

The evolution of the american television family



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Television is not just a form of entertainment, but it is an excellent form of study of society's view concerning its families. This study focuses on the history of television beginning in the early 1950s and will run through present day. It examines the use of racial, ethnic and sexual stereotypes to characterize the players of these shows. The examples assist in tracing what has happened to the depiction of the American family on prime time television. It reveals the change of the standards employed by network television as disclosed to the American public. Finally, I will propose the question of which is the influential entity, television or the viewing audience.

The Goldbergs, which was originally a radio show, became the first popular family series. It became a weekly TV series in 1949, revealing to Americans a working class Jewish family who resided in a small apartment in the Bronx. The show, while warm and humorous, confronted delicate social issues, such as sensitivity due to the Second World War. It is an excellent example of an ethnic family's status in society.

A classic among classics, I Love Lucy appeared on television on October 15, 1951, ([http://www. nick-at-nite. com/tvretro/shows/ilovelucy/index. tin](http://www.nick-at-nite.com/tvretro/shows/ilovelucy/index.tin)). The series premise focused on the antics of a nonsensical wife who beguiles her easily angered husband. The series created the men-versus-women standard on television, (such as what we see between Dan and Roseanne on Roseanne today), that still predominates today. One circumstance that led TV executives to seriously challenge the show's impending success was the use of Lucille Ball's real-life Cuban husband, Desi Arnaz. The mixed-marriage status was a questionable concept that worried the administrators. The

situation prevailed; its episodes routinely attracted over two-thirds of the television audience.

Leave it to Beaver, the definitive 1950s household comedy, focused on life through the eyes of an adolescent boy, Beaver. Beaver was a typically disorderly youngster. His brother Wally, just entering his teens, was beginning to discover the opposite sex. The relationship that existed between the boys and their parents, Ward and June, was impeccable. A situation never developed that damaged the kinship beyond restoration. The parents exhibited perfect attributes that no real man and wife could attain. The children bestowed unnatural virtues. The program became popular with Americans but it did not realistically portray Americas family status. In 1974, a series developed by Garry Marshal entitled Happy Days issued popularity to this era. The Cunningham family was the primary family featured on the program.

The view of the American family modified little when the sixties arrived. Leave it to Beaver dominated television through 1963. In 1961, the Dick Van Dyke Show aided in reinforcing the flawless family image. Some viewers thought Rob and Laura Petire were visibly similar to the first family, John and Jackie Kennedy. The highly successful series Bewitched further developed the perception of an immaculate suburbia. The identical condition developed by the Ward and Petire families was operative in the Stephens family.

Each television household featured a working father, affectionate mother, and attentive children. Each family was a middle-class family and all financially secure. They each resided in secure households, which were in

carefree urban areas. The morality displayed between the parents was commendable and sacred.

The finest depiction of the American family living in the 1960s came twenty years later. *The Wonder Years*, which debuted on January 31, 1988, exhibited the best portraiture of a middle-class family in distinction to the 1960s. The Arnold family featured a struggling urban household. The parents were both conventional and, in the case of the father, emotionally distant. Kevin, the teen-aged hero, growing pains mirrored those of America itself.

The end of the 1960s witnessed a drastic alteration in America's culture. Television's reflection of society had begun to mature. A solitary bed replaced the twin beds customarily utilized in the depiction of bedrooms. The relationship shared between parents and their children possessed increased difficulty. *The Brady Bunch* challenged the accepted family structure as it pertained to television. Television's first blended family was introduced. The program contested certain typical regulations while practicing others.

The face of television changed forever in the fall of 1971. *Norman Lear's All in the Family* brought a sense of harsh reality to television which previously had been populated largely by inoffensive characters and stories that seemed to have been laundered before they were ever placed on the air. Its chief character, Archie Bunker, was uneducated, prejudiced, and blatantly outspoken. His constant lambasting of virtually every minority group in existence characterized the program as controversial. His problematic marriage to Edith was due to their contrasted racial ideas. The relationship that he shared with his daughter, Gloria, was strained after her decision to

enter the matrimonial state with a Pole, Mike Stivic. The show became the first notable series to address racial, ethnic, and social issues within the home.

Following the All in the Family genre, family series took a more conservative approach. In Family Ties, the mellow 1960s clashed with the conservative 1980s, which in some ways reflected Americas changing values in the Reagan era. The childrens ideas were in sharp contrast to that of their parents, leading to humorous conflict between the two groups. The Bill Cosby Show also addressed the variance between children of the 1980s and theyre contrasted parents. One substantial discrepancy between the two shows was race and economic status. The Bill Cosby Show confronted the social issues that pertained to a black upper class family. Both programs represented conservative issues that the majority of American families faced at this time.

In the 1990s, television as a whole has developed a sense of reality in its programming. The dominant role women possess in the family and in society are better defined. In Roseanne, the idea of the American family is much more realistic than that of those shows from the 1950s. The familys obnoxious mother is the most dynamic member of the family. Married with Children was an overly exaggerated example of a problematic family. While it was a far cry from reality, the show expressed the societys opinion of its own culture in a satirical fashion.

Televisions portrayal of the American family has undergone a significant transformation in the fifty years of its existence, as stated by this essay. The

families seen on television today are the diametric opposite of those seen in the early 1950s. The relationship between the parents and the children has gone from perfect to dysfunctional. But, it is the dysfunctional relationships that are better examples of American families. Racial and ethnic lines have been crossed in the fifty years of televisions existence. If anything, television families have been teachers, showing the viewing audiences how to act and how things truly are. Blind folds, previously worn by the American people, have been taken off and thrown away. It is societys greater appreciation for honesty that has greatly influenced television.

Film and Cinema