CSMC
Critical Studies in Mass Communication

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 4 DECEMBER 1989

The Domestic Economy of Television Viewing in Postwar America

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□—*This essay examines how postwar women's magazines introduced television to the American housewife. Combining methods of textual analysis with industrial and cultural history, it shows the ambivalence which characterized popular discourse on television. In particular, the study reveals the way television was imbricated in the gendered division of labor and leisure at home by exploring how the magazines deliberated on the problems television posed for women's domestic chores and the efficient functioning of the household. It thus contributes historical perspective to the ongoing concerns about television's relationship to family audiences.*

In 1952, the Western-Holly Company marketed a new design in domestic technology, the TV-stove. The oven included a window through which the housewife could watch her chicken roast. Above the oven window was a television screen which presented an even more spectacular sight. With the aid of this machine the housewife would be able to prepare her meal, but at the same time she could watch television. Although it was clearly an odd object, this TV-stove was not simply a historical fluke. Rather, its invention is a reminder of the concrete social, economic, and ideological conditions that made this contraption possible. Indeed, the TV-stove was a response to the conflation of labor and leisure time at home. If it now seems strange, this has as much to do with the way in which society has conceptualized work and leisure as it does with the machine's bizarre technological form.[1]

In this essay, I examine television viewing in terms of a history of ideas concerning gendered patterns of work and leisure in the home. Based on a study of popular media from the postwar era (especially middle class women's magazines), this essay considers how television was introduced to the American housewife. Television's innovation after World War II occasioned a multitude of responses and expectations voiced in films, magazines, newspapers, and on television itself. These popular dis-

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Critical Studies in Mass Communication
6 (1989), 337-354

courses were replete with ambivalence about television's relationship to family life. As the TV-stove so dramatically suggests, there was a profound uncertainty about television's place and function in the home, an uncertainty that gave rise to a fierce debate on the cultural and social value of this new domestic object and entertainment form.

Indeed, as other historians have shown, this kind of ambivalence has characterized America's response to a host of household technologies, including television's most obvious predecessor, radio (Covert, 1984; Davis, 1965). In this respect, the popular debates about television should be seen not as an aberrant phenomenon but rather as a specific manifestation of a larger history of ideas about household technology, ideas which were firmly inscribed in gendered patterns of labor and leisure in domestic space. It is these patterns, as they were described to the first wave of television viewers, that I consider in the following pages. To do so, I first briefly describe the historical roots of the domestic ideology and some theoretical questions to which they give rise.

GENDER, WORK, AND LEISURE

Since the nineteenth century, middle class ideals of domesticity had been predicated on divisions of leisure time and work time. This doctrine of two spheres represented human activity in spatial terms: the public world came to be conceived of as a place of productive labor, while the home was seen as a site of rejuvenation and consumption. By the 1920s, the public world was still a sphere of work, but it was also opened up to a host of commercial pleasures like movies and amusement parks that were incorporated into middle class family life styles. The ideal home, however, remained a place of revitalization and, with the expansion of convenience products that promised to reduce household chores, domesticity was even less associated with production.

As feminists have argued, this separation has served to justify the exploitation of the housewife whose work at home simply does not count. Along these lines Nancy Folbre (1982) claims that classical economics considers women's work as voluntary labor and therefore outside the realm of exploitation. In addition, she argues, even Marxist critics neglect the issue of domestic exploitation since they assume that the labor theory of value can be applied only to efficiency-oriented production for the market and not to "inefficient" and "idiosyncratic" household chores.

But as feminist critics and historians have shown, the home is indeed a site of labor. Not only do women do physical chores, but also the basic relations of our economy and society are reproduced at home, including the literal reproduction of workers through child rearing labor. Once the home is considered as a work place, the divisions between public/work and domestic/leisure become less clear. The ways in which work and leisure are connected, however, remain a complex issue.

Henri Lefebvre's studies of everyday life offer ways to consider the general interrelations among work, leisure, and family life in modern society. In his foreword to the 1958 edition of *Critique de la Vie Quotidienne*, Lefebvre argues that,

> Leisure . . . cannot be separated from work. It is the same man who, after work, rests or relaxes or does whatever he chooses. Every

> day, at the same time, the worker leaves the factory, and the employee, the office. Every week, Saturday and Sunday are spent on leisure activities, with the same regularity as that of the weekdays' work. Thus we must think in terms of the unity "work-leisure," because that unity exists, and everyone tries to program his own available time according to what his work is—and what it is not. (1958/1979, p. 136)

While Lefebvre concentrated on the "working man," the case of the housewife presents an even more pronounced example of the integration of work and leisure in everyday life.

