

Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945–60

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IN THE YEARS AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN CANADA, residential suburbs provided symbolic female counterparts, 'bedrooms' as it were, to the male-dominated, market-oriented world of modern cities.¹ Tracts of new housing embodied a separation of the sexes that held women particularly responsible for home and family and men for economic support and community leadership. Such a gendered landscape was far from new or unusual in Canada. Women and men had long moved in somewhat different worlds, presiding over residential and public space in varying degrees as dictated by custom and, sometimes,

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- 1 See Susan Saegert, 'Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs: Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities,' *Women and the American City*, ed. C. Stimpson, E. Dixler, M. Nelson, and K. Yatrakis (Chicago 1981), 106. The appeal of suburbs was not limited to cities. New resource towns, of which forty-six appeared between 1945 and 1957, provided numerous instances of what have been termed 'suburbs in search of a town,' 'suburbs in the wilderness,' 'suburbia in the bush,' 'transplanted suburbia,' 'experiment in conformity,' 'displaced southern suburb,' 'suburb without a metropolis.' Cited in Margaret P. Nunn Bray's useful overview, "'No Life for a Woman": An Examination and Feminist Critique of the Post-World War II Instant Town with Special Reference to Manitouwadge' (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1989), 46. While produced by many of the same forces, the gendered landscape of the resource town is, however, distinctive. This article explores the suburban experience only as it manifested itself around cities.

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by law.² After 1945, however, women's, particularly wives', rising labour-force participation might have suggested that spatial segregation on the suburban frontier was ill-timed. Why and how, then, did there occur a massive increase in residential suburbs remote from opportunities for employment, lacking many community resources, and reliant on female labour? What did female residents and contemporary observers make of this investment on the suburban frontier? This article begins to answer these questions by examining the conditions that gave rise to postwar suburbs, the character of housing initiatives, and the nature and meaning of that experience for Canadian women.

Historians of the United States have associated postwar housing development not only with technological improvements, gas and oil discoveries, and a massive increase in the number of private automobiles, but also with political conservatism, racism, and domestic roles for women.³ While scholars studying Canadian suburbs will find much that is useful in American assessments, particularly in their exploration of suburbia's gendered terrain, Paul-André Linteau's question, 'Does the border make a difference?'⁴ inevitably arises. Works like Michael A. Goldberg and John Mercer's *The Myth of the North American City: Continentalism Challenged* (1986) and Caroline Andrew and Beth Moore Milroy's *Life Spaces: Gender, Household, Employment* (1988) have offered the beginnings of a reply. In particular, Andrew and Milroy point to safer and more livable cities, a long tradition of resource towns, and 'the particular institutional and policy framework that exists in Canada,'⁵ all of which distinguish Canadian women's lives. Although comparisons with the United States remain peripheral to the study here, my reading of the Canadian suburban

2 See, for example, the discussion of gendered space in the provocative studies by Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners. Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950* (Toronto 1990), and Peter De Lottinville, 'Joe Beef of Montreal,' *Labour/Le Travailleur* 8/9 (autumn/spring 1981/2): 9-40.

3 Among the major studies see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier. The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York 1985), Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York 1987), Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York 1988), Margaret Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick and London 1990), and Dolores Hayden *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work and Family Life* (New York and London 1984).

4 'Canadian Suburbanization in a North American Context: Does the Border Make a Difference?' *Journal of Urban History* 13, 3 (May 1987): 252-74.

5 Caroline Andrew and Beth Moore Milroy, eds., *Life Spaces: Gender, Household, Employment* (Vancouver 1988), 4.

TABLE 1
Age-Specific Fertility Rates for Canadian Women, 1921-60⁶

Year	Age group of women						
	15-19	20-4	25-9	30-4	35-9	40-4	45-9
1960	59.8	233.5	224.4	146.2	84.2	28.5	2.4
1940	29.3	130.3	152.6	122.8	81.7	32.7	3.7
1921	38.0	165.4	186.0	154.6	110.0	46.7	6.6

'script' suggests that, for all the proliferation of American influences in the years after 1945, life north of the forty-ninth did indeed differ. In particular, Canada's cities, lacking racial divisions comparable with those in the United States, never lost their attraction for citizens of all classes. And just as flight from urban dangers does not seem as influential in Canada, suburbia does not appear as homogeneous as many American commentators have suggested. Communities composed of war veterans, industrial workers, rural emigrants, newcomers to Canada, and the middle-class native- and urban-born contribute to a picture that, as the sociologist S.D. Clark convincingly demonstrated in *The Suburban Society* (1968), seems every bit as complicated as what was happening downtown. While middle-class WASPs were a major presence, they were never alone on the outskirts of cities. Suburbia's meaning is further complicated by the influence of region. The background of residents and the rate of suburbanization in these years varied from one part of the country to the other, distinguishing the experience of Montreal from Toronto and from Halifax, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver. Facing as they did a different set of contingencies, Canadian women were not mere reflections of American suburbanites. The nature of their story is set out below.

The postwar experiment with the promise of a spatial segregation that placed Canadian women in suburban homes and men in employment located elsewhere was fuelled by high rates of fertility. During the Second World War and into the 1950s, couples married at ever younger ages. First and second babies came earlier in these marriages, and increasing numbers of women gave birth to third children (see table 1). Fewer women had no children. Bigger families increased women's home-based responsibilities. Not surprisingly, women were often preoccupied with their roles as wives and mothers. Housing

6 See John R. Miron, *Housing in Postwar Canada* (Kingston and Montreal 1988), from table 3, p. 35. See also chapter 3 for an excellent discussion of family formation patterns in the years after 1945.

where children could be cared for comfortably and safely was an urgent priority in many women's lives.

Whereas their parents had often had to be crowded and uncomfortable, postwar Canadians aspired to something better. Between 1945 and 1960 nearly continuous prosperity, high employment, the extension of the welfare state, and the presumption of a limitless bank of natural resources generated income and hopes for a better life, and, if possible, the lifestyle of comfortable homes and new products advertised since the 1920s in the continent's popular media.⁷ Rising car ownership offered unprecedented numbers of citizens the opportunity to search for homes well beyond areas where employment opportunities were concentrated.⁸ Many male breadwinners, the most likely both to drive and to control the use of cars,⁹ no longer had to rely on walking or public transit to get to work. An increase in the production of oil, gas, and hydroelectric power was available to power both new cars and the central heating characteristic of new homes.¹⁰ Residential suburbs on the periphery were the beneficiaries of these developments.

New housing that enshrined a gendered division of labour also responded to a generation's anxiety about changes in the world about them. The threat of the Cold War and the Korean War encouraged citizens to prize the private consumption and accumulation of products in the nuclear family household as proof of capitalism's success. Stable families, fulltime mothers, and the benefits they produced in sound citizenship were to provide the first defence against the 'Red Menace' symbolized in Canada by the Gouzenko Affair.¹¹ Suburban housewives at home in ever larger houses epitomized the promise that prosperity would guarantee both individual happiness and the final triumph over communism.¹²

The inclination to concentrate on private matters and to cling to

7 See Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada 1919-1939* (Toronto 1988).

8 The number of passenger automobiles registered in Canada rose from 1,281,190 in 1941 to 2,105,869 in 1951 to 4,325,682 in 1961. Series T147-194, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa 1983)

9 See Charles L. Sanford, ' "Woman's Place" in American Car Culture,' *The Automobile and American Culture*, ed. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor 1983).

10 See Series Q13-18 to Q75-80, *Historical Statistics of Canada*.

11 See, for example, John Thomas, 'How to Stay Married,' *Canadian Home Journal* (April 1955): 2-3.

12 For a useful discussion of the impact of the Cold War on sex roles in the United States see May, *Homeward Bound*.

the faith in women's particular talent and responsibility for family survival was fostered further in the 1940s and 1950s by the highly publicized predicament of many of the world's citizens. The statelessness of the 'Displaced Persons,' or 'DPs' as the 165,000 who had come to Canada by 1953 were commonly known,¹³ like the plight of concentration camp survivors, captured especially poignantly what it meant to lose families and homes. The arrival of 48,000 war brides added to Canadians' consciousness of how much the future depended on the establishment of new households and the persistence of marital bonds.¹⁴ The promise of a renewed family life, secured by all the benefits of a revived capitalist economy, became in some ways the *leit-motif* of the second Elizabethan Age. As one typical enthusiast put it, 'the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh [sic] are young, modern parents who, like many other young people, in an anxious and insecure world, find their deepest happiness and satisfaction in the warm circle of family life.'¹⁵ In suburban homes and families, Canadians endeavoured modestly to echo the ideals embodied in the domesticated monarchy of the youthful Elizabeth II.

The popular and academic social sciences of the day sanctioned the inclination to believe that collective happiness and well-being were most likely when women concentrated their energies on the home front. Experts' secular sermons, frequently presented in the guise of a celebration of female nature, stressed women's unique qualities. With some few exceptions, assertions of inferiority were out of fashion. As one Toronto psychiatrist observed, 'Today we think of marriage as a partnership of equals.'¹⁶ To this end, modern fathers were encouraged to take on some care of children.¹⁷ Yet, while up-to-date advisers flattered their female audiences with claims for equality, even superiority, 'true' women had normally to demonstrate their authenticity by pursuing roles centred on the private rather than the public sphere. Women's ability to take on a broad range of duties, so well

13 James Lemon, *Toronto since 1918* (Toronto 1985), 94

14 See Joyce Hibbert, *The War Brides* (Toronto 1978), for revealing portraits of the brides who came to Canada.

15 Alice Hooper Beck, 'Royal Mother,' *Chatelaine* (Jan. 1951): 63. See Hector Bolitho, 'The Queen's Conflict. How Can One Woman Fulfill the Dual Role of Monarch and of Mother?' *ibid.* (Feb. 1953): 12-13, 36, 38, 40. See also David Macdonald, 'Farewell to the Fifties,' *Star Weekly* (2 Jan. 1960): 10-11, 14, who saw the decade as 'frantic ... an age of anxiety,' 24.

