

The important thing for a mother to realize is that the younger the child the more necessary it is for him to have a steady, loving person taking care of him. In most cases, the mother is the best one to give him this feeling of "belonging," safely and surely. She doesn't quit on the job, she doesn't turn against him, she isn't indifferent to him, she takes care of him always in the same familiar house. If a mother realizes clearly how vital this kind of care is to a small child, it may make it easier for her to decide that the extra money she might earn, or the satisfaction she might receive from an outside job, is not so important, after all.

What children need most from parents or substitutes. The things that are most vital in the care of a child are a little bit different at different age periods. During the first year, a baby needs a lot of motherly care. He has to be fed everything he eats, he eats often, and his food is usually different from the adults'. He makes a great deal of laundry work. In cities he usually has to be pushed in his carriage for outings. For his spirit to grow normally, he needs someone to dote on him, to think he's the most wonderful baby in the world, to make noises and baby talk at him, to hug him and smile at him, to keep him company during wakeful periods.

A day nursery or a "baby farm" is no good for an infant. There's nowhere near enough attention or affection to go around. In many cases, what care there is is matter-of-fact or mechanical rather than warm-hearted. Besides, there's too much risk of epidemics of colds and diarrhea....

2. A Working Mother Lauds the New "Two-Income Family" (1951)

Dr. Spock might have advised mothers to stay at home, but even as he wrote, a quiet revolution in women's status was grinding inexorably forward as more and more women—including mothers—took up wage-labor jobs. In the 1960s the women's movement would burst noisily into public consciousness, and women would storm all kinds of previously male bastions in the workplace and elsewhere; but in the 1940s and 1950s the issue of working women was still controversial. When the following article appeared in Harper's Magazine in 1951, one reader wrote to the editor that she was "violently agitated" by it. Another wrote that he and his wife were "singing hallelujahs that the days of financial necessity which compelled for a time two-income living have passed." Still another lamented that the spectacle of women trading home and hearth for factory and office "is contrary to all standards, ethics, etc. which Western civilization has practiced and protected.... Woe to Western civilization and especially to the family unit as we know it—for it is the hub around which our civilization revolves, and when that is gone, everything is gone—if such thoughts as are expressed, and evidently supported, by Mrs. Mavity [author of the article] ever become universally accepted by society." In her article that follows, what does Nancy Barr Mavity see as the root cause driving women into the workplace? What role does she assign to the Great Depression and World War II?

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I am a wife, a mother, and a grandmother, and I have been a continuous jobholder since I graduated from college. Besides all that, I am a dodo.

I never used to think of myself as a dodo, but it has been brought home to me by my married daughter and her contemporaries that I most certainly am. These young people have perpetrated a revolution right under the noses of my generation. There have been no parades, no crusading arguments or lectures or legislative lobbying. They did not fight for a revolution—they simply are one.

The whole argument of marriage versus a career which burned like a roaring fire when I was my daughter's age is now as dead as wet ashes. The revolution that we were so vociferous about as a matter of principle has taken place unobtrusively as a matter of hard necessity.

My daughter and her friends and the young married women who work in my office do not call themselves career women. They do not harangue about the right to develop their individual capacities. They do not discuss the primary function of woman as a homemaker. They do not argue the propriety of muscling in on the labor market. They just plain work....

Under present circumstances, a single pay envelope will not meet the needs of a white-collar-class family. It is as simple as that....

Through a good many years of my life I heard men say, "I'd be ashamed to let my wife work." The standard of a man's success in America was—and to some extent still is—his earning capacity. It was a symbol of his masculine prowess and an extension of his virility. To maintain his social, his economic, and his psychological position as titular head of the family by virtue of being its source of supply, he often had to relinquish long-term goals for temporary advantages and to sacrifice his natural aptitudes to the demands of an immediate and steady job. No wonder Thoreau said that "most men lead lives of quiet desperation."

No wonder, then, that men jealously guarded their prerogatives. To be a "good provider" was one of the chief criteria—and in the eyes of many was *the* criterion—of a man's achievement. Every woman of my generation who worked in what was called a "man's job" knew what it was to walk on eggs. With a diplomacy that would make Machiavelli look like a coal-heaver in a conference of foreign ministers the masculine ego had to be protected from the slightest scratch in both marital and occupational relations.

This often made the women of my generation hopping mad. What we did not realize was that the restrictions foisted on us by the masculine ego were not prompted by innate sex cussedness. They were imposed by a cultural code which men dared not flout under penalty of losing face, and which they would keep women from flouting, if they could, for the same reason. But something has happened to alter this code, something that has convinced men as well as women that the old demarcation of their spheres of action made them both the losers....

These young people were children during the great depression of the thirties. They learned the facts of economic life by experiencing or observing the collapse of financial security. They were married either just before or during or after the war, and when their husbands were called into the armed forces the young women had to learn to stand alone in a practical as well as an emotional sense.

Once the war was over and husbands returned, few of them had had a chance to accumulate any savings. The allotments they received from the government were

insufficient to support their families in accordance with middle-class standards of living. Wives with or without children either had to produce income or throw themselves on the mercy of relatives who had problems of their own....