In the absence of a thoroughgoing critique of the issues surrounding work and leisure, it has been difficult for television critics and historians to deal with the central importance of domestic labor for television spectatorship. Recent British ethnographic research suggests that men and women tend to use television according to their specific position within the distribution of leisure and labor activities inside and outside the home (Gray, 1987; Morley, 1986). In the American context, two of the most serious examinations come from Tania Modleski (1983) and Nick Browne (1984), who theorize the way television watching fits into a general pattern of everyday life where work and leisure are intertwined. Modleski suggests that the soap opera might be understood in terms of the "rhythms of reception," or the way women working at home relate to the text within a specific milieu of distraction: cleaning, cooking, child rearing, etc. Browne concentrates not on the individual text but rather on the entire television schedule, which he claims is ordered according to the logic of the workday of both men and women. As he writes, "the position of the programs in the television schedule reflects and is determined by the work-structured order of the real social world. The patterns of position and flow imply the question of who is home, and through complicated social relays and temporal mediations, link television to the modes, processes, and scheduling of production characteristic of the general population" (p. 176).

WOMEN'S MAGAZINES AND TELEVISION

The fluid interconnection between leisure and labor at home presents a context for exploring the ways women use and understand television programming in their daily lives. In the following pages, I focus on a moment in American history, specifically the years 1948–1955, when women were first learning how to accommodate television, both as a domestic object and as an entertainment form. During these years, more than half of all American households installed television, and the basic patterns of daytime television emerged as a distinct cultural form which entailed a particular set of female viewing practices. While most women might not have had the elaborate mechanism offered by the TV-stove, they were in the process of adapting themselves to—or else resisting—a new and curious entertainment machine.

How can we understand the way people integrated television into their lives some 30 years ago? How can we discover a history of everyday life that was not recorded by the people who lived it at the time? The women's home magazines I examine illuminate the reception of television as it was registered in popular media of the postwar period. These magazines included graphics, articles, cartoons, and illustrations depicting television's relationship to family life.[2]

While they cannot tell us how television was actually received by people at the time, popular magazines do reveal an intertextual context through which people could make sense of television and its relation to their lives.

The debates about television drew upon and magnified the more general obsession with the reconstruction of family life and domestic ideals after World War II. The 1950s was a decade that placed an enormous amount of cultural capital in the ability to form a family and to live out a set of highly structured gender roles. Although people at the time might well have experienced and understood the constraining aspects of this domestic dream, it nevertheless was a consensus ideology, promising practical benefits like security and stability to people who had witnessed the shocks and social dislocations of the previous two decades. As Elaine Tyler May (1988) suggests, while people acknowledged the limitations of postwar domesticity, they nevertheless often spoke of their strong faith in the overall project of being in a family. In this social climate, television was typically welcomed as a catalyst for renewed familial values. Indeed, television, in many popular discussions, was depicted as a panacea for the broken homes and hearts of wartime life: not only was it shown to restore faith in family togetherness, but as the most sought-after appliance for sale in postwar America, it also renewed faith in the splendors of consumer capitalism. By the same token, however, television was also greeted in less euphoric terms, and as I have argued elsewhere (1988a; 1988b), the discourses on television typically expressed profound doubts about domesticity—especially, gender roles in the home.

Women's home magazines were the primary venue for this debate on television and the family. Yet, apart from the occasional reference, these magazines have been disregarded in television histories. Rather than focusing on the social and domestic context, broadcast history has continually framed its object of study around questions of industry, regulation, and technological invention: that is, around spheres where men have participated as executives, policy makers, and inventors. Women, on the other hand, are systematically marginalized in television history. According to the assumptions of our current historical paradigms, the woman is simply the receiver of the television text: the one to whom the advertiser promotes products. This is not to say industrial history necessarily fails to explain gender relations. Indeed, as other feminist critics have shown, the very notion of femininity itself is in part constructed through and by mass media images as they are produced by the "culture industries." But industrial history clearly needs to be supplemented by methods of investigation that will better illuminate women's subjective experiences and the way those experiences, in turn, might have affected industry output and policies.

By looking at women's magazines as a source of historical evidence, we find another story, one that tells us something (however partial and mediated) about the way women might have experienced the arrival of television in their own homes. These magazines, through their debates on television's place in the domestic sphere, provided women with opportunities to negotiate rules and practices for watching television at home. In addition, they addressed women not simply as passive consumers of promotional rhetoric but also as producers within the domestic sphere. In

fact, even the television manufacturers, who used women's magazines to promote the sale of television sets, seem to have recognized this productive role. For, as I will show, rather than simply offering women the passive consumer luxury of total television pleasure, the manufacturers tailored their messages to the everyday concerns of the housewife; they typically acknowledged the conflicts between household chores and television leisure, and they offered their products as solutions to these conflicts.

In this sense, I emphasize the importance of looking at advertisements in relation to the wider media context in which they appear. A popular assumption in advertising history and theory is that ads are the voice of big industry, a voice that instills consumer fantasies into the minds of the masses. But advertising is not simply one voice; rather it is necessarily composed of multiple voices. Advertising adopts the voice of an imaginary consumer—it must speak from his or her point of view, even if that point of view is at odds with the immediate goals of the sales effort. In this respect, television advertisers did not simply promote ideas and values in the sense of an overwhelming "product propaganda." Rather, they followed certain *discursive rules* found in a media form that was popular with women since the nineteenth century. Advertisers often adjusted their sales messages to fit with the concerns voiced in women's magazines, and they also used conventions of language and representation that were typical of the magazines as a whole.

