

**The Happy Housewife  
Fulfillment and the Role of Mother Post World War II**

By

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## **The Happy Housewife**

### **Fulfillment and the Role of Mother Post World War II**

In 1963, Betty Friedan introduced The Feminine Mystique to the American public. The feminine mystique, according to Friedan, was the social concept that the highest value and the only commitment for women should be the fulfillment of their own femininity.<sup>1</sup> Friedan used this term as part of her explanation of the current state of the middle class female. “The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women’s troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love. It simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence ... into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live.”<sup>2</sup> Friedan’s examination led her to see the relegation of the American female to a domestic sphere in which she experienced pain, dissatisfaction, and self-loathing.<sup>3</sup>

Friedan’s book rapidly became a bestseller and elicited a mass response from women across the country claiming that the book had changed their lives.<sup>4</sup> For those women, Friedan had labeled what she called “the problem that had no name” by identifying the psychological consequences of living the life of, what Friedan labeled, the

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<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique. (London: Penguin, 1965), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era. (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 209-217.

housewife-mother.<sup>5</sup> In giving voice to what Friedan saw as a rampant problem and generating such a response, she has often been credited with giving rise to modern feminism.<sup>6</sup>

While Friedan's book and her ideas had an indisputable impact on the women of her day, her argument that being a housewife-mother wasn't fulfilling made such an impact only because of an earlier association between fulfillment and the housewife role. Only if women valued personal fulfillment to begin with would it matter that they were not achieving fulfillment by becoming mothers and taking care of the home. There had to be a prior sense within society that being a mother and housewife was supposed to bring fulfillment for it to cause discontent that the role did not. Therefore, to understand completely any association between the housewife-mother role and fulfillment, one must go back years earlier to the growth of the concept of fulfilling motherhood. It is the purpose of this essay to examine the popular encouragement for women to seek fulfillment in their role as wives and mothers.

The housewife-mother role that Friedan criticized was not new to the postwar period. However, the way people began to think about women's roles was new. The changes brought by World War II, and the peace following it, brought the condition of women in the United States much more into public view. The place of women had not previously received as much attention as it did during the postwar.

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<sup>5</sup> Friedan, 20, 44. Friedan makes a specific point of naming the domestic role of women as housewife-mother.

<sup>6</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958" in Not June Cleaver : Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960. (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1994), 230.

World War II profoundly affected American women. Numerous women were encouraged to work in jobs formerly performed only by men. This gave women the chance to hold jobs that they had never before been offered. The new position of women was largely accepted until the war began drawing to a close, at which point people began seriously questioning what would happen to the social structure and the position of women in postwar America. A substantial number of Americans, including members of Congress, felt that women should quit their jobs, especially those in factories, as the soldiers started returning home.<sup>7</sup> The war-weary public was expressing conservative sentiments as part of a growing urge to return to normalcy.

While the war had affected the position of American women, the changes that occurred at the end of the war had a far greater effect on women's lives. Major changes in the social structure increased the focus on motherhood and the methods of child rearing. With the return to peace, there was an overwhelming desire among the majority of Americans to marry and start families. The marriage rate skyrocketed from 85 per 1,000 unmarried females in 1940, the last full year of peace, to nearly 100 per 1,000 unmarried females in 1945, when the war ended.<sup>8</sup> More people were getting married at a younger age. The median age for first marriage dropped steadily for both males and females from 1947 to 1956.<sup>9</sup> With people getting married earlier there were more married people in the United States. Of those that came of age during and just after World War II, 94.1 percent of men and 96.4 percent of women married. Overall in 1950,

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<sup>7</sup> William Henry Chafe, The Paradox of Change : American Women in the 20th Century. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 156.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington, D.C.:Government Printing Office, 1975), 1-6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-9.

66 percent of the total population was married, while the marriage rate had only been as high as 60 percent for any decade since 1900.<sup>10</sup> These young married couples desired more children and had them earlier than people in previous generations. What resulted was a sharp increase in the birth rate: in just two years, from 1945 to 1947, the birth rate jumped from 20 to over 25 births per 1,000 people.<sup>11</sup> The post-war surge brought the birth rate to a twentieth-century high, after a prolonged decline in fertility that had lasted nearly two centuries.<sup>12</sup>

A second alteration of social structure with profound cultural consequences can be attributed to a movement of a large segment of the population from the cities into less populated areas. The bulk of new postwar housing construction occurred on the periphery of most major cities. In 1950, it was reported that the suburban national growth rate was ten times that of central cities and that an estimated nine million had moved to the suburbs in the decade since 1945.<sup>13</sup> The suburbs, with their detached houses, physically separated individuals from each other, contributing to a low population density per square mile. The suburbs tended to consist of small family units, meaning that those who were attracted to and moved to the suburbs were mostly nuclear families consisting of a husband, wife, and their children.<sup>14</sup> The absence of extended families meant that most children would grow up only having intimate contact with their parents and siblings. This change in social structure meant that raising children was no

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Vital Statistics of the United States, 1981 (Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics, 1985), 1-7.

<sup>12</sup> May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, 136.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 238.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 239.

longer a group effort involving the extended family but the sole responsibility of the mother. Yet, the mother as the primary caretaker of the children was not a new social development arising from the suburbs. Women had been responsible for the care of the home and the children since the beginning of the century. What changed in the postwar was the social perception of a mother's raising of her children.

It was at a time when there were more mothers in society than ever before and with the task of mothering falling more to individual women instead of groups that the idea of fulfillment became increasingly associated with motherhood. Not only was the idea of maternal fulfillment growing during the early postwar period but the psychological responsibilities of the mother to the children were as well. The idea of fulfillment here refers to a general sense of satisfaction, enjoyment, and personal reward that mothers derived from their role. The postwar view of motherhood considered it be a very natural part of women's existence. Having children fulfilled what was commonly perceived as a woman's basic needs. Therefore, fulfillment was an element of having and caring for children. In this text, the words fulfillment, satisfaction, and reward will be used interchangeably and for the purposes of this text are considered similar.

The writing of Betty Friedan was instrumental in the way that people thought about fulfillment in the postwar period. While some of Friedan's ideas have been mentioned, further examination of The Feminine Mystique is necessary to gain a better understanding her perceptions of maternal fulfillment. In addition, Friedan's work was important not only for its claims about the lives of housewives, but because it would have an impact on virtually all those that would write after her.

The feminine mystique according to Friedan was the concept that the highest value for women was the fulfillment of their femininity, a somewhat mysterious but natural and intuitive part of their being. According to the mystique, the trouble of women in the past had been to attempt to be like men instead of accepting their nature, which would only find fulfillment in male domination and nurturing maternal love.<sup>15</sup>

Friedan felt that popular magazines had been selling the feminine mystique to women through articles that highlighted the benefits of the domestic life. The argument postulated that magazines downplayed women's education and independence in favor of "happy housewife" images.<sup>16</sup> The domestic ideal and the feminine mystique relegated women to the home through the successful messages of the post war literature. She felt that the domestic ideology was so pervasive in the fifties that it had kept women silent about the psychological consequences of living as a housewife.<sup>17</sup> For Friedan the only way to find true fulfillment was through the realization of their full human potential. The way to realize this potential would only come through having a career and performing what she felt was meaningful work.<sup>18</sup>

The Feminine Mystique, as an early critique of fifties domestic life and the overbearing magazines which encouraged it, awakened further debate and examination into the legitimacy of Friedan's ideas. The Feminine Mystique was so widely read and elicited a such a wide response from American women that it laid a ground work from which other historians would talk about the popular influences on domestic life. In addition, the book made Friedan a feminist hero because she was one of the first people

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<sup>15</sup> Friedan, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 37, 67.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 20, 44.



to speak critically of women's existence in the fifties. Betty Friedan's popularity and position also had the effect of luring scholars to further examination of her ideas.

Several scholars have examined the other forms of proscriptive literature from the postwar period and reached conclusions similar to Friedan. Child-care manuals, according to historians Nancy Weiss and Julia Wrigley encouraged domesticity and shaped women's popular identity. While reaching similar conclusions, it is important to note that Friedan was actively critiquing the condition of housewives in the fifties while historians Weiss and Wrigley were attempting to further the understanding of the lives of women at the time. Examining articles published by both scholars illuminates their agreement with Friedan.