16 Dr K.S. Bernhardt, 'Happily Ever After,' *Bride's Book* (fall/winter 1952): 75

17 See Fred Edge, 'Are Fathers Necessary?' *Canadian Home Journal* (Feb. 1953): 24, 63; John Thomas, 'Are Fathers Necessary?' *ibid.* 24, 63-4, and 'Father's a Parent, Too,' *Canadian Home and Gardens* (April 1952): 29-31.

demonstrated during the years of depression and war, was conveniently dismissed as an aberration. In advising Canadians how to live, experts returned to opinions that were reminiscent of the 1920s.¹⁸

Lives that were gender-specific lay at the heart of a number of influential texts that enjoyed general circulation across Canada in the years after the Second World War. Among the earliest and most influential was Dr Benjamin Spock's best-selling *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1947).¹⁹ As one Canadian from the suburb of Lachine, Quebec, recalled, 'Dr Spock of course was my "Bible."' ²⁰ Although most women consulted the good doctor for practical advice on treating childhood ills, his answers reinforced conventions holding women primarily responsible for the emotional and practical functioning of the household. A veteran of suburbs in Cooksville and North York, Ontario, summed up the conclusions of many of her generation: 'I felt quite sure in those days that women who chose to have a family should stay home and raise them! I had worked as a social worker for the Children's Aid Society and had seen the emotional devastation in children separated from mothers.'²¹

Spock was far from alone in applauding women who mothered. Ashley Montague's best seller, *The Natural Superiority of Women* (1953), celebrated women both for their gentler dispositions and for their biological superiority. Not coincidentally, he concluded that 'the most important of women's tasks is the making of human beings ... [and] because mothers are closer to their children than fathers, they must of necessity play a more basic role in the growth and development of their children.'²² A self-proclaimed women's champion, Montague applied his reading of modern science to 'undermine the age-old belief in feminine inferiority,'²³ but in the process he reasserted the faith that biology was destiny. The capacity for motherhood was, as with both the older anti-feminist and the maternal feminist tradition, identified as the very source of superiority.

Ashley Montague's fundamentally conservative message appeared

18 See Strong-Boag, *New Day*.

19 See J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York 1986).

20 Mildred Grace Baker, 'Canadian Women and the Suburban Experience 1945-60: Questionnaire for Residents' (henceforth 'Questionnaire'), to author (1991), 8. See also note 147 below.

21 Marjorie Bacon, 'Questionnaire,' 16

22 A. Montague, *The Natural Superiority of Women* (New York 1953), 188. See the favourable assessment in Joan Morris, 'The Scientific Truth about 'Male Superiority,' *Canadian Home Journal* (July 1957): 15, 45.

23 Ibid., 25

in the same year as the publication of *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953),²⁴ the second volume on human sexuality by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues. In the forefront of the 'sexology' of its day, this volume documented women's possession of a powerful libido, the physiological equivalent of male sexual response.²⁵ Under the influence of such scientific authority, an active sexuality became increasingly accepted as the prerequisite of satisfactory personal and marital life.²⁶ The result could be higher levels of intimacy and equality between the sexes, but women's erotic potential could easily be incorporated into an updated domestic ideal. Kinsey's support for the female libido and his opposition to guilt and shame about sexual acts were closely tied to marital and social stability. His early work was used to justify Canadians' youthful marriage: only then could sexuality find its proper channels.²⁷ Ultimately, Kinsey's pioneering studies reinforced the tendency to dedicate women to private life.

The assignment of women to roles as wives and mothers was further legitimated by the popularity of the functionalist school of sociology that dominated the discipline as it established itself throughout Canada. The work of the leading American 'father' of this tradition, Talcott Parsons, drew on 'the anatomy is destiny' psychiatry of Freud and his followers to argue that women and men naturally had different, albeit compatible and equal, roles within society. Women were responsible for expressive functions of mediating and nurturing; men for instrumental functions of struggle and leadership. The first responsibilities directed women to the private sphere and the second legitimated men's domination of public life. Husbands concentrated on the workplace and its values of 'rationality, impersonality, self-interest,' while wives guided children in the traditional family values

24 See the positive, if cautious, review of Kinsey's work by J.R. Seeley and J. Griffin in *Canadian Welfare* (15 Oct. 1948); the optimistic assessment of the utility of early marriage for women, based on Kinsey's findings, in Miriam Chapin, 'Can Women Combine the B.A. and the Baby?' *Saturday Night* (21 Feb. 1948): 24; and the positive attitude to the similarity of male and female sexuality in Eleanor Rummung, 'Dr. Kinsey and the Human Female,' *ibid.* (15 Aug. 1953): 7-8. See also Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Toronto 1987), 113-15.

25 See Regina Markell Morantz, 'The Scientist as Sex Crusader: Alfred C. Kinsey and American Culture,' in *Procreation or Pleasure: Sexual Attitudes in American History*, ed. T.L. Altherr (Malabar 1983).

26 See 'Dr. Kinsey Talks about Women to Lotta Dempsey,' *Chatelaine* (Aug. 1949): 10-11, 59-60, and Claire Halliday, 'A New Approach to the Problem of Frigidity,' *Canadian Home Journal* (June 1956): 9, 69.

27 See 'The Age for Marriage,' *Chatelaine* (May 1948): 2.

of 'love, sharing, cooperation.'²⁸ Domestic life might no longer require long hours of hard physical labour, but the unremitting pressure of modern corporate life on men appeared to make women irreplaceable in the home as psycho-sexual managers.²⁹ The appropriate division of duties was summed up by Bell Telephone's company magazine, *The Bluebell*, which pointed to wives' appropriate role in a short story entitled 'WE Were Promoted.'³⁰ Both capitalist prosperity and humanized relationships were to be guaranteed by the functionalist division of labour. Such conclusions became the stock-in-trade of Canadian sociologists like J.R. Seeley, R.A. Sim, and E.W. Loosley, the authors of one of the foremost North American studies of suburban life, *Crestwood Heights* (1956).

Home-grown authorities like the popular gynaecologist Dr Marion Hilliard of Toronto's Women's College Hospital regularly voiced the conservative conclusions of the contemporary social sciences. Speaking to her own patients and countless others through articles in *Chatelaine*, she spread prevailing medical opinion:

The burden of creating a happy marriage falls mainly on the wife. A man's life is much more difficult than a woman's, full of the groaning strain of responsibility and the lonely and often fruitless search for pride in himself. A cheerful and contented woman at home, even one who must often pretend gaiety, gives a man enough confidence to believe he can lick the universe. I'm certain that the woman who enriches her husband with her admiration and her ready response gets her reward on earth, from her husband.³¹

Hilliard and most other Canadian 'experts' on home and family joined their American colleagues in arguing that women's most basic satisfactions came through service to others in the domestic sphere.

²⁸ Jan E. Dizard and Howard Gadlin, 'Family Life and the Marketplace: Diversity and Change in the American Family,' in *Historical Social Psychology*, ed. K.J. Gergen and M.M. Gergen (Hillsdale, and London 1984), 292

²⁹ See, for example, Elsiehes Thorpe, 'Does He Resent Your Working?' *Star Weekly* (May 1953), who emphasized the husband's right 'to have his wife's undivided attentions at times when he needs to unburden himself, the right to have a companion and a friend when he needs one,' 7; Charles Cerami, 'Are You Jealous of Your Husband's Job?' *ibid.* (8 Nov. 1958): 30-41; and J.K. Thomas, 'If He Lost His Job ...' *Canadian Home Journal* (Feb. 1957): 10-11.

³⁰ Ken Johnstone, 'How Do You Rate with Your Husband's Boss?' *Chatelaine* (March 1953): 70. See also the fierce rejection of the role of business helpmate in Mrs John Doe, 'An Open Letter to My Husband's Boss,' *Canadian Home Journal* (May 1954): 10-11, 90, 93.

³¹ Dr Marion Hilliard, *A Woman Doctor Looks at Love and Life* (Toronto 1957), 72-3

The verdict of professionals was repeatedly echoed in the dominion's mass media. Typical advertisements credited the housewife with 'the recipe for good citizenship ... for a woman's influence extends far beyond the horizons of housekeeping. She guards the family health by her buying standards; she shares in plans for the family welfare; hers is the opportunity of training her children ... of promoting good character and good citizenship.'³² Companies readily championed a feminine ideal that offered them real benefits. Corporate profits and male careers alike depended on women's concentrated efforts in the private sphere, more especially in new suburban homes where opportunities for purchases were unsurpassed.

Advertising in these years was only one part of a commercial onslaught hitting Canadians. Newspapers, magazines, radio, films, and, by the 1950s, television entered households with a distinct message about the meaning of the 'good life.' Radio soap operas such as 'Road of Life,' 'Big Sister,' 'Lucy Linton,' 'Life Can Be Beautiful,' and 'Ma Perkins' offered women escape from isolation and loneliness in dreams of consumption, romance, and improved family life.³³ Television shows like 'The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet,' 'I Love Lucy,' 'The Honeymooners,' and 'Father Knows Best' made it quite clear that good wives and mothers stayed properly at home far from the temptations of employment. Just as importantly, they suggested that women reaped real advantages from this division of duties. Wives may have looked a little foolish in these sitcoms, but audiences were encouraged to join in a conspiracy of good-humoured silence about the real power that they wielded. Housewives after all had the freedom to construct their own routines while spouses were tied to onerous duties as breadwinners.