How does a two-income family cope with the problem of bringing up young children? Not so long ago a woman of proved vocational ability was adjured to divide her life into two—or, more rarely, three—periods. She might work until she produced a baby, but then she must either bury her vocation altogether, exchanging it for that of housewife-and-mother, or else lay it away for long years with the rather feeble hope of resuscitating it after the children were grown. That picture has now changed out of all recognition. Indeed, one hears wives arguing that children, instead of constituting the unanswerable argument against the two-income family, are strong arguments in its favor.

"If it weren't for the children," said one wife to me, "I'd be tempted to try to get along on one salary, even if it meant skimping. But we need two incomes to enable us to have a house with a yard that the children can play in; to live in a neighborhood where I don't have to worry about their playmates; to provide a guitar for the musical one and dancing lessons for the one who needs to improve her muscular coordination—not to mention teeth-straightening and medical insurance and the bonds we are stowing away for their education...."

The depression years, the war years, and the postwar years have cracked the old economic-social family mold. These were forces outside the control of individual women, but they have learned a lesson from circumstances. The working wives of 1951 have learned to recognize the mistakes of my generation, and are determined not to repeat them....

3. *The Move to Suburbia (1954)*

Americans by the millions abandoned the cities and joined the exodus to suburbia in the 1940s and 1950s. Most migrating Americans were young married couples just beginning to form families and have children. They took up residence in brand spanking-new neighborhoods that they obviously preferred to the crowded, and expensive, turmoil of the cities. Yet countless observers found much to criticize in the new suburban way of life that was quickly becoming an American norm. What aspects of that lifestyle does the following article criticize? How persuasive is the criticism? If life in the suburbs was really as thin and conformist as the author claims, why did all those millions of people keep moving to suburbia? How was the raw, historyless character of suburban life any different from life on the thinly populated frontier?

A young man who had attended an exclusive preparatory school and an Ivy League college felt that his horizon had been restricted because, during the years of his education he had met only the sons of bankers, brokers, executives, lawyers and doctors. He determined that, when the time came, *his* children would go to public school.

The time came. The young man and his wife moved out to the suburbs where their children could get fresh air and play space, go to public school and grow up

¹From Sidonie M. Gruenberg, "Homogenized Children of New Suburbia," *New York Times Magazine*, September 19, 1954, p. 14.

with children of all kinds. "And whom do my children meet?" he asks. "The children of bankers, brokers, executives, lawyers and doctors!"

Despite the drawback that depressed this particular parent, the suburb into which he moved had certain things in its favor, besides the obvious attraction of *lebensraum*.^{*} It was a town, one of the older suburbs. It had grown up gradually over the years with its own schools, churches and deepening civic consciousness until it had developed into a real *community* with traditions of its own.

New Suburbia is something else again. Around every major city from the Atlantic to the Pacific the new suburbs have been springing up like mushrooms in a damp season. They are sometimes created by dividing large estates—as on Long Island, in Westchester County and in areas around Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles. More often the new suburbs are built on what had been until recently empty acreage. Whether in California or New Jersey they are typically "prefabricated" in all their details and the parts are suddenly assembled on the spot. Unlike towns and cities and the suburbs of the past, they do not evolve gradually but emerge full-blown. They are designed and constructed by corporations or real estate operators who work on mass-production principles. A hundred or a thousand houses open their doors almost simultaneously, ready for occupancy....

... The new suburbanites take what they can afford and can get. And they pay a subtle psychological price. For one thing, the new suburb is a community only in the sense that it is an aggregate of dwellings—often identical houses. It may in time become a community, but not yet. No one has grown up in it; it has no traditions. We really don't know what effect it will ultimately have on children; we can only conjecture.

The families of New Suburbia consist typically of a young couple with one or two children, or perhaps one child and another on the way. The child living here sees no elderly people, no teenagers. Except on weekends and holidays he sees only mothers and other children of his own age. This dearth of weekday variety was remarked on by a woman who had moved to a new suburb and returned after some months to visit friends in her former city neighborhood. "Though I have lived in the city most of my life," she said, "I was actually startled to see such a variety of people, of every type and age. It seemed so long since I had seen old people and school kids, since I had seen men around in the daytime!"

If Old Suburbia is lacking in a variety of work going on that boys and girls can watch or actively share in, it at least has a garage, a movie theatre, a shoe repair shop. In New Suburbia there is often nothing but a supermarket and a gasoline station. In Old Suburbia children grow up seeing people of all ages and playing with children older than themselves—from whom each child normally learns the ways and customs appropriate to the age into which he matures day by day. In New Suburbia the children are likely to be nearly of the same age. In Old Suburbia the fathers take the train to the city each day, leaving the car with the mothers. In New Suburbia there is often no railroad station, so the fathers drive to work in their own cars or by "car pool." The mothers remain—with the house and yard and children.

The children growing up in New Suburbia run the danger of becoming "homogenized." In many of the new suburbs the white child never sees a Negro.

^{*}A German word meaning space required for life, growth, or activity.