Nancy Weiss in the article "Mother, The Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's Baby and Child Care" finds that child-care manuals are very much mother-rearing manuals too with clear guides on how the mother should act.<sup>19</sup> Weiss used pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock's very popular postwar child-care manual to illustrate that behind every rule concerning desirable child behavior was a background message to mothers advising them on the proper and moral way for them to conduct their lives.<sup>20</sup> According to her article, the mother in Spock's advice has to be very careful because improper mother love can harm the life of the child. At the same time women are advised that they should be enjoy their children. The mother has to be careful to show just the right amount and type of affection. These emotional proscriptions illustrate how Spock superimposed an emotional workday on the mother's physical workday to urge the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Weiss, Nancy "Mother, The Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's Baby and Child Care," American Quarterly, Winter 1977, 519-546.

establishment of proper conditions for the child's development.<sup>21</sup> According to Weiss, all child work became mother work, as women were encouraged to keep a happy attitude all the time or fear hurting their children.

The mother's identity became dependent on her child through the advice of the child-care manual. In addition, the mother had to be unfailingly upbeat as she was encouraged to smile even when it was sometimes inappropriate or risk hurting her children. All of this could only be accomplished if the mother devoted all her time and energy to her children because the mother's workload had doubled with the inclusion of emotional work. In this article, Weiss concurs with Friedan's assessment that women were sold the "happy housewife" image and were further pushed into the home with the added work required of fifties mothers.

Nancy Weiss further writes about child-care manual proscription of increased maternal work in "The Mother-Child Dyad Revisited: Perceptions of Mothers and Children in Twentieth Century Child-Rearing Manuals."<sup>22</sup> In the article, Weiss focused on the mother-child relationship portrayed in advice manuals. Similar to her other work, Weiss examined the amount of physical and emotional work that child-care manuals proscribed to women from early in the century to the post World War II period. The article finds that during the postwar period mothers were expected to do more for their children, increasing the time and energy mothers had to put into their children.<sup>23</sup> Living the life of a full-time housewife was necessary so that the proper amount of time could be

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 520.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 533.

<sup>22</sup> Weiss, Nancy. "The Mother-Child Dyad Revisited: Perceptions of Mothers and Children in Twentieth Century Child-Rearing Manuals," *Journal of Social Issues* 34/2 (1978) 29-45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 35.

devoted to the children. Again this is similar to Friedan because Weiss illustrates women's further entrapment into the life of the housewife through the increased duty of the mother. Yet, while recognizing the greater emotional responsibility of the mother toward the child, Weiss fails fully to examine what message that emotional responsibility was sending to the mother.

Historian Julia Wrigley similarly looks at the mother's investment in her child postwar in her article "Do Young Children Need Intellectual Stimulation? Experts' Advice to Parents, 1900-1985."<sup>24</sup> The focus of the article is the change through the century in the methods of child-care meant to produce a healthy child. Wrigley acknowledges the early twentieth century position that stimulation is harmful to babies and then tracks the rise of the belief in emotional and intellectual development.<sup>25</sup> The article then notes the mother as the main caretaker and her increasing responsibility for her children's intellectual development. In making the mother responsible for her child's intellectual development, she had to devote more time to the child. The care tasks no longer were just for physical maintenance but now the mother had to ensure that the baby would be intellectually stimulated as well. The added duties of motherhood encouraged full-time domesticity with an increased workload and higher output expected of the mother. Again exhorting the concepts of Friedan, the increased duties of the mother postwar meant that her identity was increasingly tied to her domestic role. By focusing on women's further relegation to the home through increased duties, both Weiss and

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<sup>24</sup> Wrigley, Julia. "Do Young Children Need Intellectual Stimulation? Experts' Advice to Parents, 1900-1985," *History of Education Quarterly*. 29 (Spring 1989), 41-75.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 56, 59.

Wrigley fail to look further toward the emotional intricacies of what it meant to be a homemaker.

With Friedan such a central author in the portrayal of the lives of postwar housewives, historical debate focused on both agreement and disagreement with her ideas. Using the same popular magazines as Friedan, scholars began to find conflicting messages that did not solely endorse domesticity. Joanne Meyerowitz is one scholar who took issue with Friedan's version of the dominant ideology of the time, the conservative promotion of domesticity.<sup>26</sup> In the article "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," Meyerowitz examined the magazines of the fifties, and found that the popular discourse did not have a single overriding ideology but was instead rife with contradictions. In addition to disagreeing with Friedan's monolithic assessment of post war magazines, Meyerowitz found that they contained repressive and subversive potential.<sup>27</sup> According to this research, magazines advocated both the domestic and the non-domestic often emphasizing individual achievement as well as the domestic ideal. Meyerowitz also writes that as much as magazines portrayed the domestic ideal it sometimes contained language of discontent.

The concept of discontent was one that other historians found in the popular magazines. Eva Moskowitz in her article "It's Good to Blow Your Top: Women's Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent" found that magazines consistently gave voice to discontented women.<sup>28</sup> Moskowitz claimed that month after month magazines reported the difficulties that women encountered trying to realize the satisfaction that

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<sup>26</sup> Meyerowitz, 230.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 231.

marriage and motherhood was supposed to guarantee.<sup>29</sup> This argument, while taking issue with the messages of magazines, supported Friedan's idea that the women of the fifties could never find fulfillment in the domestic role by highlighting popular discontent. Meyerowitz and Moskowitz suggested the existence of social forces encouraging women into domesticity while not wholly seeing it as the fault of popular magazines. While proving that Friedan was not entirely correct in her assessment of the messages of popular magazines, Meyerowitz and Moskowitz do not go further than showing evidence of discontent. Both scholars fail to look further into why women may have been expressing discontent.

Somewhat different than just agreeing or disagreeing with Friedan's assessments of women's condition postwar, Historian Elaine Tyler May found broader social conditions instrumental in shaping women's identities. While May examines the fifties from a somewhat different perspective, she assumes as true many of Friedan's ideas. May doesn't counter that women in the postwar were discontented or trapped into domesticity. In fact, May felt that there were definitely social forces encouraging women into domesticity and that these forces were found in the socio-political conditions of the time. It is hypothesized in May's book, Homeward Bound, that the traditional family values of the fifties were the result of postwar Americans' need to feel liberated from the past and secure in the future.<sup>30</sup> To men and women who had seen the troubles of the depression, World War II, and were now instilled with the fears of the cold war, the home was a source of meaning and security. Marrying young and having several children

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<sup>28</sup> Moskowitz, Eva, "It's Good to Blow Your Top: Women's Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent 1945-1965," Journal of Women's History. 8/3 (1996), 66.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 67.

was a way to rebel against the disaster scenarios generated by the nuclear threat.<sup>31</sup> May saw the family as the arena where men and women could gain control of their destinies and shape the future through their children. Assuming that men and women had little control over destiny threatened by nuclear annihilation the anxieties generated by fear of the bomb and the communist threat put a premium on family stability and linked women's role as caretaker to national security.<sup>32</sup> Fear of communism reinforced the domestic ideal because things that deviated from established norms, like career women, were susceptible to classification as contributing to communism. While fear and the desire for security may have reinforced the domestic ideal, it cannot be the sole explanation for the creation of the post-war social structure. Reaction to the atomic age could have manifest itself in several ways. A devaluation of marriage and fear of bringing children into an atomic world could have easily occurred. The formation of large families with women as caretakers therefore was the result of more than just communism and the atomic age. May looked for causes as to why women went into the home but did not really examine the emotional ideas about being housewives.

May is reflective of the scholarly literature which argues about or incorporates many of Friedan's ideas while generally ignoring or underestimating a full understanding of the place of fulfillment. It is significant that the popular discourse of the postwar era encouraged women to find fulfillment as housewives and mothers. In popular media, the idea of fulfillment sent to women and reflected back by them. While the mothers of the postwar reflected back the concept of fulfillment, it is not assumed that they actually

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<sup>30</sup> May, Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Meyerowitz, 85.

were fulfilled. The popular discourse by encouraging women to seek fulfillment in mothering served to make this concept a conscious value of motherhood. Thus, Friedan's pronouncement that motherhood was not fulfilling caused such an impact because finding fulfillment had become a created value of postwar motherhood.

The popular encouragement that women seek fulfillment in motherhood is illustrated by looking at three aspects of that popular encouragement. The first aspect for examination is the growth of the discourse about maternal fulfillment. In section one, comparing popular child-care manuals from the postwar and from an earlier time illuminates the changes in the way motherhood was talked about especially in regard to mothers' personal satisfaction. Building on the first section about the growth of a discourse of maternal fulfillment, is an examination of the way women were encouraged to find fulfillment in the number of children they had. The second section is a look from inside the family where the popular discourse portrayed to women that having more children meant more chances for fulfillment. The third section looks from outside the family at the assurances the popular discourse gave to women about fulfillment in the tasks of child rearing and the external social value of motherhood. Together these sections provide a picture of the rise of greater discussion about maternal fulfillment, fulfillment discourse about women in the family, and fulfillment discourse about the tasks and external value of motherhood.