What the experts and the media largely ignored after World War II was a massive increase in the labour-force participation rate of married women. This increased from 4.5 per cent in 1941, to 11.2 per cent in 1951, to 22.0 per cent in 1961. In the same years, wives rose from 12.7 per cent to 30.0 per cent to 49.8 per cent of all women in paid employment.³⁴ For all this dramatic change meant in terms of disposable family income and the nature of the labour mar-

32 Full-page ad for Eaton's, *Saturday Night* (9 Aug. 1949): 19

33 See the response of 2000 members of *Chatelaine's* Consumers' Council in Mary Juke, 'It Makes Married Life Easier,' *Chatelaine* (Sept. 1948): 22-3. On television see Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young. Primetime Canada 1952-1967* (Toronto 1990), 200-1, which includes a useful discussion of the sexism of broadcasting in these years.

34 S.J. Wilson, *Women, the Family and the Economy* (Toronto 1972), 19

ket, it appears to have done little initially to challenge women's primary identification as labourers in the domestic workplace.³⁵ Many post-war wives accepted periods of employment before childbirth and, sometimes, after children were in high school, as intervals in a modern life cycle that still saw them as chiefly responsible for home and family. In particular, energetic young wives could take pride in establishing families on a sound economic footing. Such was true of a 'white collar wife' in her early twenties employed by Montreal's CIL. Vivian used her salary to purchase new housing and 'other rewards: electrical kitchen appliances, bedroom and living room furniture, a small English car.' Her husband David paid other expenses. Traditional appearances were maintained when she assumed responsibility for most housework and received an allowance from David. Vivian planned to leave CIL at about the age of twenty-five to have between two and four children.³⁶ Many women hoped to do the same. The same assumptions underlay the 'putting hubby through school' phenomenon that first attracted public attention with the return of war veterans to university.³⁷ Women's work in the labour market regularly represented an investment in a more domestic future.

Incentives for female citizens to return home as soon as possible always remained considerable. Never missing were unequal opportunity and wages. Resources in support of female workers were meagre.³⁸ Matters at home were hardly better. Most families could only afford one car, on which the husband had first claim, and few settlements boasted adequate public transportation. Nor was that all. Working wives had to face the 'double day of labour.' One refugee from a clerical office explained that she had cheerfully given up a schedule that required 'twelve hours or more a day, seven days a week.'³⁹ Another clerical worker from North Toronto added:

35 For discussion of this phenomenon see Meg Luxton, Harriet Rosenberg, Sedef Arat-Koc, *Through the Kitchen Window. The Politics of Home and Family*, 2nd ed. (Toronto 1990).

36 Zoe Bieler, 'White-Collar Wife,' *Chatelaine* (Aug. 1953): 22-4, 37-40.

37 See, for example, Gwyn Le Capelan, 'I Worked My Husband's Way Through College,' *Chatelaine* (April 1949): 4-5. See also the discussion in National Archives of Canada (NA), MG 31, K 8, Mattie Rotenberg Papers, vol. 1, folder 66, radio broadcast 'Changing Patterns' (Jan. 1954).

38 See Ruth Roach Pierson, 'Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada, 1934-1960,' *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (spring 1990): 77-103.

39 See Anita A. Birt, 'Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job,' *Chatelaine* (Jan. 1960): 41.

As a married woman for fourteen years and a working wife for less than one year ... the two don't go together. You can't be a success at both. So I decided to quit my job to save my marriage.

You simply can't look after a home and go to the office too. I don't care who you are or how well organized you are, you can't be a good wife and mother, hostess and housekeeper and also do a good job for your employer all at the same time. When you try, someone is bound to get cheated.⁴⁰

Working wives had no right to hope for relief at home. As one writer for the *Star Weekly* insisted: 'I don't see how a job gives a woman a legitimate out on housekeeping. She still has the basic responsibility to run a home for the family. ... [and] ... a man whittles himself down to less of a man by consistently performing woman's work.'⁴¹ In the decades after the Second World War, income tax law, the absence of day care, formal and informal bars to female employment,⁴² and school schedules combined with a commercially fuelled celebration of domesticity and maternity and the general reluctance of husbands to assume household responsibilities to confirm the wisdom of staying home, if you had a choice.

Such decisions were applauded by experts who feared the worst. In 1953 a counsellor for Toronto's Family Court and the United Church summed up prevailing opinion, arguing that 'where the husband and wife are both working outside the home, very often a dangerous spirit of independence exists. Finally, it is quite impossible to do two jobs well.'⁴³ Women who dismissed such arguments could look forward to being scapegoated for a host of society's problems,

40 Dorothy Manning, 'I Quit My Job To Save My Marriage,' *ibid.* (June 1955): 16

41 Jean Libman Block, 'Husbands Should Not Do Housework!' *Star Weekly* (16 Nov. 1957): 6

42 See the complaint about discrimination against women in Francis Ecker, 'Will Married Women Go to War Again?' *Saturday Night* (30 Jan. 1951): 21-3. For a more extended discussion of the policies of the federal government in this area see Ruth Roach Pierson, 'They're Still Women After All': *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto 1986), chap. 2

43 John G. McCulloch, 'How To Be Sure of a Happy Marriage,' *Bride's Book* (spring/summer 1953): 86. See also John K. Thomas, 'How To Stay Married: Can Motherhood and Career Mix?' *Canadian Home Journal* (March 1955): 4, 6. For a contemporary assessment of women's own reservations about paid work, especially for mothers with young children, see Department of Labour, 'Married Women Workers: The Home Situation,' in *Canadian Society: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. B.R. Blishen, F.E. Jones, K.D. Naegele, and J. Porter (New York 1961), 176.

blamed for homosexual sons, juvenile delinquents, mental cripples, wandering and alcoholic husbands, and school truants.⁴⁴

When authorities repeatedly insisted that women were needed at home, the corollary often was that men were too weak to have them anywhere else. As the Kinsey reports had documented in detail, sexual orientation was conditional; men were the more vulnerable sex. When men's physical weakness was further disclosed by experts like Ashley Montague,⁴⁵ female discontent or competition appeared enormously threatening. A wife's wages might endanger the very core of the fragile male personality.⁴⁶ By the same measure, house-working men challenged the very basis of contemporary masculinity. The Montreal psychiatrist Dr Alastair MacLeod plaintively summed up modern problems for *Chatelaine's* readers,

Father no longer has opportunities for pursuing aggressive competitive goals openly at work. Some of his basic masculine needs remain unmet. Mother no longer feels she has a real man for a husband and becomes openly aggressive and competitive herself, even moving out of the home into industry in her efforts to restore the biological balance.

Faced with an increasingly discontented and dominating wife, father becomes even more passive and retiring ... certain trends in modern industry are theoretically capable of disturbing the biological harmony of family organization. The resulting disharmony can lead to psychological and psychosomatic illnesses.⁴⁷

44 See, for example, John Nash, 'It's Time Father Got Back in the Family,' *Maclean's* (12 May 1956), 28; S.R. Laycock, 'Homosexuality - A Mental Hygiene Problem,' *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (Sept. 1950): 247, as cited in Kinsman, *Regulation*, 115; Mary Graham, 'Mama's Boy,' *Canadian Home Journal* (Oct. 1952): 18-19, 37-9; and Hilliard, *Woman Doctor*, passim. The most famous example of 'woman-blaming' in these years was Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947), with its classic Freudian claim that 'anatomy is destiny.'

45 Montague, as cited in Robert McKeown, 'Women are the Stronger Sex,' *Weekend Magazine, Vancouver Sun* (22 Jan. 1955): 2. See also Dr Ashley Montague, 'Why Men Fall in Love with You,' *Chatelaine* (Oct. 1958): 23, 58, 99; Joan Morris, 'The Scientific Truth about "Male Superiority,"' *Canadian Home Journal* (July 1957): 15, 45; and Florida Scott-Maxwell, 'Do Men Fear Women?' *Chatelaine* (Nov. 1959): 39, 50, 54-5.

46 See the argument by the anonymous author of 'Careers and Marriage Don't Mix,' *Saturday Night* (1 Nov. 1949): 32, who concluded that she had been letting her husband down, despite her higher salary of \$10,000 a year, by not keeping up the domestic side of their life.

47 *Chatelaine* (March 1959): 214

The message was clear: domestic women guaranteed both their own femininity and their husbands' masculinity.

In the 1940s and 1950s Canadians had many reasons to believe that the gendered division of labour was the most appropriate response to their own and their nation's needs. While some citizens always challenged too narrowly defined roles, many were prepared to accept the fact that women and men had different duties in the family and in society at large. Residential suburbs that enshrined the notion of largely separate spheres for the two sexes proved attractive because most Canadians preferred women at home and out of the labour market.

The recurring housing crisis of the 1940s and 1950s provided the crucial opportunity to fix this preference in space.⁴⁸ The dominion entered the postwar years with 'a large stock of aging and substandard housing, communities that lacked appropriate municipal services, rural areas that lacked electric power, and with a substantial number of households living in crowded conditions or paying shelter costs they could ill afford.'⁴⁹ Families with youngsters were particularly hard hit. A boom in babies and immigrants raised the costs of even inferior accommodation.⁵⁰ The January 1946 occupation of the old Hotel Vancouver protesting the lack of housing for veterans and their families, like the later seizure of several government buildings in Ottawa by members of the Veterans' Housing League, were only the most visible symptoms of widespread dissatisfaction and rising unrest.⁵¹ The *Star Weekly* summed up popular sentiments: 'It must be remembered that the whole situation is charged with an intense emotional desire on the part of veterans and non-veterans alike to have homes of their own. The years of loneliness and being apart, the years of cramped, semi-private living, have created a desire as strong as the migrating instinct in birds to have a home.'⁵² Not surprisingly,

48 See J.N. Harris, 'One Vacancy!' *Saturday Night* (15 Nov. 1947), 20; E.L. Chicanot, 'Juvenile Immigration Will Help Canada,' *ibid.* (6 Dec. 1947): 24, 37; Benjamin Higgins, 'Better Strategy and Tactics To Win the Housing War,' *ibid.* (14 Feb. 1948): 6-7; J. Bhaidlow, 'Proper Rentals To Ease Housing Predicament,' *ibid.* (17 April 1948): 17, 32; D. Wilensky, 'War's Impact on Family Life,' *Canadian Welfare* (15 Oct. 1945): 8-16.