The common thread uniting the ads, editorial content, and pictorial representations was mode of address. The discourses of middle class women's magazines assumed, a priori, that women were housewives and that their interests necessarily revolved around cleaning, cooking, child rearing, and, less explicitly, love making. Indeed, even though the 1950s witnessed a dramatic rise in the female labor force—and, in particular, the number of married women taking jobs outside the home rose significantly (Chafe, 1972; Gatlin, 1987)—these magazines tacitly held to an outdated model of femininity, ignoring the fact that both working class and middle class women were dividing their time between the family work space and the public work space. In this sense, the conventions formed for viewing television arose in relation to this housewife figure; even if the actual reader was employed outside the domestic sphere, her leisure time was represented in terms of her household work. Representations of television continually presented women with a notion of spectatorship that was inextricably intertwined with their useful labor at home.

These magazines offered women instructions on how to cope with television, and they established a set of viewing practices based around the tenuous balance of labor and leisure at home. They told women of the utopian possibilities of fantasy and romantic transport that television might bring to their relatively "unglorious" lives as homemakers, but they also warned that television might wreak havoc on the home and therefore had to be carefully managed and skillfully controlled. Indeed, these magazines offered women an ambivalent picture of television; the television set appeared less as a simple consumer luxury than as a complex set of problems that called for women's rational decisions and careful examination. In the discussion below, I consider the industrial solution to the working/viewing continuum, then detail the concerns

which circulated in magazines, and finally address some of the implications these popular discourses had for gender dynamics in general.

THE INDUSTRY'S IDEAL VIEWER

Unlike the many household appliances which, since the nineteenth century, have promised to simplify women's work, the television set threatened to disrupt the efficient functioning of the household. And while other home entertainment media such as the phonograph could be enjoyed while doing household tasks, pleasure in television appeared to be fundamentally incompatible with women's productive labor. As William Boddy (1979) argues, the broadcasting industry recognized this conflict when radio was first introduced to the public. But overcoming its initial reluctance, the industry successfully developed daytime radio in the 1930s, and by the 1940s housewives were a faithful audience for soap operas and advice programs.

During the postwar years, advertisers and networks once more viewed the daytime market with skepticism, fearing that their loyal radio audiences would not be able to make the transition to television. The industry assumed that, unlike radio, television might require the housewife's complete attention and thus disrupt her work in the home (Boddy, 1985). Indeed, while network prime time schedules were well worked out in 1948, both networks and advertisers were reluctant to feature regular daytime television programs.

The first network to offer a regular daytime schedule was DuMont, which began operations on its New York station WABD in November 1948. It seems likely that DuMont, which had severe problems competing with CBS and NBC, entered the daytime market to offset its economic losses in prime time during a period when even the major networks were losing money on television. Explaining the economic strategy behind the move into daytime, one DuMont executive claimed, "WABD is starting daytime programming because it is not economically feasible to do otherwise. Night time programming alone could not support radio, nor can it support television" ("DuMont Expansion," 1949, p. 23). In December 1949, DuMont offered a two-hour afternoon program to its nine affiliate stations, and it also made kinescopes available to its non-interconnected affiliates. DuMont director Commander Mortimer W. Loewi reasoned that the move into daytime would attract small ticket advertisers who wanted to buy "small segments of time at a low daytime rate" ("Daytime Video," 1949, p. 3).

It was in 1951 that the major networks aggressively attempted to colonize the housewife's workday with advice programs, soap operas, and variety shows. One of the central reasons for the networks' move into daytime that year was the fact that prime time hours were fully booked by advertisers and that, by this point, there was more demand for television advertising in general. Daytime might have been more risky than prime time, but it had the advantage of being available--and at a cheaper network cost. Confident of its move into daytime, CBS claimed, "We aren't risking our reputation by predicting that daytime television will be a solid sell-out a year from today . . . and that once again there will be some sad advertisers who didn't read the tea leaves right" (*Sponsor*, 1951, p. 19). Alexander Stronach Jr., ABC vice president, was equally certain about the daytime market, and having just

taken the plunge with the *Frances Langford-Don Ameche Show* (a variety program budgeted at the then steep $40,000 a week), Stronach told *Newsweek* (1951, p. 56), "It's a good thing electric dishwashers and washing machines were invented. The housewives will need them."