## Section 1

### Mother and Child: Spock and his Predecessors

The basic duty of the mother has always been to care for and rear the children. How this rearing has been carried out and to what extent the mother was responsible for certain duties changed over time. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was relatively common for extended families to live with each other or within close proximity. Under these conditions, several women in the extended family were responsible for care of the children. As the century advanced and it was no longer as likely that extended families would reside together, an alteration in child rearing patterns occurred. The change was largely toward a single family unit where a mother raised her children.<sup>33</sup> Looking specifically at the period of time following World War II, continued suburbanization and the return of many women to the home increased the likelihood that mothers would be the primary sources of care for the children.

The care of children has been a societal concern for centuries, but the nature and perception of those concerns were fluid concepts. Changing social conditions and increasing formal knowledge were partially responsible for changed viewpoints on child care. With the growth of mass circulation magazines and increased literacy, especially among women, there grew to be a large market for advice literature and children's care guides. These guides acted not only as child-rearing manuals but also in many ways as mother-rearing manuals as well. They often recommended to women the proper, correct,



and moral way to conduct their own lives.<sup>34</sup> In this way advice literature can be seen as serving two purposes. On the one hand, it helped outline what mothers were supposed to be doing for their children. Secondly, advice literature told mothers how they were supposed to handle themselves as well. These guides were primarily targeted at a middle-class audience because these parents were more likely than less affluent ones to look to expert opinion on child-rearing matters.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the mother that is discussed in popular advice is almost always a full-time mother who devotes all her energy in that direction.<sup>36</sup>

While the profile of readers of advice literature remained fairly consistent into the postwar period, magazine contents shifted to a greater focus on psychology and the intellectual development of the child. Studies showed that the topic of advice articles appearing most often early in the century focused primarily on the physical care of the infant with medical issues being discussed most often.<sup>37</sup> In the 1930s, however, a notable increase occurred in the number of articles that focused on the intellectual development of children. These articles placed greater emphasis on children as impressionable thinking feeling beings and less like inanimate objects. With previous advice literature solely focusing on physical care, the child was an object to be handled. The emphasis on intellectual development introduced in the thirties meant that the child was no longer an object but a feeling independent being. A focus on emotional needs, scholars argue,

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<sup>33</sup> Leta Stetter Hollingworth, Social Devices Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children. (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 20.

<sup>34</sup> Weiss, "Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*," 519-546.

<sup>35</sup> Wrigley, 41-75.

<sup>36</sup> Weiss, "Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*," 519-546.

<sup>37</sup> Wrigley, 41-75.

resulted from declining health fears and Freudian thinking that, while not being explicitly expressed, began influencing the literature.<sup>38</sup> This can be seen as the beginning of the peak of formal psychological proscription for parents.<sup>39</sup>

The expression of concern regarding children's emotional needs that grew up in the thirties became more prevalent post World War II. The care for the cognitive and emotional development of the child thus became incorporated into the mother's responsibilities that began to appear post war. While the mother had greater duties post war, she was supposed to be deriving satisfaction and fulfillment from this role while performing her tasks. This idea of enjoying one's children became more popular following 1945 and can be seen in examining the advice literature to mothers early in the century and the advice given post war. Through comparison, it becomes clear that the postwar texts encouraged women to find fulfillment and satisfaction in mothering. While numerous advice texts were written throughout the century, picking one well-known text from each period and comparing them gives a good sense of the changes that had occurred following World War II.

The first text is a manual published in 1914 by the U.S. Children's Bureau entitled Infant Care. The Children's Bureau was an official government branch dedicated to child welfare and related matters. Mary Mills West, a professional writer, widow, and mother of five children, wrote the pamphlet which was the second advice piece she wrote for the Bureau. The second advice manual from the post World War II period is The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care which was published in 1946. The book

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Zuckerman, Michael. "Dr. Spock the Confidence Man," in Charles Rosenberg, ed., The Family in History. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1975) 197-207.

was written by pediatrician, Dr. Benjamin Spock. While there were other advice literature sources written during each time period none surpassed these two in popularity. Both guides sold numerous copies and elicited a mass response from women around the country.

Spock gave women the idea that they could achieve some measure of fulfillment through raising their children according to his precepts. He stressed that a mother raising her child is the natural culmination of a woman's destiny. Because Spock feels it is natural, he encourages women to feel fulfillment in the everyday duties of mothering. As part of his ideology, the everyday duties of mothering included the emotional and psychological development of the child which meant more work for mothers but more enjoyment through their efforts.

Contrasting this, the United States Children's Bureau childcare pamphlet, Infant Care, gave technical physical care advice women needed to help their children live beyond infancy. The pamphlet elicited a mass response for its time with as many as 125,000 women writing the Children's Bureau each year commenting on the book, asking questions, and requesting copies.<sup>40</sup> The pamphlet was so popular partially because it gave advice on what mothers could do to ensure their children survived the precarious period of infancy.<sup>41</sup> The survival advice the manual dispensed was rigid and gave strict guidelines for the mother, often seemingly disregarding the child's will.

As part of its focus on child survival, Infant Care focused much time on spelling out conditions and habits that were considered important or imperative to bringing up

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<sup>40</sup> Weiss, "Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*," 519-546.

<sup>41</sup> Weiss, "The Mother-Child Dyad Revisited: Perceptions of Mothers and Children in Twentieth Century Child-Rearing Manuals," 29-45.

healthy children. The pamphlet has a total of 109 pages, 36 of which focus on the correct home conditions for a child and the proper care of the child from clothing to caring for its ears. This third of the pamphlet offers mostly practical physical care advice. "...If there is a well, it should be so located as to prevent the water from being poisoned by foul drainage from stable or outhouses."<sup>42</sup> Water purity was a serious issue at this point in the century, with diseases like cholera and dysentery almost sure killers of young children. In addition, the section on the home spends several paragraphs describing the importance of ventilation in the baby's room and even encourages putting the baby outside to sleep. With the number of communicable diseases prevalent prior to World War I, providing adequate fresh air to the baby was important to keep him from getting any of the eleven diseases mentioned in the book.<sup>43</sup> The fear of communicable diseases is also present in the advice that, "Great care should be taken to protect the baby from flies and mosquitoes... the crib should be covered with netting."<sup>44</sup> These are just some of the many examples of advice given in the pamphlet purely concerning the physical survival of the baby.

By the end of World War II many of the physical care techniques in the Infant Care manual had disappeared or been modified in the advice literature. This can be seen in Spock's, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, which elicited a mass response from American women, just as the Infant Care manual had done in its time. So many women wrote Spock in response to the book that an entire archive of letters was

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Children's Bureau. Infant Care (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922) 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-97.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

created.<sup>45</sup> Women referred to their copy of the manual as their “Bible” and used it so much that it literally fell apart and they had to request extra copies. One woman even wrote Dr. Spock to request a copy to put in the glove box of her automobile just in case she needed it there.<sup>46</sup> Women appeared to absolutely crave the advice that he had to give. The book eventually went through more than two hundred printings with sales of over twenty million copies.<sup>47</sup>

While Spock did discuss the physical care of children, his treatment of the issues differed from advice given in the earlier pamphlet. Compared to the over thirty pages dedicated to home conditions in the 1914 pamphlet, Spock only spends about fifteen pages, about three percent of the book, discussing the same topics. There is almost no mention of contaminated water supplies by Spock. His only advice is to, “boil the water ... if you aren’t sure that the water from your faucet is absolutely pure.”<sup>48</sup> Compared to the 1914 treatment of water contamination from raw sewage, Spock makes only a short, almost perfunctory, comment about boiling the water. In the quote, Spock casually mentions the water coming from a faucet, a sign that indoor plumbing was more prevalent. Indoor plumbing meant that people were no longer as reliant on open wells for water as they had been in 1914. In addition the water coming out of the faucet in 1946 had likely been treated so that the chances of contracting cholera or dysentery were minimal compared to what they had been thirty years earlier. The water supply was no longer a problem for the child’s survival, just as communicable diseases were not as

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<sup>45</sup> Spock (Dr. Benjamin) Archives. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, George Arents Library, 1948-1965.

<sup>46</sup> Weiss, “Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock’s *Baby and Child Care*,” 519-546.

<sup>47</sup> Zuckerman, 197-207.

much of a threat post 1945. Spock mentions all the diseases listed in the 1914 guide, but his discussion of these diseases such as diphtheria includes vaccination information.<sup>49</sup>

The 1946 guide even includes an entire section on inoculations that is not present in the Infant Care pamphlet. With inoculations recommended and available postwar, children's death from disease was one less issue to be discussed at such length in child-care texts.