49 Canada Mortgage and Housing, *Housing in Canada 1945-1986: An Overview and Lessons Learned* (Ottawa 1987), 6

50 *Ibid.*, 10

51 Jill Wade, ' "A Palace for the Public": Housing Reform and the 1946 Occupation of the Old Hotel Vancouver,' *BC studies* (spring/summer 1986): 288-310; ' "Squatter Fever" Spreads to Canada,' *The Enterprise* (Lansing, Ont.), 10 Oct. 1946

52 John Clare, 'Where Are the Houses?' *Star Weekly* (8 June 1946): 5

crowded accommodation was regularly cited as contributing to family breakdown and social disarray.⁵³

Prime Minister Mackenzie King's postwar government, already alerted by the report of the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction on housing and planning to the magnitude of the housing shortage⁵⁴ and fearful of the appeal of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, moved to fill the gap. The passage in 1944 of the second National Housing Act (NHA) and the creation of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) one year later confirmed the significance of housing for peacetime reconstruction.⁵⁵ With some few exceptions, strong anti-public housing sentiments and official reluctance to interfere with the 'free market' sharply limited the reclamation of urban residential cores.⁵⁶ Across the dominion, despite the substantial investment in urban infrastructure – sewers, schools, public transportation, sidewalks, churches, and the like – that cities represented, they did not become the focus of government housing initiatives. Attention focused instead on the construction of new houses in the suburbs.

Despite their neglect by governments, city neighbourhoods continued to attract middle- and working-class Canadians, but many tried to maximize dollars and improve family situations by turning to new residential communities. Not all benefited from state support. In British Columbia's Lower Mainland, poorer citizens made do with little better than squatters' quarters in Bridgeview, a marginal Surrey settlement, without sidewalks and sewers.⁵⁷ In Quebec the Montreal working class had to satisfy its land hunger in Ville Jacques Cartier. There the discomfort and distress of life in tarpaper and tin shacks on postage-sized lots bought on the instalment plan helped embitter the future separatist Pierre Vallières.⁵⁸ In Newfoundland, the city

53 See Dorothy Livesay and Dorothy Macdonald, 'Why B.C. Divorces Soar,' *Star Weekly* (15 May 1948): 16, and Marjorie Earl, 'Canada's Divorce Headache,' *ibid.* (12 June 1948): Section 2, 2.

54 See Canada, Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, Housing and Community Planning, *Sub-Committee Report, No. 4* (Ottawa 1944).

55 For an excellent review of policy see Albert Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies (1935–1980)* (Toronto 1980).

56 See John Bacher, 'From Study to Reality: The Establishment of Public Housing in Halifax, 1930–1953,' *Acadiensis* 18, 1 (autumn 1988): 120–35, and Albert Rose, *Regent Park: A Study of Slum Clearance* (Toronto 1958).

57 Graduate Students in Community and Regional Planning, *Bridgeview: A Sub/Urban Renewal Study in Surrey, B.C.* (University of British Columbia 1965)

58 See his *White Niggers of America* (Toronto 1971). For an equally unflattering description of Ville Jacques Cartier see John Gray, 'Why Live in the Suburbs?' *Maclean's* (1 Sept. 1954): 7–11, 50–2.

of St John's was surrounded by 'fringe areas ... characterized by very poor, substandard housing, complete lack of services (piped water and sewer facilities, garbage collection, street-lighting, etc.), poor roads and low family incomes.'⁵⁹ Few residents in such locations used the provisions of the National Housing Act, since borrowers in the years after World War II had to earn steadily higher gross family incomes in order to pay rising down payments and interest rates.⁶⁰

Atlantic Canadians, poorer on average than their contemporaries elsewhere, were particularly unlikely to receive federal mortgage help: between 1954 and 1966 only 23.4 per cent of all new 'dwelling units' in the Atlantic region were completed with CMHC assistance, compared to 51.9 per cent in Ontario in the same period.⁶¹ The variability of financing meant that housewives in different regions sometimes confronted dramatically different working conditions. In 1960 and the first five months of 1961, for example, 38.5 per cent of new units located in Atlantic Canada lacked flush toilets and 41.9 per cent furnace heating, compared with 8.7 per cent and 8.2 per cent, respectively, in Ontario.⁶² Such distinctions helped ensure that accommodation on the urban periphery varied, often tremendously, from one part of the country to the other. In the Maritimes, suburbia would be neither as extensive nor as prosperous as in many other regions of the country.

In contrast to the plight of the poor, the housing predicament of a broad range of Canadians was addressed by federal enthusiasm for subsidizing the construction of single family homes and the desire of private developers, contractors, and mortgage lenders to maximize profits. For those who could meet income requirements, mortgage money, at artificially low rates, was made available to build hundreds of thousands of three-bedroom 'residential units.'⁶³ While the fore-

59 See Project Planning Associates Ltd., *City of St. John's Newfoundland: Urban Renewal Study* (Toronto 1961), 6.

60 See David Bettison, *The Politics of Canadian Urban Development*, vol. 1 (Edmonton 1975), 110.

61 CMHC mortgage assistance was tied to the earnings of the family head; if earnings were too low, then assistance was denied. In low-income areas such as the Maritimes, CMHC loans were correspondingly fewer. For a discussion of the regional implications of CHMC policy see Atlantic Development Board, *Urban Centres in the Atlantic Provinces* (Ottawa 1969), 74.

62 Ibid., 76

63 For a discussion of the impact of mortgaging by government see Lawrence B. Smith, *The Postwar Canadian Housing and Residential Mortgage Markets and the Role of Government* (Toronto 1974), chap. 9, and also Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies*,

most scholar of Canadian suburbs, S.D. Clark, has concluded that residents were frequently 'middle class in terms of income ... Canadian born, of British origin, and of Protestant religious affiliation,'⁶⁴ suburbs always attracted ambitious working-class and immigrant citizens as well. One daughter remembered that 'as refugees from Hungary,' her parents 'could hardly wait to leave' downtown Toronto 'for, to them, lavish splendour of the suburbs,' where they settled without regret.⁶⁵ In a subdivision of owner-built houses in Cooksville, Ontario, in the 1950s, an English immigrant remembered friendly Italian neighbours whose comfortable homes were constructed by their labouring and small-contractor husbands.⁶⁶ The Yugoslav immigrant, who began work as a carpenter and plasterer when he arrived after the war and went on to achieve his dream of a suburban bungalow, in his case in Winnipeg's West Kildonan, may not have been in the majority, but he had imitators from one end of the country to the other.⁶⁷ The eclectic nature of the suburban community was captured by the comment from a resident who insisted that her modest suburb west of Toronto, whose residents included Olga, Grand Duchess of Russia, was 'neither purely WASP nor dull.'⁶⁸

Once families moved to suburbia, they often found themselves with people of similar income and in houses of similar price. Neighbours were 'all in the same boat.'⁶⁹ New communities often revealed a distinct class and ethnic character, one that was sometimes legally imposed. Until their overthrow by the Supreme Court in 1951, residential covenants that included race as criteria were commonplace. Drawing on Canadian property law, they were used by land developers to exclude 'undesirables' and to set minimum house values.⁷⁰ Even after covenants had lost some of their power, homogeneity often survived, a testament to more informal support. In 1957 the new North

chap. 3. In 1951 single-family construction made up 77.3 per cent of all the dominion's housing starts; in 1955, 71.5 per cent and in 1960, 61.7 per cent. Smith, *Postwar Canadian Housing*, 22-3

64 S.D. Clark, *The Suburban Society* (Toronto 1968), 101

65 Krisztina Bevilacqua to author, 10 May 1991

66 Marjorie Bacon, interview with author, 7 June 1991

67 See John Gray, 'A New Life Begins in Winnipeg,' *Star Weekly* (9 July 1960): 2-4, 6-7.

68 Lois Strong to author, 29 May 1991

69 Montreal suburbanite 1, 'Questionnaire,' 7

70 See John Weaver, 'From Land Assembly to Social Maturity: The Suburban Way of Life of Westdale (Hamilton), Ontario, 1911-1951,' *Histoire sociale/Social History* (Nov. 1978): 437.

York suburb of Don Mills, for example, attracted certain occupational groups: 32.1 per cent of male homeowners were executives, 23.7 per cent professionals, 19.9 per cent skilled technicians, 11 per cent salesmen, and 3.8 per cent teachers and professors, with the remaining 9.5 per cent listed as miscellaneous.⁷¹ The hopes of many suburbanites were summed up by one observer in 1945: 'It's not just a house, but a way of life that people are seeking ... Most people wanted to be part of a community which consisted of congenial people, equality of income – restricted house values.'⁷² Different suburbs could have distinctive characters, depending on the ability of different groups to afford the cost of houses in their community.

The availability of CMHC mortgages for new homes, relatively low land costs, and builders' incentives, such as that by Saracini Construction in NHA's Glen Park development in Etobicoke in the early 1950s that gave purchasers the 'option of taking a lower priced home and completing part of it at a later date,'⁷³ made a difference to many Canadians. Despite the continuing decline in the rural population, where ownership was most common, the number of owner-occupied houses in Canada increased from 57 per cent in 1941 to 65 per cent in 1951 to 66 per cent in 1961.⁷⁴

Immediately after the Second World War much new housing was constructed either individually, often by 'do-it-yourselfers,' or as part of developments of a few to several hundred houses. Most early construction took place either within older suburbs like East Vancouver or East York in Toronto or in the first ring of surrounding townships or municipalities, such as British Columbia's Burnaby and Ontario's Etobicoke. By the early 1950s, however, high demand plus the enlarged scale of the development industry increasingly directed growth to more remote areas, many without existing municipal services. There in sites like Halifax's Thornhill Park, Toronto's Don Mills, and Edmonton's Crestwood appeared the suburban, automobile-dependent sprawl that came to characterize the last half of the twentieth century. Between 1951 and 1961 the population in metropolitan areas around city cores grew far more than that in city centres (see table 2).

