similar background. And if you want to talk seriously, you go to church.

Discussion in the church takes place in a relaxed atmosphere. You don't feel threatened, and you don't have to be afraid of what you say or of your opinions. The church lets you be fluid. You can freely discuss problems. The greatest value in the church is that problems are freely discussed.

The group I attend has been discussing basic values. I can talk without fear of being crucified. All of us can let our hair down and free ourselves of pent-up emotions. In bull sessions your friends are very often critical; and they like to say things but hate to listen to what you have to say. I feel better talking in a church group. At least I'm able to express my true feeling. This kind of makes me free. We come down to the truth—at least what the truth seems to be to each of us. This is important. If people couldn't talk freely in one place, where could we get at truth? I guess this maybe is the church's responsibility. It has to give people what they need—a place to be free where they can catch their breath. [Young man, twenty-six.]

If the church could be what it ought to be, then I could be a part of it. [Young man, twenty-two.]

They really care for you there. They live in the bright sunlight of Christianity without umbrellas (referring to the church where "I really began to live"). [Young woman, twenty-five.]

Through a number of conversations with my pastor, I recently came to accept the Christian faith and joined the church. For I saw the shape of the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle life had been, and, when that piece dropped into shape, my life was all put together. It was a *whole.* [Adult woman, thirty-three.]

POPULAR CULTURE AND IMAGES OF THE FAMILY

By GEORGE GERBNER

[*Professor Gerbner is at the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois. This article is an adaptation of his presentation at the 1959 meeting of the Illinois Council on Family Relations. It helps us in understanding a whole segment of young adults, for the readers of confession magazines are mostly women in their twenties, late adolescence, and early thirties. (Also most of the followers of the celebrity gods are feminine.) But, even more importantly, he helps us to understand a new phenomenon in civilization—popular culture. Popular culture is clusters of people organized by mass media into listening and believing publics, trained to need recurring doses of particular types of images, ideas, experiences. Each of these cultures is therefore both a world of meanings about life and a unit of consumers that can be dependably delivered to the "Madison Avenue" advertising trade.*]

I will attempt to give some evidence of what the image of the family might be in popular culture. The picture will not be complete; it will be fragmentary; and in many ways it will not be pretty. If the net result is to confuse you with some facts, this is a professional hazard in research.

I will first give a few glimpses from research in various mass media and then come specifically to what is known in the

publishing trade as "family behavior magazines," more popularly known as the "confession magazine."

Now what is meant by "popular culture"? I will use the term as meaning mass-distributed images. Images are mass produced and mass marketed, not just for the purpose of selling themselves as a commodity, but as a means for selling other goods. That is, mass media attract and organize publics to which the advertiser can successfully make his pitch. This final purpose has a profound effect upon the images produced for popular culture. It influences more and more every image that is produced and distributed.

The studies I shall report deal with the images which are produced rather than with their effect upon the viewer and the listener. To find out the image called forth in the reader is yet another research job. I will present what is actually being "used," not what it means in the lives of the "users."

IMAGE OF PARENTS PRESENTED IN POPULAR CULTURE

It is interesting to see what happens to fathers and mothers in the popular culture of mass media. Some people who have studied "Li'l Abner" since its beginning (it has been going since 1934) come up with such observations as the following. When they started out, Mammy and Pappy Yokum were the same size as Li'l Abner. In the course of time they began to shrink. Paralleling certain crises and emotional upheavals, they grew in stature again. But, for a number of years, Mammy and Pappy have been permanently dwarfed by Li'l Abner. A number of other studies of comic strips show the interesting way in which the sizes of people over a period of time reflect the amount of power and relative position they hold.

Now among the major developments brought about by the industralization and urbanization of life is the taking of the father out of the home, out of the context of the family for a large portion of his life. The mother is in the home and becomes the primary agent of socialization. She becomes the conscience figure. She represents discipline and moral codes. As such, she becomes very disturbing. So we find that in a growing number of mass-culture products, in which tension and disturbance are to be eliminated, the mother is eliminated.

A large number of comic strips—and an even larger number of the funny animal comics—that apparently portray and resemble family situations lack a mother. There is no mother at all, although there are uncles and aunts, grandmothers and grandfathers. Or there may be somebody else in the mother role—a stepmother (and this legitimatizes her disturbing role) or a "good" fairy. These two solutions are present also in many fairy tales. Take, for example, the story of *Pinocchio*. In that story there is no mother. It is the father who gives life to Pinocchio in the first place and is the beloved companion. But there is a mother image in the form of a good fairy, who represents conscience, punishment, discipline.

A common trend in popular culture products is to please and to sell—and this atmosphere requires the elimination of disturbing elements. And so, the psychological reasoning goes, the elimination of the mother.