The networks' faith in daytime carried through to advertisers. In September 1951, the trade journal *Televiser* (p. 20) reported that "47 big advertisers have used daytime network television during the past season or are starting this Fall." Included were such well-known companies as American Home Products, Best Foods, Proctor and Gamble, General Foods, Hazel Bishop Lipsticks, Minute Maid, Hotpoint, and the woman's magazine *Ladies' Home Journal.*

But even after the networks and advertisers had put their faith in daytime programming, they had not resolved the conflict between women's work and television. The industry still needed to construct program types conducive to the activities of household work. The format that has received the most critical attention is the soap opera, which first came to network television in December, 1950. As Robert C. Allen (1985) demonstrates, early soap opera producers like Irna Philips of *Guiding Light* were skeptical of moving their shows from radio to television. By 1954, however, the Neilsen Company reported that the soaps had a substantial following; *Search For Tomorrow* was the second most popular daytime show, while *Guiding Light* was in fourth place. The early soaps, with their minimum of action and visual interest, allowed housewives to listen to dialogue while working in another room. Moreover, their segmented story lines (usually two a day), as well as their repetition and constant explanation of previous plots, allowed women to divide their attention between viewing and household work.

Another popular solution to the daytime dilemma was the segmented variety format which allowed women to enter and exit the text according to its discrete narrative units. One of DuMont's first programs, for example, was a shopping show (alternatively called *At Your Service* and *Shopper's Matinee*) which consisted of 21 entertainment segments, all revolving around different types of "women's issues." For instance, the "Bite Shop" presented fashion tips while "Kitchen Fare" gave culinary advice ("Daytime Video," 1949; "DuMont Daytime," 1949). While DuMont's program was short lived, the basic principles survived in the daytime shows at the major networks. Programs like *The Gary Moore Show* (CBS), *The Kate Smith Show* (NBC), *The Arthur Godfrey Show* (CBS) and *Home* (NBC) catered to housewife audiences with their segmented variety of entertainment and/or advice. Instituted in 1954 by NBC President Sylvester Pat Weaver (also responsible for the early morning *Today Show*), *Home* borrowed its narrative techniques from women's magazines with segments on gardening, child psychology, food, fashion, health, and interior decor. As *Newsweek* reported, "The program is planned to do for women on the screen what the women's magazines have long done in print" ("For the Girls," 1954, p. 92).

As NBC began to adapt narrative strategies from women's periodicals, it also initiated an advertising campaign that instructed housewives on ways to watch the new programs while doing household chores. In 1955, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* carried ads for NBC's daytime lineup which suggested that not only the programs but also the scheduling of the

programs would suit the content and organization of the housewife's day. The ads evoked a sense of fragmented leisure time and suggested that television viewing could be conducted in a state of distraction. But this was not the kind of critical contemplative distraction that Walter Benjamin (1936/1969) suggested in his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Rather, the ads implied that the housewife could accomplish her chores in a state of "utopian forgetfulness" as she moved freely between her work and the act of watching television.

One ad that is particularly striking in this regard includes a sketch of a housewife and her little daughter at the top of the page. Below this, the graphic layout is divided into eight boxes composed of television screens, each representing a different program in NBC's daytime lineup. The caption functions as the housewife's testimony to her distracted state. She asks, "Where Did the Morning Go? The house is tidy . . . but it hasn't seemed like a terribly tiring morning. . . . I think I started ironing while I watched the *Sheila Graham Show.*" The housewife goes on to register details of the programs, but she cannot with certainty account for her productive activities in the home. Furthermore, as the ad's layout suggests, the woman's daily activities are literally fragmented according to the pattern of the daytime television schedule, to the extent that her everyday experiences become imbricated in a kind of serial narrative. Most significantly, her child pictured at the top of the ad is depicted within the contours of a television screen so that the labor of child rearing is itself made part of the narrative pleasures offered by the NBC daytime lineup (*Ladies' Home Journal*, 1955, p. 130).

NEGOTIATING WITH THE IDEAL VIEWER

Although industry advertisements offered television as spiritual transportation for the housewife/spectator, popular media were not complicit with distraction as a remedy for the television/labor problem. Women's magazines warned of television's thoroughly negative effect on household chores and suggested that a careful management of domestic space might solve the problem. In 1950, *House Beautiful* warned of television: "It delivers about five times as much wallop as radio and requires in return five times as much attention. . . . It's impossible to get anything accomplished in the same room while it's on." The magazine offered a spatial solution, telling women "to get the darn thing out of the living room," and into the TV room, cellar, library, "or as a last resort stick it in the dining room" (Crosby, p. 125).

An ad for Drano (*American Home*, 1955a, p. 14) provided a solution to television's obstruction of household chores: The housewife is shown watching her afternoon soap opera, but this nonproductive activity is sanctioned only insofar as her servant does the housework. As the maid exclaims, "Shucks, I'll never know if she gets her man 'cause this is the day of the week I put Drano in all the drains!' " The Drano Company thus attempted to sell its product by giving women a glamorous vision of themselves enjoying an afternoon of television. But it could do so only by splitting the function of leisure and work across two representational figures: the lady of leisure and the domestic servant.

