group, children were singled out as the victims of the new piped piper. Indeed, even while critics praised television as a source of domestic unity and benevolent socialization, they also worried about its harmful effects, particularly its encouragement of passive and addictive behavior. In 1951, *Better Homes and Gardens* complained that the medium’s “synthetic entertainment” produced a child who was “glued to television.” Worse still, the new addiction would reverse good habits of hygiene, nutrition, and decorum, causing physical, mental, and social disorders. A cartoon in a 1950 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal* suggests a typical scenario. The magazine showed a little girl slumped on an ottoman and suffering from a new disease called “telegeyeye.” According to the caption, the child was a “pale, weak, stupid looking creature” who grew “bugeyed” from sitting and watching television for too long. Perhaps responding to these concerns, some advertisements presented children spectators in scenes that associated television with the “higher arts,” and some even implied that children would cultivate artistic talents by watching television....

As the popular wisdom often suggested, the child’s passive addiction to television might itself lead to the opposite effect of increased aggression. These discussions followed in the wake of critical and social scientific theories of the 1930s and 1940s that suggested that mass media injects ideas and behavior into passive

on juvenile delinquency. The war that Wertham waged against mass culture struck a chord with the more general fears about juvenile delinquency at the time, and parents were given armor in what popular critics increasingly defined as a battle to protect the young from the onslaught of a hypercommercialized children's culture.

Indeed, discussions about children and mass culture typically invoked military imagery. One woman, who had read Wertham's 1948 article in the *Saturday Review*, wrote a letter that explained how her children had become "drugged" by mass media: "We consider this situation to be as serious as an invasion of the enemy in war time, with as far-reaching consequences as the atom bomb." One year later, anthropologist Margaret Mead expressed similar fears to her colleagues, worrying about children who grew up in a world where "radio and television and comics and the threat of the atomic bomb are every day realities." If in the late 1940s television was seen as just one part of the threatening media environment, over the course of the 1950s it would emerge as a more central problem.

As Ellen Wartella and Sharon Mazzarella have observed, early social scientific studies suggested that children weren't simply using television in place of other media; instead, television was colonizing children's leisure time more than other mass cultural forms had ever done. Social scientists found this "reorganization hypothesis" to be particularly important because it meant that television was changing the nature of children's lives, taking them away from school work, household duties, family conversations, and creative play. This hypothesis was also at the core of early studies conducted by school boards around the country, which showed that television was reducing the amount of time children spent on homework. Researchers and reformers were similarly concerned with television's effects on children's moral and physical welfare. As early as 1949, PTA members voted at their national convention to keep an eye on "unwholesome television programs." Religious organizations also tried to monitor television's unsavory content. In 1950, the National Council of Catholic Women counted violent acts in television programs while Detroit's Common Council (which was composed of religious groups and city officials) drew up a three-prong plan to make the new medium safe for children and teenagers. By 1951, the National Council of Catholic Men had joined the fray, considering a system of program ratings, while Catholic teachers were urging the formation of a Legion of Decency at their annual conference in Washington. Even Wertham, who devoted most of his energy to comic books, included in his book a final chapter on television (appropriately titled "Homicide at Home"), which warned parents that programs such as *Captain Video* and *Superman* would corrupt the potential educational value of the new medium and turn children into violent, sexually "perverse" adults.

Such concerns were given official credence as senators, congressmen, and FCC commissioners considered the problem. Commissioner Frieda Hennock championed educational television, which she believed would better serve children's interests. Thomas J. Lane, representative from Massachusetts, urged Congress to establish government censorship of television programs, claiming that teachers and clergymen "have been fighting a losing battle against the excess of this one-way form of communication," and praising parents who were demanding that the "juvenile delinquent called television" be cleaned up

individuals. Adopting this "hypodermic model" of media effects, the magazines circulated horror stories about youngsters who imitated television violence....