A few years ago a study was made of the success of Arthur Godfrey. Six social scientists were put together in a hotel room and for three days viewed films of his show, in order that they might tell the advertising agency why Godfrey was so successful. Their verdict was that Godfrey and the "little Godfreys" were successful because they presented an image of a

family without tension—namely, without a mother. I might add that this happened before Julius LaRosa shattered the public's picture of this happy family.

A study of American films found a similar image. The heroes and heroines are generally people unbound by family ties. The image of the lonely, isolated hero is extremely powerful. More than half the male heroes, and just about half of the heroines, have no relatives.

The emphasis, you see, is upon the family you make, not the family you come from. The family you come from, if it is present in the image, usually means trouble and danger or at least outmoded ideas to be fought and opposed in many ways. In the motion pictures studied, the father-daughter relationship was the only one that tended to be positive. However, it was counterbalanced by the fact that, if a movie heroine happens to be a mother, her life tends to be much more full of frustrations, anxieties, and troubles than if the movie heroine is unmarried.

These studies of motion pictures indicate that the emotional significance of manifest family figures tends to be minimal. American movies thus reflect the tendency to put the older generation in the background and to register an emotional involvement with them as finished business. This as far as the manifest figures are concerned. The people who did the research went on to describe some of the not-so-manifest or latent figures, and it appears that, when male heroes were involved, while fathers rarely appeared, almost universally there was the appearance of an older man, who eventually involves the hero in mortal combat, against whom the hero must triumph. The suggestion there is that perhaps the emotional involvement with the older generation is not so lacking as the manifest roles might indicate.

MALE AND FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

A social scientist has recently studied the relationships of males and females in American comic strips.

In terms of power, children rank first; then mother, with father far behind. Yet single men and married women are high in aggressiveness—as are females, in general, who appear in the comic strips (remember I am merely reporting how they are portrayed, not asserting that this is the way men and women are!). Unmarried males are usually taller than their female partners, but, after marriage, they begin to shrink. Married men are generally shorter than their wives and female partners. As pictured in the comic strips, man has as his major desire and goal to be left alone. And this can never be realized because a wife is always after him. Adventuresome heroes who meet with unqualified success and admiration tend to be men who do not reciprocate love—the tough guy, the bad man, the detective, many of the cowboy heroes.

The over-all conclusion of this study of male and female relations in the American comic strip was that, while love is a universally recognized goal, love tends to be dangerous because it leads to marriage, and marriage is a situation in which men lose their strength.

POPULAR CULTURE AS DEVELOPED BY THE CONFESSION MAGAZINE

With these few glimpses of the images presented in mass culture, let us narrow our focus to the world of the romance confession magazines.

The confession magazine market is a fairly large one. The group contains about forty titles, with a total circulation of about sixteen million. Its readership is the blue-collar or wage-earning family group. The small towns in the United States and of the South and Midwest furnish propor-

tionately more readers than other areas. The distinct appeal of these magazines is to a group of women who consider themselves—and are viewed by the publishers—as a distinct subculture and social class. The publishers capitalize on this and make it their major appeal to the clients (the advertisers) who make it possible for them to publish. They say to the advertisers, "Here is a market that no other group of magazines reaches. It is a large market. While it isn't very wealthy as individuals, neither is it a poor market; the sum total of purchasing power is great." (They figure about thirty million dollars a year spending money.)

There is little overlapping among those who read confession magazines and those who read the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, etc. These latter magazines—called, in the trade, "women's service magazines"—reach very few of the blue-collar or wage-earning market.

So much for the broad statistics. Now the publishers and editors have to draw sharper aim. What are these readers like? What kind of "a world" presented in their stories will keep them continuing to read the magazine?

Studies have found that, by and large, the confession-magazine reader tends to accept the world as a chaotic and brutal place. She feels that it is beyond her control. She feels that she is not an effective part of the broader society in which she lives. She tends to the fatalistic. (So that we may avoid misunderstanding, let me say that these are not my conclusions about these people. I am simply indicating the assumptions which the magazine publishers and editors proclaim about their audiences on the basis of their research studies.)

She is confused by abstractions but is eager for guidance. But she can accept and understand guidance only in simple, concrete, and specific terms. She cannot or will not read about or discuss issues and principles. Her interests are confined to people and things. She wants to read about people in real situations, with real problems, doing things.

Researchers have found that the blue-collar or wage-earning family women are not nearly so confident of their abilities as wives and mothers as are the readers of the women's service magazines. They are not so sure of their husbands; they very seldom either expect or demand shared power and responsibility in the home. They are most comfortable with their relatives and not nearly so comfortable with others.

The women who read the *Ladies' Home Journal* feel that their husbands are family-oriented; that, as wife and mother, they are the center of the family; and that their relationship to their children is in many ways similar to their relationship to their husbands. Many of them implied that they treat their husbands pretty much in the same way and on the same level as they treat their children.