While giving less space to some of the physical components of child rearing, Spock writes more about the emotional and psychological components of the tasks of child care than in the 1914 Infant Care pamphlet. The differences are clear, especially in the treatment of the same material, like thumb sucking and crying, in the two manuals. Part of the separation between Baby and Child Care and the 1914 manual was the very strict nature of the 1914 guide.

The 1914 Infant Care pamphlet viewed thumb sucking as a dreadful habit of which a child should be broken as soon as possible. "The extremely bad habit of sucking ... the evil effects ascribed to the habit are that it spoils the natural arch of the mouth..."<sup>50</sup> The solution the manual gave to mothers was to put restraints or splints on the baby's arm to prevent sucking. The section even mentions that, "there are patent articles sold in stores for keeping the hand from the mouth..."<sup>51</sup> Following mention of the "evil" of the habit and advising the binding of the arm there is only a small mention at the end of the section on the effect this may have on the child. "It (the arm) should be

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<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Spock, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care. (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 89.

<sup>49</sup> Spock, 418.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Children's Bureau, 44-45.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

set free now and then ... to save as much unnecessary strain on his nerves as possible."<sup>52</sup>

It admittedly made the child unhappy if it was a "strain on the nerves". If setting the arm free at certain times saved some unnecessary strain on the nerves, then, conversely, binding the arm caused necessary emotional distress in order to break the child of the habit.

By 1946 the expert's view on thumb sucking had changed. Spock acknowledges that previously thumb sucking was viewed as a bad habit, however, he writes that it really isn't a habit but occurs in very young children as part of their need to satisfy a sucking instinct. He then writes that as the child gets older, it changes from being instinctual to taking on an emotional element. "It is a sort of comfort which he needs at special times. He sucks when he is tired or bored or frustrated ... he retreats to early infancy when sucking was his chief joy."<sup>53</sup> In considering this emotional level, especially one in which the habit provides some happiness, Spock does not readily suggest that parents do anything about thumb sucking, even mentioning the relative uselessness of arm restraints in stopping the habit.<sup>54</sup>

Spock's discussion of thumb sucking is lengthier than in the 1914 manual and even covers the emotional angle of the mother. "So, if your child is thumb sucking, see to it that his life is good. Most important of all, try to stop thinking about it. If you keep on worrying ... the child will feel it and react against it."<sup>55</sup> The mother is responsible for the emotional state of the child, and how the mother feels directly projects onto the child and how he will deal with the thumb sucking. That the mother's state of being directly

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Spock, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, 142.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 143.

projects onto the child is reflective of the idea that what is good for the child is good for the mother. The mother's independent emotional welfare was overshadowed by her child's needs and the implication is that if her child is happy then she will be happy. This complex handling of thumb sucking especially from its emotional angle is something not even considered in the earlier manual. The 1914 guide finds a mother's comfort much more important, especially because it neglects the child as its own being.

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The 1914 guide encouraged an extremely regimented feeding and toilet schedule for the child to encourage regular development.<sup>56</sup> Here regular development is what the author considers the healthy upbringing of the child. The Infant Care pamphlet states that a strict schedule, "... is not only one of the greatest factors in keeping the baby well and in training him in a way which will be of value to him all through life, but it also reduces the work of the mother to a minimum and provides for her certain assured periods of rest and recreation."<sup>57</sup> The mother caring for the child is work with no hint that she gained any enjoyment from being with her child. Spock feels it important that the mother respond to the child's needs, where as the concern here is that the mother gets rest from the tedious duties of child care. In the 1914 manual, the ideology is opposite, what is good for the mother is good for the child.

This formulation starkly contrasts with Spock's attitude toward care of the baby with the mother not responding to a schedule she sets, but instead, acting on the needs and whims of the child. He specifically speaks out against arbitrary scheduling. "It is wrong to take the figures for an average baby too seriously when you are dealing with

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Children's Bureau, 45, 43, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 42.



one particular baby.”<sup>58</sup> What is recommended is more flexibility, which Spock views as natural as he demonstrates by making reference to a woman in a far away place who has never heard of a schedule. When her baby cries she picks him up and puts him to her breast. As he continues writing Spock makes clear the reward of flexibility. “He nurses until he is satisfied, then falls asleep. Seeing him peacefully asleep satisfies the mother, too.”<sup>59</sup> The baby is happy so the mother is happy too. The scheduling is not as important as satisfying the child. In postwar America, the emotional needs of the child and the subsequent fulfillment of the mother had replaced the idea of a rigorous schedule, regular development, and maternal labor as primary child-care material.

Even the language used in the advice sections reflects the more sensitive emotional ideas of Spock compared to the rigid 1914 Bureau advice. In the earlier manual babies are viewed as “spoiled” or “fussy” which imparts early judgement on them and their behavior by describing them in negative terms. This negative language implies that the child is inherently bad and will behave that way if given the chance. According to Spock, babies are not harmful but morally neutral and passive beings that are under parental control. The mother’s emotional state reflected onto her child and elicited a reaction. This means that under Spock’s thinking, a mother’s environmental influence increased. It is the mother’s actions that shape the child, thus making her more responsible for how the child develops.<sup>60</sup>

Related to the above idea is the distinction between the manuals in the treatment of the emotional development of the child. In the 1914 guide, if the child is crying and

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<sup>58</sup> Spock, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>60</sup> Weiss, “The Mother-Child Dyad Revisited: Perceptions of Mothers and Children in Twentieth

the mother can find no obvious problem like thirst, illness, or pain, then the mother is instructed to leave the child alone and let it cry in its crib. If the mother picks up the child, she is warned that it will become spoiled, “and a household tyrant whose continual demands make a slave of the mother.”<sup>61</sup> This view sees no harm coming to the cognitive/emotional development of the child from being left to cry. In fact, the manual proposes the opposite is true with the child becoming a beast if given attention. The 1914 guide even sees harm falling to the mother who will become a victim of her child if she picks it up.

Spock treated this issue very differently. He encouraged mothers to follow their natural instinct and pick up their children if they cry. He even suggested that some gentle rocking would be good for the baby.<sup>62</sup> Attention from the mother was good for the baby according to Spock and what was good for the baby was good for the mother. Spock himself makes clear the emotional benefit to the mother of tending to the crying baby. “I don’t think it’s good to let a baby cry miserably for long periods if there’s a way to comfort him, not because it will do physical harm but because of what it might do to his and his mother’s spirits.”<sup>63</sup>

Connected to the emotional element of Spock’s writing is the overriding psychological element to his work. Spock encouraged mothers to enjoy their children while performing child-care duties. He entitles an entire section “Enjoy your Baby” and states that “your baby is born to be a reasonable, friendly human being” so “don’t be afraid to love him.” The same section encourages that “he needs to be played with,

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Century Child-Rearing Manuals,” 29-45.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Children’s Bureau, 44.

<sup>62</sup> Spock, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, 20.

smiled at ... just as much as he needs vitamins and calories.”<sup>64</sup> Showing feelings of love encourages women to develop a close and personal attachment to their children. This feeling of attachment was considered a need of the baby as part of the necessary components for growing up. Of course, as part of his advice, giving the baby what it needs helps give the mother what she needs. “It’s the parents who have a natural self-confidence in themselves and a comfortable, affectionate, attitude toward their children who get the best results—and with the least effort.”<sup>65</sup> If parents meet and use specific emotional criteria in raising their children, then they will be successful. According to Spock the mother’s success is directly related to her emotional attitude.

It is important to note here that while Spock uses the word “parent”, indicating either the mother or the father, the mother is the primary addressee of the advice.<sup>66</sup> There is a section entitled “The Father’s Part” where Spock talks about how fathers should view child care. “Some fathers have been brought up to think that the care of babies and children is the mother’s job entirely. This is the wrong idea... the father’s closeness and friendliness to his children will have a vital effect on their spirits and characters.”<sup>67</sup> Yet, this should not be interpreted that Spock meant the father should participate equally with the mother in child care. He writes, “Of course, I don’t mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change just as many diapers as the mother ... it’s fine for him to do these things occasionally.”<sup>68</sup> The father is only

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>66</sup> Weiss, “Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock’s *Baby and Child Care*,” 519-546.

Weiss writes that for Spock home is the school of infancy and that the mother is the teacher-trainer of choice with all her tools the modern conveniences available in the middle to upper class home.