71 'More Than Half Don Mills Home Owners Professional Men or Executives Survey Shows,' *The Enterprise* (Lansing), 26 May 1957

72 Dottie Walter, 'Homes for Tomorrow,' *Canadian Home Journal* (June 1945): 30, 33

73 'Saracini's Will Build 106 Islington Homes,' *Etobicoke Press*, 13 April 1950

74 Rose, *Housing in Postwar Canada*, 168–71

TABLE 2
 Percentage Increases in Population for the Central Cities
 and Remaining Parts of the 1961 Census Metropolitan Areas,
 Canada and the Regions, 1951-61⁷⁵

Census Metropolitan Area	Central City	Remainder of Metropolitan Area
Canada	23.8	110.7
Atlantic	11.7	70.6
Quebec	27.9	117.7
Ontario	15.5	116.3
Prairies	50.2	133.0
British Columbia	10.9	90.7

These first homes meant a great deal. Coming out of depression and war, couples struggled to become property owners. A team effort was common. As one observer noted of veteran housing: 'There is hardly a single case among all these veteran-builders of a wife lounging about. They have been as active in all weathers as their husbands.'⁷⁶ Such couples had good reason to prize long-awaited houses. Tenants in particular, like one longtime inhabitant of Montreal's Verdun, her husband, and three children, aged five, three, and seven months, were delighted to use CMHC mortgages to move, in their case to Lachine's 'Dixie' suburb.⁷⁷ Their enthusiasm was matched by the York Township resident in Ontario who remembered being 'very poor in the depression - 8 people in a 4 room one storey house.' She was understandably 'really excited - To have a 5 room brick bungalow for the two of us! Such Luxury!!'⁷⁸ A Scottish immigrant expressed the same sense of achievement: 'We came from a society where houses were scarce, renting was almost impossible unless one had the proper connections, and from a country which had spent 6 years at war. So owning a house in the suburbs was a dream for us, a dream we achieved after only 6 years in Canada.'⁷⁹

While new suburbs varied in many particulars,⁸⁰ all shared a com-

⁷⁵ Peter McGahan, *Urban Sociology in Canada* (Toronto 1986); from table 61

⁷⁶ Ronald Hamilton, 'You Need a Wife Who Can Saw,' *Maclean's* (July 1950): 36

⁷⁷ Mildred Grace Baker, 'Questionnaire'

⁷⁸ Helen M. Boneham, 'Questionnaire,' 5

⁷⁹ Catherine Cunningham to author, 14 May 1991

⁸⁰ See Clark *Suburban Society*, 16-18, for his classification of different suburban types. These included: 'I. The Single-Family Residential Development of the "Pure" Suburban Type; II. The Semi-Detached Residential Development of the "Pure" Suburban Type; III. The Single-Family Residential Development in a Built-Up Area; IV. The "Package" or Semi-Packaged Residential Development; V. The Cottage-Type Residential Development; VI. The Residential Development of

mitment to the gendered division of labour. Purchase of a home – whether in a highly planned community like Etobicoke's Thorncrest Village with its provision of a wide range of urban services expected by upper middle-class buyers⁸¹ or in a mass-produced subdivision like Scarborough's Wishing Well Acres, where the one millionth new house constructed after VE-Day was officially opened⁸² – was part of a child-centred strategy for many Canadians. As a study by Vancouver's Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board discovered, 'to a young family without much money, faced with the alternative of a small apartment in the city ... It is no small thing to be able to look out of the living-room window at one's children playing in relative freedom with fields and woods beyond them.'⁸³ As a mother of two in Toronto's Iondale Heights suburb explained in 1957, 'We moved to the suburbs because of the children. We wanted to give them room to romp, where they wouldn't have to worry about street cars and fiend-driven automobiles. True, we have no museums or art galleries. But the children can go outside and see nature as it is.'⁸⁴ Such commentators took for granted that greater opportunities for children depended ultimately on maternal supervision.

Finally responsible for child care and house maintenance, modern suburban wives were tethered to their communities in ways that few husbands could match. In 1958 one speaker for a Toronto construction company described the suburban home: 'A woman is there all the time, she lives there. A man just boards there: he gets his meals there. She is there all day long.'⁸⁵ A male architect characterized his

the "Pure" Suburban Type, Now Five to Ten Years Old.' In the context of this classification, 'pure' meant lacking 'form and structure' (12) and 'packaged' meant growing up 'as a result of careful planning and direction' (15).

81 See Collier Stevenson, 'City Living in the Country,' *Canadian Home Journal* (Nov. 1947): 55–6. For a Scarborough example see 'Guildwood Village on the Move,' *The Enterprise* (West Hill) (25 Sept. 1958).

82 'All-Canadian Home Designed from Results of Newspaper Survey,' *Canadian Builder* (Jan. 1960): 62, and 'Million Mark Reached,' *ibid.* (Oct. 1956): 41. See also 'Scarborough Has Canada's Millionth New Home,' *The Enterprise* (West Hill) (26 July 1956).

83 The Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board, *The Urban Frontier*, Pt 2: Technical Report (New Westminster, BC: Oct. 1963): 37.

84 As quoted in William MacEachern, 'Suburbia on Trial,' *Star Weekly* (18 May 1957): 2. See also, for a continuation of this preoccupation with children, Isabel Dyck, 'Integrating Home and Wage Workplace: Women's Daily Lives in a Canadian Suburb,' *Canadian Geographer/Le géographe canadien* 33, 4 (1989): 329–41.

85 Mrs Woods, Saracini Construction, 'What the Experts Say About Kitchens,' *Canadian Builder* (June 1958): 50.

own experience of gender relations even more vividly: 'I spend every day in my Mobile Room [car] going to and from the women at either end [in the office or in his suburban home].'⁸⁶ As these remarks suggest, the suburban house remained first of all a workplace for female residents. For husbands, lengthy commutes and long hours at work, not to mention individual preferences, meant that domestic responsibilities were largely subordinated to the demands of waged work.⁸⁷ Nor did the suburbs make joint efforts easy. As one husband recalled:

Like most of my fellow male suburbanites I was the sole auto driver. I also drove a lot in my job. Rushing home to take a child to cubs or brownies, to take my wife to a class in the city, to drive to hockey practice or to a game, or to be shopping driver when required was a daily task. Work pressures made this more difficult. There were the open spaces to cut, cultivate and shovel. Social evenings required a driver to pick up the sitter, drive into town, return home and drive the sitter home. The automobile was a itching appendage needing constant scratching.⁸⁸

To be sure, some suburban wives always joined their husbands in leaving home for employment. As the expansion of Avon's and other door-to-door sales in these years suggested, earning extra money was never far from many residents' minds.⁸⁹ So-called 'working' wives shored up families' aspirations to a better standard of living; the husband of a young Bank of Commerce clerk, for instance, was reconciled to her job so she could furnish the house they were building in Saskatoon in 1952.⁹⁰ Yet women's ideal primary role remained, especially after babies arrived, in the home. As one resident of a Toronto suburb remembered, her husband 'didn't want me to work, and I thought that no one could look after my children as well as I could.'⁹¹

While they may not have remained in the labour market, wives

86 Anthony Adamson, 'Where Are the Rooms of Yesteryear?' *Canadian Architect* (June 1958): 74

87 See, for example, Frank Moritsugu, 'Learn How to Relax,' *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (Jan. 1955): 7-9, 38-9, 41.

88 Male former resident, Oakridge Acres, London, Ontario, to author, 10 June 1991

89 See R.D. Magladry, 'Door-to-door Salesmanship Fills the Gap,' *Financial Post* 54 (5 March 1960): 13; 'Beauty Aid Sales Soar,' *ibid.* (20 Aug. 1960): 1; and J. Schreiner, 'Door-to-door is a Booming Business,' *ibid.* 55 (30 Dec. 1961): 24.

90 'Wife or Working Girl,' *Bride's Book* (fall/winter 1952): 4, 6

91 Helen Boneham, 'Questionnaire,' 14

regularly contributed to husbands' careers. Women married to professionals or businessmen often functioned as part of a marital 'team,' spending hours as unpaid assistants, typing, translating, or entertaining. The wife of a successful academic remembered that 'in university circles a wife was expected to entertain – often upwards of 50 people.'⁹² Another academic spouse found her eyes giving out as she typed the manuscripts that advanced her husband in his profession.⁹³ Acknowledgment of such contributions forms a regular refrain in scholarly prefaces.

The great majority of wives remained crucially dependent on male wages. Women's financial vulnerability was worsened by the fact that many families purchased suburban homes only by rigorous self-denial. More than one investigator discovered that 'Baby sitters were done without, food costs reduced, less spent on clothing, and a hundred and one other small ways discovered to save money. "I'm not going dancing no more" gave expression certainly to the financial plight of more than one suburban housewife.'⁹⁴ While such careful juggling of finances was not true of all suburbanites, the strains of budgeting, large or small, were likely to be borne unevenly. Not only did male wage-earners usually have prior right of access to what they commonly held to be 'their money,'⁹⁵ they frequently had to maintain certain standards as conditions of employment. Women and children could dress, eat, and travel much less well without immediately endangering the family economy.⁹⁶

Suburban houses were the stage on which women explored the meaning of separate spheres. That setting varied greatly depending on income and individual preference, but the introduction of CMHC inspections under the 1954 revision of the Housing Act encouraged the giving way of 'individual, custom-built homes' to 'mass, speculative development' with standardized shapes, sizes, and configurations.⁹⁷ In the late 1940s and 1950s master plans and more stringent municipal zoning by-laws across the country, which represented efforts to control errant developers, also contributed to the increasing

92 Alaine Barrett Baines, 'Questionnaire,' 8

93 Scarborough suburbanite, interview with author, March 1991

94 Clark, *Suburban Society*, 121

95 On this male attitude see Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (Toronto 1980), 163–5.

96 On the existence of two standards of living within the family see the bitter observation in Mrs John Doe, 'An Open Letter to My Husband's Boss.'