The confession reader, by contrast, sees the man as prominent and controlling. She also feels that she has to accept rough behavior (and, in view of some of the stories I will mention, that is an understatement) in order to keep her man. She sees herself as playing a dual role—emotionally her duties and obligations as a wife are somewhat apart from her responsibility and emotions as a mother. Her family, then, is based on these two rather separate relations—that of wife to husband and that of mother to child. And, according to the publishers and the editors who sponsored this study, this dual role can and does give her a great deal of trouble. This is one of the reasons, they say, why these women found the content of confession magazines relevant and very often helpful to their lives.

The split in these two roles may be illustrated by story titles, such as "Torn between Duty and Desire," "He Locked Me Out," and "The Devil in My Man." This last story has a subtitle: "Facing the truth: at last I knew my husband was destroying the children, but he was my lover and I could not let him go." Or here is the story of a young mother who saw her child killed by an automobile, because she had taken the child with her when she had left home in a fit of anger after an argument with her husband. It was made clear that she could never thereafter escape the sense of personal guilt that she had for her child's death.

BASIC DESIGN OF LIFE IN THE STORIES

In this story can be seen some of the ingredients that dictate the general run of stories in these magazines. There is present the qualities of fear and violence in the family. The wife leaves home rather than the husband (as a story for the white-collar reader would have had it). Married life has the feeling of guilt and inadequacy. And terrible punishment is meeted out to her for leaving home—even with provocation.

Now, in order to get readership, the stories need to evoke identification with the central character. First of all, this requires a flavor of authenticity and content dealing with real fear—real problems that disturb the women who read the magazines. But identification also requires a strong dose of sympathy with the heroine. Editors are as reluctant to use an unsympathetic heroine, no matter how much she sins and suffers, as they would be to put a homely looking girl on a magazine cover.

However, sympathetic characterization is not an easy task when it is combined with the requirements of realistic flavor in a sordid situation. So, as the editors say in the specifications they send out to writers, the problem in the confession story is how to get basically decent people into these messes.

To sum it up in the words of the practicing writers and editors, one simple formula underlies three-fourths of all published confession stories—a simple, trustful human is faced with a complex, real, and brutal world. And, as a subheading under this formula, characters make their discovery of the truth by bumping up against troubles as they rush headlong down the path of least resistance. The overwhelming truth which they discover is that you must adjust. You must be set back—if necessary, beaten back—to the place where you were led into the sin of taking the line of least resistance; but this time you must accept necessity as a virtue. Therefore you have learned what the publishers call the "truth"—the central lesson or moral of the story. Not only have ideals been pointed out as unrealistic but the most violent and hostile aspects of the reality of interpersonal and intrafamily relationships have been asserted as the whole of them.

The path to happiness is a long and rocky path, and it goes through hell. The agony of the journey that is found in these stories is made possible only by the underlying assumption that life can be terrible. The reader assumes that the world is a hostile jungle, and, then identifying with the first-person narrator, travels this path, and sins and suffers with the heroine as she stumbles inevitably into the booby trap of common nightmares that are placed along the road.

According to the editors, stories about marital problems are most in demand, with courtship, wild-teen, and sensational shocker type stories a close second. While the most frequently stated goal in these stories is a happy and secure family life—to put it gently, family life is troubled. Violence is always around the corner, and

illness strikes frequently in these stories. In a sample of 100 stories, 1 out of 3 involved serious physical illness, and 1 out of 5 involved mental illness. There were 17 fatal accidents, 16 fist fights, 14 murders, 12 violent quarrels, 8 rapes, and 4 suicides. Some 44 per cent of the narrators reported their own marriage on the point of breaking up; 21 per cent recounted unpleasant scenes from their childhood about the marital relationship of their parents. So the most persistent flavor of these stories is a weird sort of family counseling. In fact, this feature is recognized by the publishers, who say: "Our readers don't go to psychologists, and they don't go to psychiatrists, and they don't go to family counselors. They read our stories."

When one reads many of these stories at any one time, he gets the sensation of eavesdropping on a marriage clinic of a very peculiar and special kind. He reads sequences of family quarrels, beating of children, wives murdering husbands, mothers jealous of daughters, fathers jealous of sons, mothers kicking daughters out of the house because the daughters interfere with the mothers' current romances, etc. I have a collection of prize-winning stories, of which I will mention three. The heart of one story is the insanity of a spouse. "Shut Out of Life" is a story of a girl whose overwhelming terror of her half-mad father keeps her chained to her home. "My Father Destroyed Me" is the story of a girl who has epilepsy and discovers that, because of her epilepsy, her father has had her sterilized.