Of course, the controversy surrounding television was simply a new skirmish in a much older battle to define what constituted appropriate children's entertainment. Such controversies can be traced back to the turn of the century when reformers, most notably Anthony Comstock, sought to regulate the content of dime novels. Similar battles were waged when middle-class reformers of the early 1900s debated film's impact on American youth, and later these reform discourses were given scientific credence with the publication of the Payne Fund Studies in 1933. Broadcasting became the subject of public scrutiny in that same year when a group of mothers from Scarsdale, New York, began voicing their objections to radio programs that they considered to be harmful to children. The public outcry was taken up in special interest magazines—especially the *Christian Century*, *Commonweal*, *New Republic*, *Outlook*, *Nation*, and *Saturday Review*. In all cases, childhood was conceived as a time of innocence, and the child a blank slate upon whom might be imprinted the evils of an overly aggressive and sexualized adult culture. In her work on *Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose has argued that the image of presexual childhood innocence has less to do with how children actually experience their youth than it does with how adults choose to conceptualize that experience. The figure of the innocent child serves to facilitate a nostalgic adult fantasy of a perfect past in which social, sexual, economic, and political complexities fade into the background.

In the postwar years, the urge to preserve childhood innocence helped to justify and reinforce the nuclear family as a central institution and mode of social experience. Parents were given the delicate job of balancing the dividends and deficits of the ever-expanding consumer culture. On the one hand, they had to supply their youngsters with the fruits of a new commodity society—suburban homes, wondrous toys, new technologies, glamorous vacations, and so forth. Early schooling in the good life would ensure that children continued on a life trajectory of social mobility based on the acquisition of objects. On the other hand, parents had to protect children from the more insidious aspects of the consumer wonderland, making sure that they internalized the ability to tell the difference between authentic culture and synthetic commercial pleasures. According to Helen Muir, editor of the *Miami Herald's* children's books section, there was a difference between the "real needs and desires of children" and "the superimposed synthetic so-called needs which are not needs but cravings." In this context, mass media provided parents with a particularly apt target. More than twenty years before Marie Winn called television "the plug-in drug," Muir and others likened mass media to marijuana and other narcotics that offered children a momentary high rather than the eternal pleasures of real art.

The most vocal critic was psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, whose *Seduction of the Innocent* (1953) became the cornerstone of the 1950s campaign against comic books. For Wertham, the *tabula rasa* conception of the child was paramount; the visual immediacy of comics, he argued, left children vulnerable to their unsavory content. Although most social scientists and psychologists had a more nuanced approach to mass media than Wertham had, his ideas were popularized in the press and he even served as an expert witness in Estes Kefauver's 1954 Senate Subcommittee hearings

"before it ruins itself and debases everybody with whom it has contact." Largely in response to such concerns, the NAR-TB (following the lead of the film industry and its own experience with radio) staved off watchdog groups and government officials by passing an industry-wide censorship code for television in March 1952, a code that included a whole section on television and children. But the debate persisted and even grew more heated....

While scholarship has centered around the question of how television affects children, little has been said about the way adults have been taught to limit these effects. What is particularly interesting here is the degree to which discussions about television and children engaged questions concerning parental authority. Summarizing parents' attitudes toward television, Bogart claimed, "There is a feeling, never stated in so many words, that the set has a power of its own to control the destinies and viewing habits of the audience, and that what it 'does' to parents and children alike is somehow beyond the bounds of any individual set-owner's power of control." In this context, popular media offered solace by showing parents how they could reclaim power in their own homes—if not over the medium, then at least over their children. Television opened up a whole array of disciplinary measures that parents might exert over their youngsters.

Indeed, the bulk of discussions about children and television were offered in the context of mastery. If the machine could control the child, then so could the parent. Here, the language of common sense provided some reassurance by reminding parents that it was they, after all, who were in command. As the *New York Times* television critic Jack Gould wrote in 1949, "It takes a human hand to turn on a television set." But for parents who needed a bit more than just the soothing words of a popular sage, the media ushered in specialists from a wide range of fields; child psychologists, educators, psychiatrists, and broadcasters all recommended ways to keep the problem child in line.

One popular form of advice revolved around program standards. Rather than allowing children to watch violent westerns such as *The Lone Ranger* and escapist science-fiction serials such as *Captain Video*, parents were told to establish a canon of wholesome programs....