If the domestic servant was a fantasy solution to the conflict between work and television, the women's magazines sug-

gested more practical ways to manage the problem. As *Better Homes and Gardens* suggested, the television set should be placed in an area where it could be viewed, "while you're doing things up in the kitchen" (Adams & Hungerford, 1949, p. 38). Similarly, *American Home* (1954, p. 39) told readers to put the television set in the kitchen so that "Mama sees her pet programs. . . ." Via such spatial remedies labor would not be affected by the leisure of viewing, nor would viewing be denied by household chores. In fact, household labor and television were continually condensed into one space designed to accommodate both activities. In one advertisement this labor-viewing condensation provided the basis of a joke. A graphic depicted a housewife tediously hanging her laundry on the outdoor clothesline. The drudgery of this work is miraculously solved as the housewife brings her laundry into her home and sits before her television set while letting the laundry dry on the antenna (*American Home*, 1955b, p. 138).

This spatial condensation of labor and viewing was part of a well-entrenched functionalist discourse. The home had to provide rooms that would allow for a practical orchestration of "modern living activities" which now included watching television. Functionalism was particularly useful for advertisers who used it to promote not just one household item but an entire product line. An ad for the Crane Company (*House Beautiful*, 1952a, p. 59) displayed its kitchen appliance ensemble, complete with ironing, laundering, and cooking facilities. Here the housewife could do multiple chores at once because all the fixtures were "matched together as a complete chore unit." One particularly attractive component of this "chore unit" was a television set built into the wall above the washer and dryer.

While spatial condensations of labor and leisure helped to soothe tensions about television's obstruction of household chores, other problems still existed. The magazines suggested that television would cause increasing work loads. Considering the cleanliness of the living room, *House Beautiful* told its readers: "Then the men move in for boxing, wrestling, basketball, hockey. They get excited. Ashes on the floor. Pretzel crumbs. Beer stains." The remedy was spatial: "Lots of sets after a few months have been moved into dens and recreation rooms" (Ward, 1948, p. 220).

In a slight twist of terms, the activity of eating was said to be moving out of the dining area and into the television-sitting area. Food stains on upholstery, floors, and other surfaces meant extra work for women. Vinyl upholstery, linoleum floors, tiling, and other spill-proof surfaces were recommended. In addition, the magazines showed women how to be gracious TV hostesses, always prepared to serve family and friends special TV treats. These snack-time chores created a lucrative market for manufacturers who offered a new breed of "made for TV objects" including TV trays, tables, china sets, and, in 1954, the TV dinner.

While magazines presented readers with a host of television-related tasks, they also suggested ways for housewives to ration their labor. Time-motion studies, which had been integral to the discourses of feminism and domestic science since the progressive era, were rigorously applied to the problem of increasing work loads. All unnecessary human movement which the television set might demand had to be minimized. Again, this called for a careful management of space. The magazines suggested that chairs and

sofas be placed so that they need not be moved for watching television. Alternatively, furniture could be made mobile. By placing wheels on a couch, it was possible to exert minimal energy while converting a sitting space into a viewing space. More typically, the television was mobilized. Casters and lazy Susans were suggested for the heavy console models, but the ideal solution was the easy-to-handle portable set.

More radically, space between rooms could be made continuous in order to minimize the extra movements of household labor which the television set might demand. An ad for *House Beautiful* (1952b, p. 138) suggested a "continuity" of living, dining, and television areas wherein "a curved sofa and a folding screen mark off [the] television corner from the living and dining room." Via this carefully managed spatial continuum, "it takes no more than an extra ten steps or so to serve the TV fans."

Continuous space was also a response to a more general problem of television and family relationships. Popular women's magazines discussed television in the context of domestic ideals that can be traced back to the Victorian period—ideals that were organized around the often contradictory goals of family unity and gender/social hierarchies. By incorporating notions of gender and social place within its structural layout, the middle class homes of Victorian America intended to construct a classically balanced order where ideals of family unity and division were joined in a harmonious blend of formalized rules that governed the residents' behavior. While, for example, the back parlor provided for family bonding during leisure time pursuits, individual bedrooms ensured difference among men, women, and children who were expected to carry out their own essential functions in private spaces. In the twentieth century, and certainly in the postwar era, the ideals of unity and division still pertained—even if domestic architecture had gone through a number of drastic revisions.

Women's household work presented a special dilemma for the twin ideals of family unity and social divisions because household chores demanded a more fluid relation to space than that provided by the formalized settings of the Victorian ideal. This problem became particularly significant by the early decades of the twentieth century when middle class women became increasingly responsible for household chores due to a radical reduction in the number of domestic servants.[3] As Gwendolyn Wright (1981, p. 172) has observed, women were now often cut off from the family group as they worked in kitchens designed to resemble scientific laboratories and far removed from the family activities in the central living areas of the home. Architects did little to respond to the problem of female isolation but continued instead to build kitchens fully separated from communal living spaces, suggesting that labor-saving kitchen appliances would solve the servant shortage.