<sup>67</sup> Spock, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

supposed to change diapers every now and then when he is not earning the family money. This means that during all the other infinite occasions the mother must care for the child. The majority of Spock's book is about things like bottles and diapers. With the father only supposed to play a limited role in giving bottles and changing diapers, the mother then by default becomes the primary audience of his writing. Another important implication of the father section is that his participation will help the mother and make her life a little easier adding to the enjoyment she should find in raising their children.

While the father was supposed to assist the mother, according to Spock's advice, the mother had to perform numerous duties at all hours. He felt that a child should not be force fed on a strict schedule but fed when he wants even if it is 2 A.M. This permissive attitude meant that the mother had to be ready at all times to care for the baby according to its needs and watch constantly so as to provide a learning experience.<sup>69</sup> Yet, there is some acknowledgement from the doctor of the mother's many duties as he encourages them not to lose sight of what they are gaining, "...you take the job so seriously that you forget to enjoy it. Then you and the baby are both missing something... It's the gentle, easygoing kind of companionship that is good for him and good for you."<sup>70</sup> For Spock the bottom line was the fulfillment women gained in their relationship as mothers and this was not to be lost sight of doing the work involved in the job.

Spock's ideas of placing enjoyment as an important tenant of motherhood reached and influenced millions of American women. While the conclusion cannot be drawn that Spock's specific ideas were readily absorbed by all American women, ideas

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 20, 23, 24, 100.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 102.

that he had put forth or ones similar to them began to be reflected by women in popular magazines. This reflection shows that there was some measure of interchange between what the women had read and the tenets that Spock wrote about. This means to a certain extent that Spock's ideas became part of popular consciousness.

Writing in reference to Spock's ideas a man writes about an exchange between a mother and her child and the importance attached to it. "Little by little he begins to watch his mother as she moves about the room, seeing her as the center of all his needs. He comes to look for something good... when she comes over to him, and presently he gives her that first, long-looked for smile of recognition."<sup>71</sup> Spock's concept of the mother as the important determinant in the child's life is illustrated here with reference to her as the center of his existence essentially. In addition, the satisfaction and fulfillment of the mother coming from caring for the child is also indirectly mentioned here as she receives the smile that she has long awaited. It is a sign that her child is happy and this is important to her and is directly connected to the sense of enjoyment that she can find in her mothering role.

Referring to the emotional development of the child that Spock focused so much on, the same article makes reference to emotional background a child should possess. "[They are] the emotional urges which a mother should take into account in attempting to help her child adapt to the demands of twentieth century civilization, at least to some degree, by the time he reaches school age."<sup>72</sup> The man who wrote this article is reflecting Spock in making the mother responsible for the emotional growth of the child.

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<sup>71</sup> Len Chaloner, "Psychology of Baby Care," Parents' Magazine. 21 (July 1946) 19+.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Part of her duties in preparing him for the world extend beyond physical care and so more work must be put into the child so that he will be something she can be proud of.

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## Section 2

### Woman and Family

There were several important tenets of child care put forth by Dr. Benjamin Spock during the postwar period that not only differed from earlier periods but also placed greater emphasis on different aspects of child care. In his work, Spock's focus on psychological and emotional aspects of child rearing is significant not only for its focus on the implications to the child but to those raising the child as well. Spock emphasized the importance of the healthy emotional and psychological development of the child through the methods of care taking. With the mother being the main caretaker of the child, the responsibility fell to her to make sure its emotional development was healthy. By raising an emotionally healthy child, the mother could find her own satisfaction. He encouraged women to enjoy their children and thus find fulfillment in their role as mother.

Spock's asserted that women could gain enjoyment, fulfillment, and satisfaction through the role of mothering. The duties of the mother are greater when the child is smaller. To gain the most satisfaction out of the duties the mother performs, it would be best for her to continually have children so there would always be small children in the home. By having numerous children the housewife could then prolong the duties of motherhood and, therefore, gain greater fulfillment and satisfaction out of her role as a mother. Studies have suggested that mothers have multiple children in order to extend the job of motherhood over a lifetime. Sociologists, Blake and Davis, have argued that women whose primary task is that of homemaker and mother will desire at least

moderate-sized families since one or two children is not enough to occupy a sizable portion of a woman's life.<sup>73</sup> With the primary task of most women in the postwar being housewifery, this study helps illustrate why more women wanted more children. The popular discourse of the time revealed a close association between those women who had numerous children and satisfaction in their role.

While housewives in the postwar may have desired several children, this alone cannot be considered the sole motivator for larger families. Favorable social conditions had to exist as well for people to have more children. The postwar period provided this with a restructuring of society with the return of the males from the war. The return home of soldiers meant the displacement of many women from their war jobs leaving marriage and motherhood to replace the jobs they had held. Yet, desire for children and motherhood soon after marriage were not new developments to the postwar period. Having children immediately after marriage was common before the 1950s; part of this being due to a lack of adequate birth control and a lack of access to it.<sup>74</sup>

With poor birth control methods earlier in the century, many women did not have a choice about becoming mothers. Following World War II, improvements in birth control meant that women could selectively reproduce. A better understanding of birth control in the postwar illustrates that women while being able to choose to reproduce were popularly encouraged to.

During the postwar there were changes in the availability of birth control. The birth control movement that had begun to pick up momentum in the twenties and thirties led by Margaret Sanger continued to make gains. From 1930 to 1942 the number of birth

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<sup>73</sup> Franzwa, "Pronatalism in Women's Magazine Fiction", 68-69.



control clinics in the nation grew from 55 to over 800.<sup>75</sup> As part of the growing emphasis on family and family roles, the name of the Birth Control Federation of America changed to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942. The name change implied that couples would not be attempting to prevent having children, but they would be selectively having children to plan their families. This allowed birth control to fit in with the pro-mother, pro-family push of the time because the change of focus from prevention to planning ultimately made it more accessible and more acceptable. The status of abortion, however, did not change significantly. It remained illegal during the postwar period except when termed “therapeutic” by a medical board. With the existence of approval boards the number of abortions dropped, partially because they purposely made it more difficult to obtain abortions.<sup>76</sup> Essentially, during the postwar period it was acceptable to space children and plan families. However, choosing not to have children if you were married was socially unacceptable. Often wives who could not or did not have children were considered abnormal and diagnosed as having psychiatric conditions that were preventing them from conceiving.<sup>77</sup> This is reflective of how important motherhood was in the postwar period. If a woman did not have children, people labeled her as abnormal. The social importance of having children and the stigma attached to not having children reflected the pronatalism of the time.

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<sup>74</sup> Hollingworth, 26.

<sup>75</sup> J. Reed, From Private Vice to Public Virtue: The Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830 (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 144.

<sup>76</sup> Pearce and Ott, “Hospital control of sterilization and therapeutic abortion,” American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology 63, 297.

<sup>77</sup> May, “Nonmothers as Bad Mothers: Infertility and the ‘Maternal Instinct’,” in Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky “Bad” Mothers” The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America. (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 199.

The existence of a pronatalist ideology in the postwar is not enough to explain why women had more children per person: pronatalism was just a general encouragement to reproduce. Accompanying this encouragement was the idea that women could receive the benefit of satisfaction and fulfillment from having multiple children. While the popular periodicals of the time addressed the issue of women having not just one or two but several children, this encouragement was not universal. While the readership of women's monthlies was more diverse than the suburban white middle class, the individuals featured as targets for encouragement within the text were largely white and middle class.

As has been mentioned, the availability and understanding of birth control actually increased during the postwar. However, since more children were born this meant there was a conscious effort on the part of most women to have large families. While popular magazines encouraged women to have children, the magazines cannot be shown to have a direct relationship with women's choices. The efforts of the magazines helped give women greater justification for making a life's work out of being a mother by having numerous children.