In many ways this canon recalled Victorian notions of ideal family recreation. Overly exciting stimuli threatened to corrupt the child, while educational and morally uplifting programs were socially sanctioned. In response to these concerns, magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Review*, and *Parents* gave their seal of approval to what they deemed as culturally enriching programs.... In all cases, critical judgments were based on adult standards. Indeed, this hierarchy of television programs is symptomatic of the more general efforts to establish an economy of pleasure for children spectators that suited adult concepts about the meaning of childhood....

Meanwhile, for their part, children often seemed to have different ideas. As numerous surveys indicated, youngsters often preferred the programs that parents found unwholesome, especially science-fiction serials and westerns. Surveys also indicated that children often liked to watch programs aimed at adults and that "parents were often reluctant to admit that their children watched adult shows regularly." Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theater* (which was famous for its inclusion of "off-color" cabaret humor) became so popular with children that Berle adopted

the persona of Uncle Miltie, pandering to parents by telling his juvenile audience to obey their elders and go straight to bed when the program ended. Other programs, however, were unable to bridge the generation gap. When, for example, CBS aired the mystery anthology *Suspense*, numerous affiliates across the country received letters from concerned parents who wanted the program taken off the air. Attempting to please its adult constituency, one Oklahoma station was caught in the cross fire between parents and children. When the station announced it would not air "horror story" programs before the bedtime hour 9:00 P.M., it received a letter with the words "We protest!" signed by twenty-two children....

In part, anxieties about parental control had to do with the fact that television was heavily promoted to families with children. During the 1950s, manufacturers and retailers discovered that children were a lucrative consumer market for the sale of household commodities. An editor of *Home Furnishings* (the furniture retailer's trade journal) claimed, "The younger generation from one to twenty influences the entire home furnishings industry." As one of the newest household items, television was quickly recognized for its potential appeal to young consumers. Numerous surveys indicated that families with children tended to buy television more than childless couples did. Television manufacturers quickly assimilated the new findings into their sales techniques. As early as 1948, the industry trade journal *Advertising and Selling* reported that the manager of public relations and advertising at the manufacturing company, Stromberg-Carlson, "quoted a survey ... indicating that children not only exert a tremendous amount of influence in the selection and purchase of television receivers but that they are, in fact, television's most enthusiastic audience." Basing their advertisements on such surveys, manufacturers and retailers formulated strategies by which to pull parents' purse strings—and heart strings as well. In 1950, the American Television Dealers and Manufacturers ran nationwide newspaper advertisements that played on parental guilt. The first ad in the series had a headline that read, "Your daughter won't ever tell you the humiliation she's felt in begging those precious hours of television from a neighbor." Forlorn children were pictured on top of the layout, and parents were shown how television could raise their youngsters' spirits. This particular case is especially interesting because it shows that there are indeed limits to which even advertisers can go before a certain degree of sales resistance takes place. Outraged by the advertisement, parents, educators, and clergymen complained to their newspapers about its manipulative tone. In addition, the Family Service Association of America called it a "cruel pressure to apply against millions of parents" who could not afford television sets. In the midst of this controversy, the American Television Dealers and Manufacturers discontinued the ad campaign. Although this action might have temporarily quelled the more overt fears of adult groups, the popular media of the period continued to raise doubts that often surfaced in hyperbolic predictions of the end of patriarchal family life....

## A House Divided

In a home where patriarchal authority was undermined, television threatened to drive a wedge between family members. Social scientists argued that even while families might be brought together around the set, this spatial proximity did not

necessarily translate into better family relations. As Eleanor MacCoby observed in her study of families in Cambridge, Massachusetts, "There is very little interaction among family members when they watch TV together, and the amount of time family members spend together exclusive of TV is reduced, so it is doubtful whether TV brings the family together in any psychological sense."

Popular periodicals presented exaggerated versions of family division, often suggesting that television would send family members into separate worlds of pleasure and thus sever family ties, particularly at the dinner table. In 1950, Jack Gould wrote, "Mealtime is an event out of the ordinary for the television parent; for the child it may just be out." In that same year a cartoon in *Better Homes and Gardens* showed parents seated at the dining room table while their children sat in the living room, glued to the television set. Speaking from the point of view of the exasperated mother, the caption read, "All right, that does it! Harry, call up the television store and tell them to send a truck right over!" In 1953, *TV Guide* suggested a humorous solution to the problem in a cartoon that showed a family seated around a dining room table with a large television set built into the middle of it. The caption read, "Your kids won't have to leave the table to watch their favorite programs if you have the Diney model...."