In the postwar era when the continuous spaces of ranch-style architecture became a cultural ideal, the small suburban home placed a greater emphasis on interaction among family members. The "open plan" of the postwar home eliminated some of the walls between the dining room, living room, and kitchen, and thus it was associated with a higher degree of family bonding and recreational activity. With the help of this new design for living, postwar Americans were meant to rediscover the domestic bonding and personal security that was threatened during wartime. The new "family togetherness" (a term first coined by *McCalls* in 1954) served as a

convenient spatial metaphor that offered a soothing alternative to the vast economic, residential, and social dislocations of the postwar world. As Roland Marchand (1982) argues, the ranch-style home and the values placed on domestic cohesion promised a last gasp at cultural "dominion" in a world increasingly structured by bureaucratic corporations and the anonymity of suburban landscapes. But even if the fantasy of dominion was a potent model of postwar experience, the new family home never functioned so idyllically in practice, nor was the domestic ideal itself so simple. Just as the Victorian idea of domesticity was rooted in a fundamental contradiction between family unity and social/sexual hierarchy, the postwar notion of family togetherness was itself based on rigid distinctions between gender lines and social function. The domestic architecture of the period is a testimony to this tenuous balance between unity and division. Even in the continuous ranch-style homes, space was often organized around the implicit differences in the everyday lives of men, women, and children. In the model homes of postwar suburbia, the woman's work area was still zoned off from the activity area, and the woman's role as homemaker still worked to separate her from the leisure activities of her family.

Women's magazines suggested intricately balanced spatial arrangements that would mediate the tensions between female integration and isolation. Here, television viewing became a special topic of consideration. *House Beautiful* placed a television set in its remodeled kitchen which combined "such varied functions as cooking, storage, laundry, flower arranging, dining, and TV viewing" (Conway, 1951, p. 121). In this case, as elsewhere, the call for functionalism was related to the woman's ability to work among a group engaged in leisure activities. A graphic showed a television placed in a "special area" devoted to "eating" and "relaxing," one "not shut off by a partition." In continuous space, "the worker ... is always part of the group, can share in the conversation and fun while work is in progress."

While this example presents a harmonious solution, often the ideals of integration and isolation resulted in highly contradictory representations of domestic life. Typically, illustrations that depicted family groups watching television showed the housewife to be oddly disconnected from her family members who were huddled together in a semicircle pattern. Sentinnel Television organized its advertising campaign around this pictorial convention. One ad, for example, depicted a housewife holding a tray of beverages, standing off to the side of her family which was gathered around the television set (*Better Homes and Gardens*, 1952a, p. 144). Another ad showed a housewife cradling her baby in her arms and standing at a window, far away from the rest of her family which gathered around the Sentinnel console (*Better Homes and Gardens*, 1953, p. 169). In an ad for Magnavox Television, the housewife's chores separated her from her circle of friends. The ad was organized around a U-shaped sofa that provided a quite literal manifestation of the semicircle visual cliché (*House Beautiful*, 1948, p. 5). A group of adult couples sat on the sofa watching the new Magnavox set, but the hostess stood at the kitchen door, holding a tray of snacks. Spatially removed from the television viewers, the housewife appeared to be sneaking a look at the set as she went about her hostess chores.

This problem of female spatial isolation gave way to what I call a "corrective cycle of commodity purchases." An

article in *American Home* about the joys of the electric dishwasher is typical here (Ramsay, 1949, p. 66). A graphic depicting a family gathered around the living room console included the caption, "No martyr banished to kitchen, she never misses television programs. Lunch, dinner dishes are in an electric dishwasher." An ad for Hotpoint dishwashers used the same discursive strategy (*House Beautiful*, 1950, p. 77). The illustration showed a wall of dishes that separated a housewife in the kitchen from her family which sat huddled around the television set in the living room. The caption read, "Please ... Let Your Wife Come Out Into the Living Room! Don't let dirty dishes make your wife a kitchen exile! She loses the most precious hours of her life shut off from pleasures of the family circle by the never-ending chore of old-fashioned dishwashing!"

This ideal version of female integration in a unified family space was contested by the competing discourse on divided spaces. Distinctions between work and leisure space remained an important principle of household efficiency. The magazines argued that room dividers or separate television corners might help to sanction off the work place from the viewing place and thus allow housewives the luxury of privacy from the television crowd. General Electric used this notion of family division to support the sale of a second television (*Better Homes and Gardens*, 1955, p. 139). The ad depicted a harried housewife who was able to find peace on her new GE kitchen portable. As the split-screen design of the layout showed, Mother and Daughter were able to perform their household work as they watched a cooking show, while Dad enjoyed total passive relaxation as he watched a football game on the living room console.

TELEVISION, GENDER, AND DOMESTIC POWER

The bifurcation of sexual roles, of male (leisure) and female (productive) activities served as an occasion for a full consideration of power dynamics between men and women in the home. Typically, the magazines extended their categories of feminine and masculine viewing practices into representations of the body. For men, television viewing was most often depicted in terms of a posture of repose. Men were typically shown to be sprawled out on easy chairs as they watched the set. Remote controls allowed the father to watch in undisturbed passive comfort. In many ways, this representation of the male body was based on Victorian notions of rejuvenation for the working man. Relaxation was condoned for men because it served a revitalizing function, preparing them for the struggles of the work-a-day world. But for women the passive calm of television viewing was simply more problematic. Although women were shown to relax in the home, as I have shown, the female body watching television was often engaged in productive activities.