Even before the conclusion of the war, women's magazines began extolling the virtues of motherhood to working women. In addition, the magazines often contained promises of fulfillment and happiness through children. As Amram Scheinfeld wrote in Ladies Home Journal in 1944, "Our population experts and other authorities foresee a growing popularity for larger families, not only because a war-ravaged world will want more children, but because increasing numbers of women, disillusioned with their

present roles or with what the workaday world can offer, will turn toward motherhood as the happiest road to fulfillment."<sup>78</sup> This is a powerful statement of the pronatalist ideology of the time. Not only is it advocating that people will want to have children to replenish the world, but it is also advocating that women can turn to motherhood for fulfillment since they presumably cannot find it in the workplace. The author goes on to state that, "a high portion of women engaged in war work have indicated, through various surveys that they will have had their fill of jobs when the war is over and ... will welcome the role of mother."<sup>79</sup> This illustrates that a popular journal propagated the idea that women can find fulfillment through motherhood as an acceptable and rewarding life path. The article by Scheinfeld goes on to use the example of the Conrad family with their seven children, as the "harbinger of the new American trend." They are lauded as being part of the new trend because, "Both parents went to college, are thoroughly enlightened and modern, and they're in the upper-middle-income group."<sup>80</sup> This is an example of the white educated middle class being the focus of an encouragement for larger families. It seems likely in this article that Scheinfeld was hoping that the middle class would lead the trend toward larger families as much as the statement was actually true. In 1944 the war was still going on and while the baby boom had begun, ideas of widespread maternity were not as pervasive as they would become in later years. In fact,

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<sup>78</sup> Scheinfeld, "Motherhood's Back in Style: The Case for Larger Families," Ladies Home Journal, September 1944, 136.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 136.

just a few years earlier Ladies Home Journal had conducted a poll in which only nine percent of the respondents had stated that they wanted five or more children.<sup>81</sup>

As part of the growing awareness of the value of psychology in the postwar era, Scheinfeld lists the benefits to the family of having numerous children while showing the harm of having no or only one child. The article cited a doctor who claimed that only children tended to become self-absorbed, easily upset and neurotic. The same doctor specifically claimed that the more children one had the less likely these symptoms are going to affect the children. The psychological aspects of the family are then presented as positive to the parent to have many children. "Every additional child exerts a profound influence on the character of its mother and father, offers them a new challenge, makes life more stimulating and evokes in them more sympathy and understanding."<sup>82</sup> The reference to making life more stimulating by having more children is an implicit reference to the fact that the mother who has more children will find more fulfillment in life because of her children.

While the benefits to the father are noted throughout the article, it is mentioned how the number of children will play a major role in the mother's happiness with her life. "The mother who is continually 'giving out' to meet the emotional and physical needs of a large family has not time to be concerned about her own maladies... such mothers are likely to be mellower, less self-centered, less vain..."<sup>83</sup> The quote portrays women, especially childless women, as high-strung, self-centered, vain. The only way to cure

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 210.

women of these personality evils is for them to have many children. In having several children, women can become better people and find satisfaction in their lives. In addition, the quote makes two very important statements about motherhood. The first is that if you are a mother, you are responsible for not just the physical but emotional needs of the family. The idea that the mother must work to raise an emotionally healthy child ties into what Spock writes about motherhood. In increasing the scope of her job by making the mother take on extra duties, she not only becomes more bound to the role by her greater involvement but also is making more of a personal investment in the child. The reward for the mother's greater personal investment is the satisfaction she finds in her self-sacrifice.

As the forties concluded, the enjoyment that a mother could get from having many children was actively voiced among mothers. In a 1949 survey by Woman's Home Companion, readers responded glowingly to the question "How Many Do You Want?"<sup>84</sup> The article reported that women overwhelmingly wanted more children than they had already. "Women with three or less actually want *more* than one more. Even Reader-Reporters with six think a little bit more should be added - .2 of a child to be precise."<sup>85</sup> The same reader-reporters who wanted more children than they already had reported they wanted large families not only because they felt it benefited the children but also because it benefited them. "The women also believe that lots of children mean a richer life for parents – children keep parents on their toes mentally and physically."<sup>86</sup> The assumption is that children require the work and input of the parents because they

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<sup>84</sup> "How Many Do You Want?" Woman's Home Companion, November 1949, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

physically and mentally challenge the parents. However, in putting the effort and energy into the child, the parents' lives are richer for the effort. In addition, it follows that the more children one has the richer the parent's lives can be.

This enrichment of parental lives hints that they received some sort of satisfaction from their roles. However, that idea is perhaps best summed up in the closing quote from a mother of two. "Twenty years ago my answer would have been two. At forty I say five. As we get older we find that most things which once seemed so important are rather dull and tiresome. The couple with the large family has indeed accumulated the important things in life." At twenty, this woman had two small children to occupy her time and give the fulfillment of watching them grow through her efforts. By the time she is forty, the children are grown and independent to the point of requiring little of her effort. With grown children this woman finds her life dull and lacking, the mark of a void in her life and in this context, that void is surely not having the work of child rearing to occupy and fulfill her. As she notes, the couple with many children reaps the benefits of having numerous children.

The social patterns of the postwar period really allowed couples to have numerous children because they married and had children at a young age. It made it more plausible for couples to enjoy many children as well as encouraging women to want more children so that mothering duties extended over the lifetime. Mary and Bill Arters fit that profile exactly as Bill told the story in the article "More Babies – More Fun".<sup>87</sup> The Arters got married when Mary was 16 years old and by the time she was twenty, she

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Bill Arters, "More Babies – More Fun". Ladies Home Journal, April 1950, 195.

had already had two children. For the majority of her twenties, Mary was absorbed in the task of trying to successfully raise her children.

By her early thirties, however, the children were self-sufficient enough that Mary took up gardening to occupy her time. Yet, this was not a lasting satisfactory pursuit as Bill writes that, “succeeding years found us less and less inclined to wrest food from our hillside garden.”<sup>88</sup> Not gardening anymore left Mary with a gap in her life that she found best to fill by having more children. As Bill writes, “I was outspokenly relieved that we were going to relax and that Mary was going to take it easy. It was at this juncture that Mary triumphantly announced her new project: a new family!”<sup>89</sup> This quote clearly shows that Mary was the driving force behind the decision to have more children. In addition, this mother desires more children for her own purposes; it is a new “project” that will fill and add meaning to her life again. In their mid-thirties the Arters had another child but this was not enough, “Mary was determined not to raise a lone chick as Casey would certainly be with such grown-up siblings... she was determined that Casey should have a brother.”<sup>90</sup> Having two children would mean companionship for the children as the quote stated but it also meant that Mary again had her time occupied with two small children. While this meant more work for her as a mother, it allowed Mary to find satisfaction in the role again. As the article stated, “babies bring new life in more ways than one.”<sup>91</sup> The second family gave Mary a chance to relive her mother role as she

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

had the first time. The fulfillment she gets from it is clear as Mary herself says, "It's lots of work, but it pays off in love."<sup>92</sup>

With families like the Arters having four children after starting a second family, they were a wonderful example of the popular encouragement of larger families. The encouragement was successful as the forties turned into the fifties the birth rate steadily increased each year while the popular magazines continued to extol the virtues of motherhood and especially of mothering large families. In August of 1951, Parents' Magazine featured an article on Otto and Josephine Wenzler and their ten children. Parents' commentary on the article read, "Raising a family of ten children these days is a challenge, but it's rewarding, too."<sup>93</sup> This comment was the only one explicitly made by the staff since the article is told from Mrs. Wenzler's point of view. The statement is significant because the family is especially large with ten children and Mrs. Wenzler admits that it a personal challenge. Yet, even while she had trouble with so many children Mrs. Wenzler's message was that the difficulties were overcome by the rewards she received.

In her commentary Mrs. Wenzler backs up the claims made by Parents' Magazine stating that, "a large family is the best insurance against unhappiness."<sup>94</sup> While admitting that she could experience unhappiness, this does not happen because she has so many children. She builds the claim for large families with the mother in charge by showing the satisfaction that it brings her as someone involved in the task. Her emotional gain directly relates to the number of children she had.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



While the boom continued and women had more children each year magazines did question what number of children was wise for each woman to have. There was concern over family size at the time with the features worrying about a woman's motivations to have children. Yet, as Woman's Home Companion demonstrated in 1952 the right number of children was largely dependent on how many a mother could enjoy.<sup>95</sup> The article begins by examining feelings as a guide for making big life decisions. "Feelings too are facts – of a very definite kind – and we can make serious mistakes if we refuse to count them into our calculations."<sup>96</sup> The article stresses that feelings are an important guide in decision making and encourages couples to have children based on their emotions. It even went on to warn that if feelings were not followed the very best things in life would be sacrificed. "When it comes to having a baby it often works best when two people just joyfully decide, 'What a crazy time this is to be having a baby! But oh, we want it so terribly and *somehow* we'll manage!'"<sup>97</sup> Having children was so positively portrayed that financially strained couples were even encouraged to have more children. Couples were especially encouraged to reproduce if it was something that would bring them joy and satisfaction because children were supposed to be a source of enjoyment. The timing was not as important as the willingness to have the children.