97 Bettison, *Politics*, 110

uniformity of the emerging suburban landscape.⁹⁸ CMHC's support of Canadian Small House competitions after the Second World War,⁹⁹ like the *Star Weekly's* sponsorship of the All Canadian Home in 1959,¹⁰⁰ for all their good intentions, had the same effect. In the heady days of easy sales, developers threw up one imitation after another, differing in little but colour and trim. Most models came as Cape Cods, and increasingly, as bungalows or split levels. Like the split-level winner of the first coast-to-coast architectural contest in 1953,¹⁰¹ almost all boasted three bedrooms, an L-shaped living-dining-room combination, and, in most areas of the country, a full basement. Increasingly, too, a rumpus or recreation room appeared below level, which, together with the proliferation of televisions, encouraged families to spend leisure time more privately. In these homes, more comfortable than many had ever encountered, women were to forge the moral basis for postwar Canada.

Female residents were expected and urged to bring uniqueness to uniformity through a careful attention to decoration and design. As one commentator insisted, 'The bugaboo of uniformity bothers her not at all, because every woman knows she can work out her own individual design for living with colors and furnishings and personal touches.'¹⁰² Their choice of furniture, appliances, art, and even clothes was to transform the identical into the distinguishable, in the process confirming housewives' skills and status. No wonder that practically every issue of popular Canadian women's magazines like the *Bride's Book*, *Canadian Home Journal*, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, and *Chatelaine*, not to mention their American competitors, offered readers ways, thrifty and otherwise, to personalize suburbia. In a Special Issue in March 1955, for example, *Chatelaine* offered lessons on 'How To Live in a Suburb,' 'A Spring Fashion Bazaar for Suburban Living,' and 'How To Furnish a New Home without Panic Buying.' Subscribers consulted such experts but also prided themselves on developing styles that suited their families best.¹⁰³ The mistress of

98 As a sign of this interest the Community Planning Association of Canada was created in 1946. See Gerald Hodge, *Planning Canadian Communities* (Toronto and New York 1986).

99 See the bungalow winner for 1947 in *Etobicoke Press*, 17 March 1947.

100 'First All Canadian Home Completed in Etobicoke,' *Star Weekly* (12 Sept. 1959): 14-18

101 'Home '53,' *Canadian Home Journal* (Aug. 1953): 19, 45, 46, 48, 50, 52-3, 58-60

102 Mary-Ella Macpherson, 'Postwar Houses,' *Chatelaine* (May 1945): 96

103 See Betty Alice Marrs Naylor, 'Questionnaire.'

a Rexdale, Ontario, bungalow on 'a corner-lot so at least it didn't match everything beside it in either direction, but of course, it matched the house on the corner across the street,' spoke for a renovating sisterhood when she reflected that 'I almost wrecked it trying to create something unique.'¹⁰⁴

Many women soon found more to concern them in the limitations of the environment at large. Conspicuous in their absence from many new developments in the 1940s and early 1950s, before local governments became more demanding, were public spaces and facilities, such as sidewalks, monuments, parks, and cemeteries. A mother of two children settled in a bungalow on Toronto's outskirts typically remembered that 'there were no sidewalks and the road was not paved. The mud and dust were a real pain.'¹⁰⁵ For many years developers also counted on the open country that surrounded many subdivisions to provide children with nearby recreational space. In time as the process of urban sprawl accelerated, this resource disappeared, as it did around Scarborough's Wishing Well Acres subdivision in the 1960s, without any provision for its replacement. For women, the presumed mistresses of suburbia, collective provision was almost always curiously lacking. If landscape were any guide, meeting and play were not part of the female mandate.

The location of most commercial shops and services on the periphery or, more occasionally, in the centre of residential development, either in a strip pattern along major roads or in suburban plazas, showed the same lack of attention to women's needs. Patterns of consumption centred increasingly on shopping centres, which first made their appearance in Canada in 1947 in suburban Winnipeg. By 1951, with the construction of Norgate Plaza in Montreal and Park Royal Plaza in West Vancouver, about forty-six shopping centres, all poorly served by public transit and demanding access to a private car,¹⁰⁶ drew buyers from surrounding suburbs.

One Don Mills veteran characterized shopping experiences that were not very different from the majority of her contemporaries, especially those whose husbands didn't have the option of commuting by train to work: 'Walked & pushed baby carriage to most places. Never had a second car – poor bus service especially with 3 children! Little co-operation, wives did not own car – walked to local shops.

¹⁰⁴ Helen Wallis, 'Suburban Experience' (typescript), to author, 3

¹⁰⁵ Boneham, 'Questionnaire,' 5

¹⁰⁶ John Leaning 'The Distribution of Shopping Centres in Canada,' *Canadian Builder* (June 1956): 41–5

Traffic was hazardous on highway & only route to major shopping centre (suburbs were designed for the car & most of us had only one which husband used).¹⁰⁷ Once visitors got there, new plazas, lacking free public space and cultural amenities, offered them little beyond a community based on a common commitment to purchase. As a self-satisfied Canadian retailer put it, 'Suburban living, by its basic structure, generates wants and brings latent desires more sharply into focus. The not-so-subtle effect of competitive living is also a potent influence in creating an environment that encourages liberal spending for better living.'¹⁰⁸ The domestic and individualistic orientation of women, families' major purchasers, was readily reaffirmed.

While plazas were increasingly influential, door-to-door sales and deliveries were commonplace in the 1940s and 1950s. Phone orders were taken by butchers, grocers, and department stores, and trucks with milk and bakery goods made their way among suburban homes. Avon ladies, who might be members of a local church, and Hoover, Electrolux, Fuller Brush, and Watkins salesmen were also occasional visitors. The latter were described by a former client as canvassing a Montreal suburb 'once or twice per year and I always kept their wonderful salve, "Good for Man or Beast." Very strong, didn't burn and helped heal cut knees very quickly. They also had wonderful flavourings and food colourings.'¹⁰⁹

In Metropolitan Toronto, another purchaser implied advantages beyond mere convenience: 'We liked to see a vegetable man come along the street. Ice, milk and bread were delivered as were beer and pop. The Avon lady and the Fuller Brush man provided some new faces.'¹¹⁰ Such sentiments were shared by a resident of Clarkson's Corners (Mississauga) who recalled, with affection, a milk man who 'always poked his head in to say good morning and took the children on his van for a ride.' She observed, 'Obviously these services were very important. I realize, however, that my mother had far more people calling than I. (She even had a Hellicks coffee man, Duggan's bakery, etc.).'¹¹¹ Although they grew less in time as the private automobile undermined their viability, such deliveries helped knit new

107 Marjorie Bacon, 'Questionnaire,' 9

108 H.J. Barnun, Jr, executive vice-president, Salada-Shirriff-Horsey, Toronto, as cited in 'Calls Suburbs Best Place To Develop Retail Sales,' *Style Fortnightly* (15 Jan. 1958): 35

109 Mildred Fox Baker, 'Questionnaire,' 12

110 Patricia Margaret Ziemann Hughes, 'Questionnaire,' 12

111 Elaine Barrett Baines, 'Questionnaire,' 13

communities together in ways that more modern shopping alternatives rarely did.

Suburbia's households were also connected by schools and churches. Although it often happened that housing sprawled well beyond the capacity of religious groups and municipalities to ensure even minimum services, by the 1950s their institutions were normally included in the initial planning of developments. Even then they might well be strained to their limits or inconvenient to reach, as with schools offering shift classes or located across busy intersections. For all such shortcomings, as well as their tendency to deal with female clients almost solely in their roles as mothers and wives, such institutions constituted important collective resources to a community lacking common habits of working together. Parent-teacher associations, or home and school groups, were the most effective in mobilizing women, from room mothers to fund-raisers and executive officers.¹¹² Auxiliaries and Sunday schools were critical for some residents who kept suburban churches expanding in these years.¹¹³ Work with local institutions offered more activist and sociable suburbanites the chance to combine domestic duties with a manageable level of public involvement.

As they had done in other Canadian settings, women wove the fabric of day-to-day life. As one observer noted, 'For most of the day while the men are away at work the women run the community. After the bulldozers have pulled out, the spadework to make a real community out of your particular collection of houses has to be done by ... the homemakers.'¹¹⁴ Women commonly moved beyond their homes through contacts with children and 'in turn, the fathers get to know their neighbours through their own ubiquitous wives.'¹¹⁵ Casual meetings, dismissed by critics as 'coffee klatches,' or even encounters between Avon 'ladies' and their clients, might be followed by both intimate friendships and formal associations. These ties helped women cope with limited resources and new environments. Since children were rarely far from mothers' minds, much co-operative

112 See Eileen Morris, 'Your Home-and-School Faces a Crisis,' *Chatelaine* (Nov. 1955): 11-13.

113 Between 1947 and 1962, for example, the United Church established 2000 new churches. See Mary Anne MacFarlane, 'A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in the United Church of Canada, 1925 to 1964' (MA thesis, OISE/University of Toronto, 1987), 80.