Sometimes, representations of married couples became excessively literal about the gendered patterns of television leisure. When the Cleavelander Company advertised its new "T-Vue" chair, it told consumers "Once you sink into the softness of Cleavelander's cloud-like contours, cares seem to float away ..." (*House Beautiful*, 1954, p. 158). Thus, not only the body but also the spirit would be revitalized by the television chair. But this form of rejuvenation was markedly gendered. While the chair allowed the father "to stretch out with his feet on the ottoman," the mother's television leisure was nevertheless productive. For as the caption stated,

"Mother likes to gently rock as she sews." An advertisement for Airfoam furniture cushions used a similar discursive strategy (*Better Homes and Gardens,* 1952b, p. 177). The graphic showed a husband dozing in his foam rubber cushioned chair as he sits before a television set. Meanwhile, his wife clears away his snack. The text read, "Man's pleasure is the body coddling comfort" of the cushioned chair while "Woman's treasure is a home lovely to look at, easy to keep perfectly tidy and neat," with cushioning that "never needs fluffing."

In such cases, the man's pleasure in television is associated with passive relaxation. But for women pleasure is derived through the aesthetics of a well-kept home and labor-saving devices which promise to rationalize the extra labor that television brings to domestic space. Although on one level these representations are compatible with traditional gender roles, subtle reversals of power ran through the magazines as a whole. Even if there was a certain degree of privilege attached to man's position of total relaxation—his right to rule from the easy chair throne—this power was in no way absolute, nor was it stable. Instead, it seems to me, the most striking thing about this gendered representation of the body is that it was at odds with the normative conception of masculinity and femininity. Whereas Western society associates activity with maleness, representations of television attributed this trait to women. Conversely, the notion of feminine passivity was transferred over to the man of the house.[4]

Indeed, it might be concluded that the cultural ideals which demanded that women be shown as productive workers also had the peculiar side effect of "feminizing" the father. As Andreas Huyssen (1986, p. 47) argues, this notion of feminization has been a motif in the discourse on mass culture since the nineteenth century. "Mass culture," Huyssen claims, "is somehow associated with women while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men." Indeed, mass culture has repeatedly been figured in terms of patriarchal ideas of femininity and represented in tropes of passivity, consumption, penetration, and addiction. In this way, it threatens the very foundations of so-called "authentic" or high culture that is represented in terms of masculine tropes of activity, productivity, and knowledge.

In 1941, this gendered conception of mass culture reached a dramatic pitch when Philip Wylie wrote his classic misogynist text, *Generation of Vipers,* which was reprinted 16 times. In this book, Wylie connected the discourse on mass culture and women to broadcasting. In general, Wylie argued, women had somehow joined in a conspiracy with big industry and, with the aid of advanced technology, had supplanted the need for men altogether. Women, along with the technocratic world, had stripped men of their masculine privilege and turned them into cowering sissies. In his most bitter chapter entitled "Common Women," Wylie argued that women had somehow gained control of the airwaves. Women, he suggested, made radio listening into a passive activity which threatened manhood and, in fact, civilization. As Wylie (pp. 214–215) wrote,

> The radio is mom's final tool, for it stamps everybody who listens with the matriarchal brand.... Just as Goebbels has revealed what can be done with such a mass-stamping of the public psyche in his nation, so our land is a living representation of the same fact worked out in matriarchal sentimentality, goo, slop, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death.

In the annotated notes of the 1955 edition, Wylie (pp. 213–214) updated these

fears, claiming that television would soon take the place of radio and turn men into female-dominated dupes. Women, he wrote, "will not rest until every electronic moment has been bought to sell suds and every program censored to the last decibel and syllable according to her self-adulation—along with that (to the degree the mom-indoctrinated pops are permitted access to the dials) of her de-sexed, de-souled, de-cerebrated mate." Although Wylie's rhetoric might seem to be the product of a fevered mind, this basic blend of misogyny and technophobia was common to representations of television and everyday life in the postwar period.

Men's magazines offered tongue-in-cheek versions of the situation, showing how television had turned men into passive homebodies. The fashionable men's magazine *Esquire* and the working man's magazine *Popular Science* presented ironic views of the male sloth. In 1951, for example, *Esquire* (p. 10) showed the stereotypical husband relaxing with his shoes off, beer in hand, smiling idiotically while seated before a television set. Two years later, the same magazine referred to television fans as "televidiots" (O'Brien, p. 24).

If these magazines provided a humorous look at the man of leisure, they also offered alternatives. In very much the same way that Victorians like Catherine Beecher sought to elevate the woman by making her the center of domestic affairs, the men's magazines suggested that fathers could regain their authority through increased participation in family life. As early as 1940, Sydnie Greenbie called for the reinstitution of manhood in his book titled *Leisure for Living*. Greenbie reasoned that the popular figure of the male "boob" could be counteracted if the father cultivated his mechanical skills. As he wrote (p. 210), "At last man has found something more in keeping with his nature, the workshop, with its lathe and mechanical saws, something he has kept as yet his own against the predacious female. . . . And [it becomes] more natural . . . for the man to be a homemaker as well as the woman."