In actually having children, again, it was the feelings that mattered more than the reality of what could be provided to a child. As the article stated the important things that the parents should provide the children are not the music lessons, good social

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<sup>93</sup> Josephine Wenzler, "4 Girls and 6 Boys Make a House Full," Parents Magazine, August 1951, 50.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Anna Wolf, "How Many Children Shall I Have?" Woman's Home Companion, November 1952, 80-81.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. Italics are original to document.

standing, or private school. “Yet, none of these really stacks up compared to the basic values of a warm welcome into the world and the parents’ continued pleasure in their children through all the trials and tribulations of growing up.”<sup>98</sup> The children receive love from the parents but the parents obtain the continued satisfaction of the effort they put into the children and the results they get as the children grow up.

Having multiple children functioned in two important ways for the mother. It allowed her to have more of her lifetime occupied by the duties of mothering. This allowed women to gain continual satisfaction from mothering. According to the magazines, women did not have to search for new purpose and fulfillment in their lives when their children were grown because the job of mothering would not end if they had several children. Mrs. Arters was perhaps the best example of this lesson because she didn’t find satisfaction in gardening and so had more children to continue what she already found to be a fulfilling role. The second major lesson is that having children was seen as a fulfilling pursuit in women’s lives and women could gain satisfaction in proportion to the number of children she had. The message was that more was merrier; if a woman could enjoy another child then she should have one and thus increase the pleasure and emotional benefits of mothering.

Where the first section had emphasized the growth of the idea of maternal fulfillment, here that message is carried one step further. Popular magazines, like child-care manuals, encouraged women to find fulfillment in mothering and the more children one mothered the greater satisfaction she received. The popular encouragement to have children allowed women to seek continual satisfaction in motherhood because they were

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

actively mothering for a greater portion of their lives. The next section builds on these ideas, examining how personally fulfilling mothers' specific duties were perceived to be in popular magazines. In addition, the section examines the discourse on the social significance of mothers' duties.

### Section 3

#### Women and Society

With the birthrate rising and more mothers having to care for more children, the work required of mothers increased proportionally with each child. Mothers were continually occupied with physically caring for their children by performing tasks like feeding and diaper changing. Additionally, mothers were occupied by the mental tasks of child care which involved ensuring the healthy emotional and intellectual development of their children. With several children these duties of mothering were time consuming and repetitive. However, the idea was put forth in popular magazines, often by the women themselves, that they should be seeking fulfillment in the tasks of child rearing. In the popular literature, the fulfillment that mothers were to seek was a sense of internal satisfaction often assumed as inherently attached to the mothering role.

The exhausting and time consuming nature of child care was often readily recognized, but, the satisfaction that was supposed to be gained from caring for children always overshadowed these negative aspects. In a 1947 article entitled "What Our Children Give Us" the sub-title reads, "Bringing up children may be hard work with long hours but the rewards are wonderful. Count them over next time you bog down."<sup>99</sup> At the very beginning, this article acknowledges how strenuous the duties of child rearing could be. The hard work was justified here by the wonderful rewards supposedly gained from the effort. The article goes on to write about Sally, a mother who was only aware of

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<sup>99</sup> Virginia Paxton, "What Our Children Give Us," Parents' Magazine, January 1947, 17+.

the output she was continually giving to her children. In response to Sally's attitude the author writes, "She had not stopped to understand that in return her children furnished her with a constant renewal of mental and spiritual faculties."<sup>100</sup> Sally seemed skeptical of the rewards that she was obtaining for her efforts. Here author Virginia Paxton appeared to be trying to convince Sally that upon further consideration she would see the personal satisfaction she was receiving. Paxton, as a friend of Sally's and a mother herself, reflected the circulation of the idea of maternal satisfaction by encouraging Sally.

In the article, Paxton mentions the satisfaction another friend sought and apparently found in the tasks of child care. "The coming of a baby has given her an appreciation of simple pleasures."<sup>101</sup> The new mother not only enjoys her baby, but also gains the rewards of the little tasks she performs in caring for the baby. The author mentions that the new mother's days, that used to be boring, are now, "socially enlightened by meeting a couple of her neighbors, also pushing strollers, at the corner drug store – and she finds it much more fun."<sup>102</sup> In performing the task of going to the drug store the mother can now find social enlightenment because she can participate and reap the rewards of talking with others about the common experiences of motherhood. Not only does she seek fulfillment in belonging to the group but she also is able to find value in what appears to be the rather menial task of going to the drug store.

Another article from 1947 similarly questions mothering and the work and reward involved. The article, "What is Better Parenthood?" appeared in Parents' Magazine and recognized that it was easy for parents to lose perspective but their efforts would

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

overcome small transgressions and ultimately promised parents personal reward. “No matter how high our ideals and aims we remain flesh-and-blood men and women who do not always behave as nobly as we would have ourselves behave.”<sup>103</sup> The article admits that caring for children is tiring and parents make mistakes but this, according to the article, is forgivable if a person possesses certain traits. “Fundamentally, you can’t help being a better parent if you are a happy person ... if you have children because you want them, and if you enjoy making a home.”<sup>104</sup> Enjoying the process of making a home means that a woman was encouraged to find some satisfaction in the tasks of caring for her husband and children. She is a better parent if enjoys being a homemaker. Readers were told that enjoying the tasks around the home would benefit her children because she would be a better parent and, in turn, would raise healthy children.

If women sought happiness as housewives, they were not only promised to raise better children, but also, women were told they ultimately would be rewarded with personal fulfillment. “Could there be anything much more rewarding than to watch one’s children develop? Could there be anything more deeply satisfying than to have a part in that growth?”<sup>105</sup> The implied answer to these questions is that nothing can surpass watching your children grow. These rhetorical questions illustrate the social implication that having children was part of women’s destiny. Having children should be the highest value and reproduction would fulfill women’s basic needs.

Popular magazines further encouraged women to seek fulfillment in mothering by offering a specific example of a woman who made life changes in order to attempt to

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<sup>103</sup> Clara Savage Littledale, “What is Better Parenthood,” Parents’ Magazine, October 1947, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

achieve satisfaction. A woman who just had her third baby wrote that she, “found herself wishing, once more, that I had more time for the enjoyment of motherhood.”<sup>106</sup> This woman changed her schedule to rise and retire earlier so that she could better enjoy getting her husband’s breakfast and preparing her seven year-old for school. This mother makes a life change specifically because she feels it is important to attempt to find fulfillment. She writes that this allowed her to enjoy her baby more because, “bathtime is a pleasant period where he and his older brother get acquainted and we all have fun.”<sup>107</sup> In making a change, this woman was better able to enjoy her children and in doing so, she furthers her quest for fulfillment through her children.

The satisfactions that women were supposed to obtain from the duties of mothering were portrayed as outweighing most other aspects of women’s lives. “Although you have given up time and pleasures, you are blessed with pleasures and joy of a different nature – seeing your baby grow strong, healthy, and happy under your care; seeing your family drawn closer by a bond of working and playing together. Revamp your attitude and life cannot help but be more beautiful and useful. Enjoy your baby now – not tomorrow, but now.”<sup>108</sup> Again, the message is clear that the sacrifices that go into the duties can not match up with the pleasures gained from caring for the baby. In performing all the physical and mental jobs, the assurance is that the mother would be rewarded with a strong healthy baby.

Mothers were encouraged to find fulfillment as mothers well before and after the period of infancy. In fact, the birth process in the post-war period was described as a

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<sup>106</sup> Wynne Palmer, “Children Are Fun,” Parents’ Magazine, July 1947, 121.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Helen Chrostowski, “Enjoy Your Baby,” Parents’ Magazine, June 1947, 22.

means of fulfillment. “We can look forward to childbirth as a triumphant experience,” Parents’ Magazine proclaimed in 1951.<sup>109</sup> “We can bring up our children to think of parenthood in this way.”<sup>110</sup> Part of the attitude toward childbirth as a triumphant experience no doubt stems from the decreasing mortality rate for the mother and child. The scientific advances that made birth an easier process, however, did not attach moral value to it. The article that hails birth as a triumphant experience finds new mothers and fathers to be in a wonderful position. “We can think of child rearing as something to be enjoyed. We know now that babies and children who are enjoyed by their parents have the best chance to be healthy and happy.”<sup>111</sup> Even before they are born, parents are pushed to enjoy their children so that the children will be happy and in turn make the parents happy.

Even as their children grow up, parents are told they should still be able to gain a sense of enjoyment from their children. As one mother writes about her children, “they have stimulated my interest in numerous fields that I would not have engaged in without them.”<sup>112</sup> This mother by broadening her personal horizons through participation in her children’s lives, gains new skills and knowledge that she did not before possess. Directly responding to how her children have broadened her life, another mother writes, “I’d say having children keeps you young physically and matures you mentally, a sort of general rounding of the personality, and all to the good.”<sup>113</sup> In rounding her personality,

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<sup>109</sup> Frances P. Simsarian, “You’re a Lucky Mother!” Parents’ Magazine, October 1951, 42+.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Dorothy Barclay, “What Parenthood Does for – and to – Parents,” New York Times Magazine, 25 January 1953, 35.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



this mother feels she is a better person for the effort and has a greater sense of personal completion through raising her children.

