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Watching the family

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Synopsis

The Pattern of Marriage was a four-part television documentary produced by the BBC in 1953. It followed a young couple through courtship to marriage, the birth of their first child, marital problems which lead to a temporary separation, and their final reconciliation. It was based on the notion of the family as the basic unit of social organization, and it attempted to construct its family audience as a secure unit which, although not without its internal difficulties, must be upheld.

This paper sets out to show how the BBC felt a duty to re-establish the "happy family" as a norm and how this was implemented through specific BBC policy. It examines the BBC's definition of an "ordinary" family and the audience response to that constructed definition. It also looks at how the BBC, in relation to its understanding of the post-war period, "dealt with" the image of the family and the "pattern of marriage" on television in the early 1950s.

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