114 Doris McCubbin, 'How To Live in a Suburb,' *Chatelaine* (March 1955): 35.

115 See Frank Moritsugu, 'The Amazing Don Mills,' *Canadian Home and Gardens* (Dec. 1954): 13-19, 55-60, 68.

activity centred on them. After the war women in North Burnaby's new subdivisions established 'parent-teacher groups ... in an endeavour to promote better school conditions and assist in providing hot lunches for the children.'¹¹⁶ In Don Mills, where young children were abundant and teenagers rare, women established baby-sitting co-operatives. In Thornhill, Ontario, mothers formed a community kindergarten and encouraged the fathers, who, 'though somewhat apathetic at first ... to contribute some time and energy in making odds and ends of school equipment.'¹¹⁷ In 1955 mothers at North York's York Mills School, alarmed by sexual attacks on local children, created a Parents' Action League.¹¹⁸ In Etobicoke's Rexdale development, women protested their lack of public transit to local council and to the Toronto Transit Commission. As they explained, 'Nearly all of us have children and they have to be taken to the dentist or doctor occasionally. It takes a full day to make the trip and two days to rest up afterwards.'¹¹⁹ Also in 1955, mothers from North York's Livingstone School fought the Board of Education's transfer of pupils to another school.¹²⁰ In Clarkson's Corners a Quebecker prompted her neighbours to create French conversation groups and to fund high school scholarships.

Concerns sometimes broadened beyond children to include a variety of community issues. Thorny questions related to sewers, libraries, and garbage disposal provided lessons in collective action and political lobbying. In North York, residents created the North York Women Electors Association on the model of its Toronto counterpart in September 1954.¹²¹ In Etobicoke, a year later, twenty-two mothers with children in tow from Goldwood Heights subdivision 'stormed' a council meeting, demanding 'action – not answers' to the problem created by their developer's failure to finish sidewalks, sodding, and ditching.¹²² In effect, such women were transforming suburbs into good neighbourhoods. As volunteers they facilitated the creation of everything from schools, hospitals, and churches to libraries.

116 *Vancouver Sun*, 6 Jan. 1951

117 'Thornhill Women Are Proud of Their Flourishing Nursery School,' *The Enterprise* (Lansing), 19 April 1951

118 'Parents Unite To Catch Man Molesting Children,' *ibid.*, 28 April 1955

119 '1,000 Families Protest Isolation of Rexdale,' *Etobicoke Guardian*, 13 Jan. 1955

120 'Parents Protest Board Moving School Children,' *The Enterprise* (Lansing), 2 June 1955

121 D. Smith, 'Don Mills Memo,' *ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1954

122 'Subdivision Problems Cause Angry Mothers to Storm Council Meeting,' *Etobicoke Press* 19 April 1956

For all the evidence of activism, however, the majority of women were rarely visible on the public stage. For many, suburbia constituted a period of deep engagement in the day-to-day running of the family. Very few had assistance with household duties, particularly on weekdays when most husbands were absent. While a few sometimes found substitutes for their own labour in co-operatives or paid help, others, like a Montreal suburbanite, remembered that 'even babysitters were all but unavailable (No Teens, no Grannies).'123 Questioned about their days as mothers of young children, both happy and unhappy veterans of suburbia remember themselves engrossed in time-consuming duties:

I had helped my mother in bazaars, tag days, processions, etc. etc., fund-raising, church charitable organizations from the time I was knee high. However, once married, I was apolitical. I guess, basically, because I was so very busy [with nine children].¹²⁴

I guess there were clubs and political parties but I really didn't have much time or energy with four small children to get involved. I've always been aware of my own limitations in terms of time and energy.¹²⁵

Not much [leadership from women] in my age group at the time. Too busy at home ... it was a man's world.¹²⁶

There was no energy or time to do anything about it [feminism].¹²⁷

I didn't participate in politics when my children were small, I was too too too busy. None of my neighbours with children seemed to be involved.¹²⁸

Unless they were especially gregarious, such child-rearing women were likely to devote precious free-time moments to private rather than public pursuits.

To the present day, a baleful mythology associated with postwar suburbs and their female residents persists. Suburban women provided a focus for much contemporary debate about the merits of modern life. In particular, in the minds of critics of mass society who

123 Montreal West Suburbanite 1, 'Questionnaire,' 6

124 Mildred Fox Baker, 'Questionnaire,' 14

125 Surrey, BC, Suburbanite 1, 'Questionnaire,' 14

126 Betty Marrs Naylor, 'Questionnaire,' 14

127 Toronto West Suburbanite 1, 'Questionnaire,' 15

128 Jasper Place, Alberta, Suburbanite, 'Questionnaire,' 14

flourished in the years after the Second World War,¹²⁹ the suburb emerged as the residential and female expression of the moral bankruptcy they identified in society at large, more particularly in giant corporations, big governments, and the 'organization men' who served them.

The most famous indictment from North American feminists was provided by Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*.¹³⁰ This soon-to-be classic identification of 'The Problem That Has No Name' captured the imagination of a generation no longer satisfied with the restricted options of life in suburbia. As one Canadian reader explained:

I truly considered my genes disturbed until I read Friedan's book. After all, I'd spent my life working to earn and indeed cherishing, the one compliment that topped them all – 'You think like a man.'

But I was afraid of that book. I read it in very small snatches, because it stirred me greatly, and I couldn't see any purpose to that. There I was, a relatively uneducated woman with two small children to raise.¹³¹

More than anyone else, Friedan helped women challenge the egalitarian claim of North American abundance. Ultimately, she argued, and many readers agreed, the gendered experience of suburbia betrayed women, consigning them to subordination and frustration within society and unhappiness within the family. Limited options for women also meant an immeasurably poorer 'Free World,' a critical point when winning the Cold War was all important. In Canada, Friedan's dismissal of modern housekeeping as neither sufficiently dignified nor time-consuming to require full-time dedication by wives and mothers was matched by a barrage of popular articles in the 1950s.¹³²

129 For one of the few discussions of these critics in Canada see Rutherford, *When Television Was Young*, esp. chap. 1. For a provocative assessment of the connection between fears about mass society and the maintenance of masculinity see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (Garden City, NY 1983).

130 Published in New York in 1963.

131 Wallis, 'Suburban Experience,' 23.

132 See Richard Roe, 'I'm Sending My Wife Back To Work,' *Canadian Home Journal* (April 1954): 4–5, 98; Jean Pringle, 'How I Broke Out of Solitary Confinement,' *Chatelaine* (May 1948): 34; Beverly Gray, 'Housewives Are a Sorry Lot,' *Chatelaine* (March 1950): 26–7, 37; Isabel T. Dingman, 'A Widow Writes an Open Letter to Wives,' *Chatelaine* (June 1954): 20–1, 34–5, 37; Dr Marion Hilliard, 'Stop Being Just a Housewife,' *Chatelaine* (Sept. 1956): 11, 90; Patricia Clark, 'Stop Pitying the Underworked Housewife,' *Maclean's* (19 July 1958): 8, 37–8; Jane Hamilton, 'Housewives Are Self-Centred Bored,' *Star Weekly Magazine* (22 Aug. 1959): 38, 45.

Whatever Friedan's insights, her work concentrated on a privileged minority. Her suburban women, pushed by the forces of a commercialized culture, appeared to have made the 'great refusal' in rejecting purposeful and independent lives in the public sphere. A considerable amount of women-blaming goes on in *The Feminine Mystique*. As with many of her Canadian imitators, Friedan associated suburban women with the evils of modern society – its secularism, superficiality, and materialism. Her feminism, with its support for broader interpretations and expressions of female ability, gave her message special meaning, but the message itself, like attacks on suburbia from social critics unconcerned about sexual inequality, finally ignored the complexity of female lives.

Non-feminist critics of modern society routinely targeted female suburbanites. Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* identified 'millions of women who live isolated lives from 8:00 to 6:00 P.M.'¹³³ in suburbia as part of the dilemma of modern men. In 1956 in 'You Take the Suburbs, I Don't Want Them,' the novelist Hugh Garner, flexing his muscles as a home-grown literary 'bad boy,' rejected a world in which men could not make the rules.¹³⁴ Suburbia's psychological failings were brutally diagnosed by the assistant director of Montreal's Mental Hygiene Institute. In 1958 Dr Alastair MacLeod warned *Chatelaine's* readers that 'The suburbs give children fresh air, but take away their fathers. They give women efficient kitchens, but are hard on their femininity and gentleness. They give men pride in providing so handsomely, but drive many of them to drink to make up for their watered-down maleness.'¹³⁵ This psychiatrist damned suburbs as 'matriarchies, manless territories where women cannot be feminine because expediency demands that they control the finances and fix drains and where night-returning men cannot be masculine because their traditional function of ruler and protector has been usurped.'¹³⁶ While Friedan located suburbia's limitations in the domestic definition of womanhood, few psychiatrists acknowledged that many women needed outlets beyond those provided by purely domestic life.

The indictments of social critics were elaborated most fully in *Crestwood Heights*, a case study of Toronto's Forest Hill, an 'inner suburb'

133 Published in New York in 1951. The quote is from page 76.

134 H. Garner, 'You Take the Suburbs, I Don't Want Them,' *Maclean's* (10 Nov. 1956): 30

135 Dr A. MacLeod, 'The Sickness of Our Suburbs,' *Chatelaine* (Oct. 1958): 23

136 Ibid. 94–5

built before the Second World War. Dissecting the family lives of an upper middle-class sample of WASP and Jewish Torontonians, the authors revealed what many critics of mass society feared. Men concentrated on making money, ignoring families' emotional and spiritual needs. Dissatisfied women wielded power in a community in which they were the dominant adults for the daylight hours. Mothers were preoccupied with their offspring, to the detriment of themselves and their children. Both sexes were overly materialistic. The contribution of women and men to the wider society was intrinsically limited. Despite the lack of comparability of this older suburb to what was happening on the periphery of Canadian cities, Crestwood Heights rapidly became the measure by which modern suburbia was judged.¹³⁷

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada added to the chorus of dismay. Its 1960 *Report* on the design of the residential environment summed up the views of professional architects and representatives of University Women's Clubs and the National Council of Women in its dislike for 'the essential identity of houses, the denial of differentiation, built into new suburbs.'¹³⁸ The *Report* was alert to suburbia's failure to reflect changing Canadian demography. While new buildings took for granted a father in paid employment and a mother at home with two children, many households were very different.¹³⁹ The land-eating sprawl of three-bedroom Cape Cods, bungalows, or split levels dependent on private transportation and reflective of a single style of family life was not what all Canadians needed. Preoccupied with aesthetics, however, the *Report* never confronted the problem embodied in the gendered nature of suburban space.