Harmony gave way to a system of differences in which domestic space and family members in domestic space were divided along sexual and social lines. The ideal of family togetherness was achieved through the seemingly contradictory principle of separation; private rooms devoted to individual family members ensured peaceful relationships among residents. Thus, the social division of space was not simply the inverse of family unity; rather, it was a point on a continuum that stressed ideals of domestic cohesion. Even the family room itself was conceived in these terms. In fact, when coining the phrase, Nelson and Wright claimed, "By frankly developing a room which is 'entirely public' ... privacy is made possible. Because there's an 'extra room,' the other living space can really be enjoyed in peace and quiet."

This ideology of divided space was based on Victorian aesthetics of housing design and corresponding social distinctions entailed by family life.... [T]he middle-class homes of Victorian America embodied the conflicting urge for family unity and division within their architectural layout. Since the homes were often quite spacious, it was possible to have rooms devoted to intimate family gatherings (such as the back parlor), social occasions (such as the front parlor), as well as rooms wholly given over to separate family members. By the 1950s, the typical four- and one-half room dwellings of middle-class suburbia were clearly not large enough to support entirely the Victorian ideals of socio-spatial hierarchies. Still, popular home manuals of the postwar period placed a premium on keeping these spatial distinctions in order, and they presented their readers with a model of space derived in part from the Victorian experience.

The act of watching television came to be a central concern in the discourse on divided spaces as the magazines showed readers pictures of rambling homes with special rooms designed exclusively for watching television. Sets were placed in children's playrooms or bedrooms, away from the central spaces of the home. In 1951, *House Beautiful* had even more elaborate plans. A fun room built

adjacent to the home and equipped with television gave a teenage daughter a "place for her friends." For the parents it meant "peace of mind because teenagers are away from [the] house but still at home."

It seems likely that most readers in their cramped suburban homes did not follow these suggestions. A 1954 national survey showed that 85 percent of the respondents kept their sets in the living room, so that the space for TV was the central, common living area in the home. Perhaps recognizing the practical realities of their readers, the magazines also suggested ways to maintain the aesthetics of divided spaces in the small home. While it might not have been possible to have a room of one's own for television viewing, there were alternate methods by which to approximate the ideal. Rooms could be designed in such a way so that they functioned both as viewing areas and as centers for other activities. In this sense, television fit into a more general functionalist discourse in which household spaces were supposed to be made "multi-purposeful." In 1951, *Better Homes and Gardens* spoke of a "recreation area of the living room" that was "put to good use as the small fry enjoy a television show." At other times such areas were referred to specifically as "television areas." While in many cases the television area was marked off by furniture arrangements or architectural structures such as alcoves, at other times the sign of division was concretized in an object form—the room divider.

In some cases the television receiver was actually built into the room divider so that television literally became a divisive object in the home. In 1953, for example, *Better Homes and Gardens* displayed a "living-dining area divider" that was placed behind a sofa. Extending beyond the sofa, its right end housed a television set. As the illustration showed, this TV/room divider created a private viewing area for children. In 1955, one room-divider company saw the promotional logic in this scenario, showing mothers how Modernfold Doors would keep children spectators at a safe distance. The ad depicts a mother sitting at one end of a room, while her child and television set are separated off by the folding wall. Suggesting itself as an object of dispute, the television set works to support the call for the room divider—here stated as "that tiresome game of 'Who gets the living room.'" Moreover, since room dividers like this one were typically collapsible, they were the perfect negotiation between ideals of unity and division. They allowed parents to be apart from their children, but the "fold-back" walls also provided easy access to family togetherness.