Now to shoulder the burden of all these troubles and all this responsibility, and to evoke the punishment that is meeted out by the stern code of the confession story, the characters must be dominated by some kind of urge—preferably an inner and uncontrollable urge. This urge is found to be the sex drive.

In the 100 stories analyzed, there were 40 cases of adultery, 30 of premarital relations, and 4 of prostitution, plus the 8 cases of rape previously mentioned. The stories were characterized by problems suggested by subtitles such as these: "What should a married woman do when she feels an overpowering sex urge for a man who is not her husband?" "How can a woman defend herself against sexual urges, which she feels will ruin her life?" "How can a woman avoid being a slave to sex?" This will indicate the flavor, and the point of view, that is taken in the matter of sex. Sex becomes something of overwhelming power, of tremendous fear, of danger. Now, this does not mean that these are what one would call "sexy" stories, because of the unsavory, if not tragic and fearful, views that are taken on this subject. But, basically, they advise—and very often explicitly—young women to be realistic and to forget about many of their ideals. There is a great deal of hard-boiled realism in these stories that says in effect: This is reality, this is life in the raw; it's pretty terrible and brutal, but you have no control over it anyhow, and you know it. So you might as well reconcile to it and do the best you can and make necessity into some kind of a virtue of adjustment.

AS PRESENTED IN ONE STORY

I would like to finish with a story that I picked at random. It will indicate how some of the ingredients based upon the assumptions about the audiences and the appeals to the market and the advertisers are worked out in the dynamics of the actual story.

This story is entitled: "How Can I Face Myself, I Let Him Cheapen Me?" It is narrated by the daughter of a plumber's family. The story already opens in the shadow of recent tragedy. The father and brother have just been killed in an automobile accident which wrecked the family's new car and a neighbor's kitchen. The story describes the neighbor's kitchen

in some detail—it is a well-equipped kitchen with all the new appliances that "everyone" has.

The characters start out facing a very brutal world right at the outset. Mama and Marilyn (Marilyn is the heroine) are left with nothing but grief, payments, and a debt of thousands of dollars for funeral, hospital, and damages. They work in a department store, and the owner of this store is a man by the name of Morrison. Mama is cashier, and Marilyn is a sales-girl. One day Morrison discovers that Mama has embezzled $450 to help pay these debts. Armed with this information, he goes to Marilyn and forces her to submit to his advances by threatening to send Mama to prison if she does not. Marilyn first confronts her mother and finds that her mother is completely demoralized by the discovery of what she has done and also by finding that she—the mother who is supposed to represent conscience and morality—is now being judged by her own daughter (a not unfamiliar turn of events in many of these stories of parent-child relationships). But the mother does not come out and say: "No, don't do it." In fact, she kind of indicates this is a tragic life, and maybe this is the only thing she can do. She does not say to do it, but she does not protest, so Marilyn goes back and does as Morrison asks her to do. But she feels that her life is ruined, that she has been made into a tramp. She goes home and strikes her mother in a bitter scene. Upon this, her mother is shamed and completely broken and, not knowing that Marilyn has already lost her virginity, decides to give herself up to prevent it. Mama's new resolution, however, gives Marilyn courage to go back to the department store and tell Morrison that she is not going to give in to him again. Marilyn is tortured by what she has done and decides that there is only one thing she can do now. There is one man, a kind of gruff, junkyard man, who is the only one at all interested in her. There is no particular attachment between the two, but she decides to marry him to try to forget about what happened. There is an indication in the last two lines of the story that this guilt of what she has done will haunt her forever.

Now, what does this story illustrate? Of course, it illustrates the basic formula —simple, trustful humans with the cards stacked against them from the outset. Life is represented as cruel and dull. Marilyn repeats this often throughout the story. "About the only thing you can figure," she says, characteristically, "is the monthly payment." That they know they will always have. She says in one place: "Life has been so cruel to Mama and so dull. Dad had always worked hard, but like a lot of people, our family always owed more than we had. If we wanted something and could figure the payment, we just got it." So you see, there is a somewhat realistic attitude taken as far as the matter of family finances, but it is represented as the thing to do; this is what everybody does. Sex comes to Marilyn as probably the sharpest and cruelest of the blows that her jungle society metes out to its members. Not only that but there is no hint of any desire or enjoyment; it is specifically pointed out in the words of Mr. Morrison that "you are only doing this for your Mother's sake." Part of a bargain, just another sharp deal, by the world, by the society in which she lives, and over which she has little or no control. In loneliness, debt, and greed, Mama also turns bitter against the world, and she cries out in protest after she is confronted with the discovery of her embezzlement: "Morrison's got plenty of money, he is not always honest. Lots of people are that way, and I'm tired of being made to pay for lots of things I'll never have, other people's things I've never seen. I'm tired, Marilyn, I'm tired. I hate the whole world."