Arguments about the merits of suburban life were not always restricted to polite discourse. Residents of Scarborough's Highland Creek, which their MPP characterized as 'a normal Ontario suburban community,'¹⁴⁰ were outraged in 1956 when S.D. Clark of the University of Toronto was quoted as accusing them of sexual immorality and hard drinking. The leakage of these observations from a private

137 See Robert Olson, 'What Happened to the Suburb They Called Crestwood Heights?' *Maclean's* (12 Oct. 1957): 24-5, 34-6, 38. The strength of this legacy can be seen in the incorrect identification of Crestwood Heights as Don Mills in McGahan, *Urban Sociology in Canada*, 187.

138 Committee of Inquiry into the Design of the Residential Environment, *Report* (Ottawa 1960), *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* (May 1960): 186

139 Ibid.

140 'R.E. Sutton Censures Story of "Carefree" Life at H. Creek,' *The Enterprise* (West Hill), 25 Oct. 1956

report to a research group forced him to apologize publicly to Scarborough's residents. Even then there were threats of vigilante justice.¹⁴¹

Perhaps chastened by this experience, Clark produced a path-breaking study, *The Suburban Society* (1968), which rejected any simple characterization of suburbia. Dismissing *Crestwood Heights* as unrepresentative in its 'culture of a particular urban social class and, in large degree, particular ethnic group,'¹⁴² he championed suburbia's variety and vitality. It was this heterogeneity that Friedan and the other critics of modern life, with their focus on middle-class, highly organized communities, had so largely missed. And yet, ironically enough, for all his stress on suburbia's variety, Clark joined critics of mass society in readily stereotyping women. *The Suburban Society* casually dismissed the female resident as 'the suburban housewife seeking amusement or instruction in light reading' and the 'lone miserable suburban housewife.'¹⁴³ Making easy generalizations about the 'social waste' of women left behind in suburbia,¹⁴⁴ Clark never applied his insight about the complexity of suburban patterns to any consideration of the role of gender. To a significant degree, women continued to be both victims and authors of their own misfortune, keys to the failings of contemporary family life and thus to much of the imperfection of the modern world.

Suburban women, then and today, have their own contributions to make to this debate. In 1959 *Chatelaine's* readers responded passionately to the attack on suburban women issued by the assistant director of Montreal's Mental Hygiene Institute, Dr Alastair MacLeod. In more than 300 letters they captured the complexity of women's lives. In all, 42 per cent defended women, men, and suburbia itself, one critic bluntly summing up her rejection of the psychiatrist's misogyny as 'Bunk.' A further 11 per cent of respondents blamed the problems of modern life on something other than suburbia, while 8 per cent gave it mixed reviews. The remaining 39 per cent agreed, more or less, with MacLeod's criticism of suburban women. Most readers were reluctant to limit women to domestic labour as a solution to the ills of modern society. One woman from Rexdale, Ontario, pointed out that many young wives had more than enough business experience and

141 'There Is No Joy in Highland Creek,' *Globe and Mail*, 23 Oct. 1956; 'Professor's Report Creates Furor,' *The Enterprise* (West Hill), 25 Oct. 1956, and 'Letters to the Editor,' 1 Nov. 1956

142 Clark, *Suburban Society*, 6

143 *Ibid.*, 4

144 *Ibid.*, 224

brains to manage the home and its finances. It didn't make sense to 'restrict them to the monotonous unthinking roles of mere cooks and floor waxers.'¹⁴⁵ Most suburban women did much more and did it well. A few readers, while admitting something was wrong, refused to blame women. A Regina contributor, for instance, argued that women were feeling frustrated and inadequate because their 'opportunity for economic contribution has largely been taken from the four walls of her home.'¹⁴⁶ The whole tenor of the published answers to MacLeod's condemnation of suburban womanhood suggested a diversity of opinion and experience.

Suburbia's veterans still remain divided about its meaning. In letters, memos, interviews, and answers to a questionnaire about their experience in the suburbs between 1945 and 1960,¹⁴⁷ women, whose families ranged from the well-to-do to the economically marginal, reflected on what those years had meant. Many, like one Etobicoke, Ontario, resident, offered a blunt calculation of benefits: 'Suburban life was fine. We had an auto so we weren't isolated from the Toronto scene. It also enabled us immigrants to make friends. I'd do it over again. Everyone benefitted ... When you live a situation you aren't always analyzing it. The decision was economic. I wasn't buying into an image.'¹⁴⁸ Like many others, whose satisfaction seemed grounded in happy marriages, this writer argued that suburban life was vital and fulfilling. Helpmate husbands did much to make suburbia a good place for wives.

Favourable assessments also sprang from a recognition that life in the suburbs was a step up in terms of convenience, comfort, and security. Days spent previously as tenants, in too few rooms and without domestic conveniences, could make even modest bungalows feel very good. While not without flaws, suburbs were a good deal better than alternatives. The benefits for children were stressed repeatedly

145 Ruth Drysdale, 'What Our Readers Say about Suburbia,' *Chatelaine* (Jan. 1959): 50

146 Mrs J.M. Telford. *ibid.*, 53

147 Contacts with these women, thirty-two as of 15 June 1991, are part of an on-going effort to get in touch with as many women as possible from different types of suburbs in different regions of the country. These women are asked to specify how they wished to be identified, whether anonymously, by community, or by name, and their choice is reflected in the footnotes to this article. After the completion of a manuscript now entitled 'Home Dreams: Women and Canadian Suburbs 1945-60,' these research materials, with certain restrictions on their use, will be deposited in a public archives.

148 Etobicoke suburbanite I, 'Questionnaire,' 17

but women, like the two speakers below, were likely to convey a strong sense of their own good fortune as well:

It was the right choice for us ... We did not want to raise our kids on city streets, although I realize now they did miss out on many things such as museums, libraries, etc. ... I think all who chose the life benefitted from the freer life, the men for a lot of companionship with neighbours ... It was a happier time because we no longer worried about friends and acquaintances, schoolmates who were overseas and in danger.¹⁴⁹

Those were good years for us. My husband was getting ahead and I saw myself as a helpmate ... For children suburbia really worked. They always had playmates and they had multiple parenting ... [but] Suburbia tended to narrow our vision of the outside world. *We* thought we had the ideal life ... *We* knew little about the world of poverty, culture, crime and ethnic variety. *We* were like a brand new primer, 'Dick and Jane.'¹⁵⁰

In reflecting on their suburban lives, women who counted them successful firmly rejected any portrait of themselves as conformists and insisted that the suburbs worked best for the independent and self-motivated. An artist noted that she and her friends 'were already in charge of our lives and didn't feel abused.'¹⁵¹ Whether they were gregarious and heavily involved in the community or took pleasure in quiet family pastimes, positive commentators revealed a strong sense of achievement. Happy children, rewarding relationships with spouses, and strong communities were their trophies.

Cheerful accounts contrasted markedly with those who remembered the suburbs as 'hell.' Days spent largely alone with demanding infants and lack of support from friends, relatives, and sometimes husbands were to be endured. The result could be desperation. One Ontario survivor captured her predicament, and that of others as well, when she wrote: 'I began to feel as if I were slowly going out of my mind. Each day was completely filled with child and baby care and keeping the house tidy and preparing meals. I felt under constant pressure.'¹⁵² Some women recollected feeling guilty about such unhappiness: If families were more prosperous than ever and husbands doing their jobs, what right did they have to be less than content?

149 Mildred Fox Baker, 'Questionnaire,' 17

150 Metro Toronto suburbanite I, 'Questionnaire,' 17

151 London, Ontario, suburbanite I, 'Questionnaire,' 17

152 Niagara-on-the-Lake suburbanite I to author, 10 May 1991

When a desperately lonely neighbour hung her three children in the basement, however, one resident of Don Mills put self-doubts aside and set out to create mothers' groups to compensate for the shortcomings of suburban life.¹⁵³

Critics sometimes observed that dissatisfaction extended beyond their sex. Two women explained: 'Certainly didn't work for me. I would have been much happier in row housing ... It seems to me that everyone loses – Women are isolated. Men don't know their families. Children don't know their fathers.'¹⁵⁴ And, 'I don't think anybody benefitted, exactly. You could say men, but they benefitted from marriage, suburbs or not ... And I think a lot of men were miserable trying to play the part imposed upon them in the wasteland.'¹⁵⁵ From the perspective of such veterans, women in particular and society as a whole were the poorer because of the investment on the suburban frontier.

Unlike their contemporaries who relished memories of days nurturing children and husbands, critics yearned for lives that offered them more contact with the wider world, more appreciation of their diverse skills, and more financial independence. For them the suburban landscape entailed an unacceptable restriction on options, a source of frustration, anger, and depression. This group often rejected the domestic ideal embodied in suburbia as soon as possible, ridding themselves of unsatisfactory husbands, moving to more congenial settings, and taking paid employment.

Accounts from suburban women rarely match the image presented by Friedan and the critics of mass society. Their experiences were neither homogeneous nor uncomplicated. They were much more than merely the female counterparts of 'organization men.' Women were both victims and beneficiaries of a nation's experiment with residential enclaves that celebrated the gendered division of labour. Suburban dreams had captured the hopes of a generation shaken by war and depression, but a domestic landscape that presumed that lives could be reduced to a single ideal inevitably failed to meet the needs of all Canadians after 1945. In the 1960s the daughters of the suburbs, examining their parents' lives, would begin to ask for more.

153 Marjorie Bacon to author, 6 April 1991

154 Toronto West Suburbanite 1, 'Questionnaire,' 17

155 Wallis, 'Suburban Experience,' 27