The swiveling television was another popular way to mediate ideals of unity and division. In 1953, *Ladies' Home Journal* described how John and Lucille Bradford solved the viewing problem in their home by placing a large console set on a rotating platform that was hinged to the doorway separating the living room from the play porch. Lucille told the magazine, "The beauty of this idea ... is that the whole family can watch programs together in the living room, or the children can watch their own special cowboy programs from the play porch without interfering with grownups' conversation."

This sociosexual division of space was also presented in advertisements for television sets. In 1955, General Electric showed how its portable television set could mediate family tensions. On the top of the page a cartoon depicts a family besieged by television as Mother frantically attempts to vacuum up the mess created by her

read, write or talk. Earphones let the youngsters hear every shot, but the silence is wonderful." DuMont had an even better idea with its "Duoscope" set. This elaborate construction was composed of two receivers housed in a television cabinet, with two chassis, two control panels, and two picture tubes that were mounted at right angles. Through polarization and the superimposition of two broadcast images, the set allowed two viewers to watch different programs at the same time. Thus, as the article suggested, a husband and wife equipped with polarized glasses were able to watch television together but still retain their private pleasures.

While the Duoscope never caught on, the basic problem of unity and division continued. The attempt to balance ideals of family harmony and social difference often led to bizarre solutions, but it also resulted in everyday viewing patterns that were presented as functional and normal procedures for using television. Popular discourses tried to tame the beast, suggesting ways to maintain traditional modes of family behavior and still allow for social change. They devised intricate plans for resistance and accommodation to the new machine, and in so doing they helped construct a new cultural form.

young son who, sitting on his tricycle, changes the channel on the television console. Father, sitting on an easy chair in front of the set, is so perturbed by the goings-on that his pipe flies out of his mouth. The solution to this problem is provided further down on the page where two photographs are juxtaposed. The photograph on the right side of the page depicts Mother and Daughter in the kitchen where they watch a cooking program on a portable TV while the photograph on the left side of the page shows Father watching football on the living room console. This "split-screen" layout was particularly suited to GE's sales message, the purchase of a second television set. The copy reads: "When Dad wants to watch the game ... Mom and Sis, the cooking show ... there's too much traffic for one TV to handle."

The depiction of divided families wasn't simply a clever marketing strategy; rather, it was a well-entrenched pictorial convention. Indeed, by 1952, advertisements in the home magazines increasingly depicted family members enjoying television alone or else in subgroups. At least in the case of these ads, it appears that the cultural meaning that were circulated about television changed somewhat over the course of the early years of installation. While television was primarily shown to be an integrating activity in the first few years of diffusion, in the 1950s it came to be equally (or perhaps even more) associated with social differences and segregation among family members.

It is, however, important to remember that the contradiction between family unity and division was just that—a contradiction, a site of ideological tension, and not just a clear-cut set of opposing choices. In this light, we might understand a number of advertisements that attempted to negotiate such tensions by evoking ideas of unity and division at the same time. These ads pictured family members watching television in private, but the image on the television screen contained a kind of surrogate family. A 1953 ad for Sentinel TV shows a husband and wife gently embracing as they watch their brand new television set on Christmas Eve. The pleasure entailed by watching television is associated more with the couple's romantic life than with their parental duties. However, the televised image contains two children, apparently singing Christmas carols. Thus, the advertisement shows that parents can enjoy a romantic night of television apart from their own children. But it still sustains the central importance of the family scene because it literally *represents* the absent children by making them into an image on the screen. Moreover, the advertisement attaches a certain amount of guilt to the couple's intimate night of television, their use of television as a medium for romantic rather than familial enjoyment. The idea of guilty pleasure is suggested by the inclusion of two "real" children who appear to be voyeurs, clandestinely looking onto a scene of their parents' pleasure. Dressed in pajamas, the youngsters peek out from a corner of the room, apparently sneaking out of bed to take a look at the new television set, while the grownups remain unaware of their presence.

The tensions between opposing ideals of unity and division were also expressed in material form. Manufacturers offered technological "gizmos" that allowed families to be alone and together at the same time. In 1954, *Popular Science* displayed a new device that parents could use to silence the set while their children watched. As the magazine explained, "NOBODY IS BOTHERED if the children want to see a rootin'-tootin' Western when Dad and Mother want to