After the war, this reintegration of the father became a popular ideal.[5] As *Esquire* told its male readers, "your place, Mister, is in the home, too, and if you'll make a few thoughtful improvements to it, you'll build yourself a happier, more comfortable, less back-breaking world . . ." ("Home is for Husbands," 1951, p. 88). From this perspective, the men's magazines suggested ways for fathers to take an active and productive attitude in relation to television. Even if men were passive spectators, when not watching they could learn to repair the set or else produce television carts, built-ins, and stylish cabinets. Articles with step-by-step instructions were circulated in *Popular Science*, and the *Home Craftsman* even had a special "TV: Improve Your Home Show" column featuring a husband and wife, Thelma and Vince, and their adventures in home repairs.

Popular Science also suggested hobbies for men to use television in an active and productive way. The magazine ran several articles on a new fad—television photography. Men were shown how to take still pictures off their sets, and in 1950 the magazine even conducted a readership contest for prize winning photos that were published in the December issue ("From Readers' Albums," p. 166).

CONCLUSION

The gendered division of domestic labor and the complex relations of power

entailed by it were thus shown to organize the experience of watching television. While these early representations cannot tell us how real people actually used television in their own homes, they do begin to reveal a set of discursive rules that were formed for thinking about television in the early period. They begin to disclose the social construction of television as it is rooted in a mode of thought based on categories of sexual difference.

Recent ethnographic studies conducted by David Morley (1986), Ann Gray (1987), James Lull (1988), and others reveal the continued impact of gender (and other social differences) on the ways families watch television. Gray's work on VCR usage among working class families in Britain especially highlights how gender-based ideas about domestic technology and productive labor in the home circumscribe women's use of the new machine. Such ethnographic work provides compelling evidence for the intricate relations of television and gender as they are experienced in the viewing situation.

For historians, questions about the television audience pose different problems and call for other methods. The reconstruction of viewing experiences at some point in the past is an elusive project. By its very nature, the history of spectatorship is a patchwork history, one that must draw together a number of approaches and perspectives in the hopes of achieving a partial picture of past experiences. The approach I have taken here provides insights into the way television viewing has been connected to larger patterns of family ideals and gender construction within our culture.

Women's magazines depicted a subtle interplay between labor and leisure at home, and they offered the postwar housewife ways to deal with television in her daily life. These popular discourses show that television was not simply promoted as a pleasure machine; rather, the media engaged women in a dialogue about the concrete problems television posed for productive labor in the home. If our culture has systematically relegated domestic leisure to the realm of nonproduction, these magazines reveal the tenuousness of such notions. Indeed, for the postwar housewife, television was not represented as a passive activity, but rather it was imbricated in a pattern of everyday life where work is never done. □

NOTES

[1]This stove was mentioned in *Sponsor* (1951, p. 119) and *Popular Science* (1952, p. 132). Interestingly, *Popular Science* did not discuss the television component of the stove as a vehicle for leisure but rather showed how "A housewife can follow telecast cooking instructions step-by-step on the TV set built into this electric oven." Perhaps in this way, this men's magazine allayed readers' fears that their wives would use the new technology for diversion as opposed to useful labor.

[2]This essay is based on a sample that includes four of the leading middle class women's home magazines, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *American Home*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *House Beautiful*. I examined each of these magazines for its entire run of issues, 1948–1955. For purposes of comparison, I have also researched general magazines, men's magazines, and women's magazines aimed at a less affluent reader. For more on sources and method, see my dissertation (1988a).

[3]I do not mean to ignore the fact that domestic servants were themselves detached from the family activities through the Victorian model of space and its elaborate separation of servant quarters from central living areas.

[4]This is not to say that television was the only domestic machine to disrupt representations of gender. Roland Marchand (1985) claims that ads for radio sets and phonographs reversed pictorial conventions

for the depiction of men and women. Ads traditionally showed husbands seated while wives perched on the arm of a chair or sofa. But Marchand finds that "in the presence of culturally uplifting [radio and phonograph] music, the woman more often gained the right of reposed concentration while the (more technologically inclined) man stood prepared to change the records or adjust the radio dials" (pp. 252-253). In the case of television, Marchand's analysis and interpretation do not seem to apply since men were often shown seated and unable or unwilling to control the technology.

The reasons for this warrant a book-length study. Some tentative explanations come from Marchand (1982), who argues that the waning of male authority in the public sphere of corporate life contributed to men's increased participation and "quests for dominion" in private life. However, I would add speculatively that the whole category of masculinity was being contested in this period. The "quests for dominion" were accompanied by an equally strong manifestation of their opposite. The down-trodden male heroes of film *noir* and the constant uncertainty about the sexual status of the "family man" in the melodramas and social problem films suggest that American culture was seeking to redefine sexual identity, or at least to give sexual identity meaning in a world where the gendered balance of social and economic power was undergoing change.

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