Like the mothers who wrote about the broadening of their interests because of their children, many other women expressed a general improvement of the quality of their lives through their children. A young mother expresses this by saying, "The main thing my children have done for me is to give my life a sort of direction. They've given me a goal to raise them as effectively as I can, mentally and physically. They have forced me to a closer examination of what is important in life."<sup>114</sup> Another mother writes more specifically about the troubles of children but still finds her life more fulfilling because of them. "At any age children are a challenge and a delight. They are entertaining, refreshing and stimulating. You have your periods of feeling guilty, discouraged or even desperate. But so long as you are rearing a family, you continuously have the heartwarming feeling of being needed. Whether the children are playing or quarreling or breaking bones or getting prizes at school, the house is alive when they are around. You, too, are thoroughly alive."<sup>115</sup>

Women, like the one quoted above, not only seemed to find great satisfaction in their role as mothers, but also, they seemed to discover inherent fulfillment in their housewifery duties. Very closely tied to and interrelated to the duties of mothering were the jobs required of the housewife. "The homemaker, the nurturer, the creator of childhood's environment is the constant re-creator of culture, civilization and virtue. Therefore, assuming that she has done and is doing well that great managerial task and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Anna Wolf, "Every Woman Has Five Lives," Woman's Home Companion, September 1954, 58-59.

creative activity, let her write her occupation proudly: ‘Housewife!’<sup>116</sup> According to Ladies Home Journal, the housewife is all of the things above and if she does her job right she gets the satisfaction not only of personal pride but also of contributing to her civilization.

Yet, the merits for women in the housewife mother role do not end there. Writing in 1952 in Ladies Home Journal, Dr. Spock compared the pride and satisfaction of housewifery to that of other jobs. “How does successful motherhood compare with other jobs in long-range satisfaction? Particularly well,” Spock wrote.<sup>117</sup> Not only did he feel that women could gain long term fulfillment from motherhood, but he deemed it more satisfying than any other job because it was an, “occupation which if reasonably well performed requires a better balanced personality than any other job.”<sup>118</sup> Mothering alone Spock continued, was “(a)n occupation that is as influential as any other regular job in the world. Probably the only occupation which, if well done, is guaranteed to give a feeling of full satisfaction for one’s entire life.”<sup>119</sup> In this article, similar to his child-care manual, Spock sent women the message that personal fulfillment should be found in motherhood.

Child-care experts like Spock were not the only ones writing about the rewards of being a housewife. Housewives themselves reflected the idea that performing the duties of homemaking should be fulfilling. As mother Dorothy Lee writes in Parents’ Magazine, “In an office, if you do not get joy from your efficiency, and the visible results of your efforts, what do you get except your pay? But think of your work as a mother...

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<sup>116</sup> Dorothy Thompson, “Occupation – Housewife,” Ladies Home Journal, March 1949, 11-12.

<sup>117</sup> Benjamin Spock, “What’s She Got that I Haven’t,” Ladies Home Journal, October 1952, 56-57+.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

Think of soaping the firm rounded body [of your baby], unfolding the deep creases, dodging the wild splashing, listening to the gurgles of joy; is not this the mother's real reward?"<sup>120</sup> For this mother, real reward comes from performing the task of bathing her baby because she finds joy in getting to experience her child and also gains the satisfaction of knowing she is doing something good for the baby. This contrasts to what she sees in the work place where it is possible that a person's only reward to be the money they bring home.

Mrs. Lee then becomes more specific about how she feels women find satisfaction in mothering. "The happy mother is one who does not look beyond her work for her reward. She finds her satisfaction within her work, because her work always involves those she loves."<sup>121</sup> For Mrs. Lee, the satisfaction found in the homemaker role is inherent, it is not something that needs to be searched out or even consciously considered. According to Lee, in working with those that she loves, she finds fulfillment. Making herself an example, Mrs. Lee encourages readers through her statements about fulfillment.

While praising its inherent benefits, Mrs. Lee, like Spock, finds great external value in home making. "The home is the laboratory where the new generation is given its basic form, and in this, you, the mother, are the key figure."<sup>122</sup> Her responsibility to rear the children gives the mother the power and satisfaction of knowing that her numerous efforts are going to produce a next generation that should be better than those before them. Motherhood is portrayed as more noble and satisfying than most other jobs

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Dorothy Lee, "What Does Homemaking Mean to You?" Parents' Magazine, January 1947, 24-25+.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

because, as mothers, women are concretely able to shape the next generation. As Mrs. Lee herself writes, “If mothers seek, in their homes, the satisfactions of the business world, they will be disappointed. But if they look for the richness of human values, they will find it in full measure. They hold human happiness in their hands. Theirs is the power to make or mar human personalities, to supply a core of warmth and security for husbands and children...”<sup>123</sup>

Throughout the postwar, the writers in popular magazines, some being more specific than others, encouraged women to find value and fulfillment in the duties that they put into caring for their children. In addition, external societal worth is attached to mothers’ work. Both Spock and Dorothy Lee are examples of authors that attached societal worth to womens’ work. They wrote about mothers’ ability to shape the future through their efforts because they are responsible for raising the next generation. Mothers, therefore, were encouraged to find fulfillment in their contribution to greater society much as they had been encouraged to find fulfillment through the number of children they produced. The messages of fulfillment in this section came in several forms and even were reflected by mothers themselves as women sought fulfillment in even the most mundane of tasks.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

### Final Ideas and Implications of Motherhood as Fulfilling

The search for fulfillment within the mother role marked a transition in the history of motherhood. The concept of maternal fulfillment became a more visible part of the postwar thinking about motherhood. More attention was focused on the conceptualization of motherhood during the postwar than ever had before. The added attention brought the role of the mother into the forethought of America, and while mothering itself may not have changed much during the period, the way mothering was thought about was different.

Women were popularly encouraged to have and enjoy children, while being told it would help them receive satisfaction from their efforts. Experts like Dr. Spock wrote in child-care manuals about the fulfillment mothers should find through their children, which introduced this idea to anyone reading the popular manuals of the time. Spock's book was a huge success during his time, selling millions of copies, which meant that the idea of mothering as fulfilling was circulating broadly in American society. When versions of the ideas that Spock wrote about began to show up among women writing in popular magazines, this demonstrated that the concept of fulfillment was getting into the public consciousness.

With motherhood promised as fulfilling, women could extend the fulfillment they were supposed to find in one child by having many. Popular magazines repeatedly sent

ideas of fulfillment through family size to American women through examples of large families that highlighted the gains the mother received from her children.

The magazines also stressed the fulfillment that women should find in the duties of motherhood. Articles stressed the importance of the tasks women performed, encouraging them to appreciate all the jobs both physical and mental that went into raising their children and caring for the home. All these tasks were supposed to give women a sense of fulfillment. In addition, the popular discourse stressed that the work of the mother in the home had a profound influence on greater society. According to the discourse, women were shaping the future of America by raising the next generation.

While women were encouraged to look for fulfillment in child rearing both in the home and in greater society, it remained that the popular discourse was providing proscriptive encouragement. These sources give no indication of whether women really found fulfillment in motherhood during the post World War II period. Whether women really found fulfillment or not is a topic worthy of further study and consideration but is not critical to this paper. The circulation of the concept of fulfillment alone served to make it a value to be obtained in motherhood.

When Betty Friedan rejected motherhood as fulfilling in 1963, she was just reflecting the value of fulfillment that had been established in the postwar. Many women agreed with Friedan in rejecting motherhood as fulfilling but they did not reject the idea of fulfillment. Women still felt they should be fulfilled and, in rejecting motherhood, looked to other means of fulfillment.

Friedan felt that it would be through a career that women would find fulfillment since she claimed that the housewife-mother role was not bringing fulfillment to the

majority of American women. Friedan felt that women were not actualizing their full potential as mothers. Women by using their education in the career of their choice would actualize their full potential and thus achieve fulfillment.

Friedan's ideas about career as the means to fulfillment helped launch the feminist movement of the sixties as greater numbers of women desired to be career women instead of homemakers. Yet, the point remains that while women sought fulfillment in a career instead of the home they were still seeking fulfillment. Thus, the concept of personal fulfillment continued to affect the lives of women beyond the postwar period.

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