

MID-CENTURY CHANGE

THE DECADE
AMERICAN CULTURE WAS SUBURBAN

BY
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I. INTRODUCTION

The American Fifties were a time of the Korean War, the brand-new Federal Interstate Highway System, Hula-Hoops, Federal Housing Administration loans, drive-in theatres, “going steady,” the television, and the suburbs. The beginning of this decade signaled the point where females outnumbered the males. Yet less than a third of the workforce was female, and of those working, less than 15% were in professional or managerial positions. (Hobbs and Stoops 2002) Thus, the remainder of the female population was termed occupation, *housewife*; it was, in fact, listed as an actual occupation on the United States Census. However, a great majority of households were single occupation, meaning they only had one adult in the workforce full-time. (Putnam 2000) This produced a significant divide between male and female roles, thus creating a distinct cultural commonality across all locations in the country. And this is only the beginning.

According to J. John Palen, author of “The Suburbs”, (Palen 1995) the cause (OR NOT) of the suburbs has been cited to the following reasons:

1. CITIES ANNEXED ALL THEY COULD
2. THERE WAS LESS EXPENSIVE LAND IN SUBURBS
3. GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZATION OF DEVELOPERS, BANKERS, INFRASTRUCTURE COMPANIES (I.E. TRANSIT AND ROADS)
6. APARTMENTS WERE NOT COVERED BY G.I. BILL, AND A MASSIVE HOUSING SHORTAGE WAS OCCURRING
7. CRIME AND FILTH WERE NOT CAUSE OF EXODUS
8. NOT HIGH URBAN TAXES

Dolores Hayden (Hayden 2003) cited two additional factors in the suburban development of the Fifties:

9. VERTICAL INTEGRATION OF BUILDING METHODS (LEVITT, THE HENRY FORD OF HOUSING)

With this said, the major suburban works of literature fail to separate culture from the physical spaces while examining the formative years of the post World War II suburbs. The period from 1950 to 1959¹ saw immense growth in automation with household appliances (sold as a time-saver)², societal trends inundating the average household (a temporal influence)³, and a post-

¹ Bowling Alone, by Robert Putnam (Putnam 2002)

² See (1959). Time: Saturday A.M.; Place: Elm St. Time Life. 47.

World War II sense of values lingering among all who remembered the decade (morals of time)⁴. **Together these are the “suburban culture” of the Fifties.** While such factors had a great deal of impact in the development and success of the actual physical suburban communities, suburban culture remained largely irrespective of being particular to the suburban communities alone. Only from understanding this relationship can the physical suburban household’s daily routines truly be understood in context.

There were several population trends which, combined with the technological and societal trends and expectations, afforded a seminal point in history where a common culture and common household situations amounted to common routine and use of time. According to the December 28th, 1956 issue of *Life* magazine, the average married couple had 2.03 children, and according to the United States Census⁵, a mere *ten percent* of households were comprised of family members. The U.S. population grew by nearly 30 million from 1950 to 1959, with the majority of the population becoming urban in 1950 for the first time; by the end of the decade the suburban population surpassed that of the central city as the most populated type of community in the country. Similarly, for the first time, in 1950 more than half of all occupied housing units were owned instead of rented in the U.S. (Hobbs and Stoops 2002)

As the title of this piece suggests, this piece is written about the culture of 1950’s suburban daily routine. Of course, it must be said every era’s culture is somewhat based on social identity and customs. However, what made the average day-to-day routine different from 1950-1959 compared to other decades was, for the first time, concerted effort, or *directive*⁶ if you will, encouraged a large percentage of the general population to “consume” the same routine. Culture became the shared way time was spent.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 3, A. (1956). Special Issue On the Woman Ibid. **41**

⁵ Hobbs, F. and N. Stoops (2002). Demographic Trends in the Twentieth Century, United States Department of Commerce.

⁶ The consequence of a culture being outlined and marketed via the new mass media formats and social expectations from business executives and societal leaders.

Whyte, W. H. (1956). The Organization Man. Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press.

Friedan, B. (1963). The Feminine Mystique. New York, W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.

Harvey, B. (1977). The Fifties: A Woman's Oral History. New York, Harper Collins.

Spigel, L. (1992). TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Schlosser, E. (2002). Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal. New York, Perennial.

Cohen, L. (2003). A Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America. New York, Vintage Books.

The clock was not the common thread but *how they spent their clock time*. 1950's culture was the routine of much the population...the time of television, of housewives, and of automation. With this said, it is important to note this lifestyle and routine, although common to both urban, suburban environments, and even sometimes the rural to some extent, most often the poor and (in different ways) the rich were outside these patterns. Nonetheless, it was the remaining portion of the upper-working and middle classes, the stronghold of the suburbs, growing and demanding this culture.

Perhaps the most important premise of this paper is this *temporal culture of the suburbs* was not directly resultant or *physically specific* to the suburbs of which the visual connotations are derived from. Routine, or “daily time,” was “suburban” in nature to a significant portion of the American population; as such the suburban culture went beyond the subdivisions of the suburban developments. While not everyone lived in the suburbs, suburban culture was an ideal shared by the large majority of the upper-working and middle classes.

The daily routine was, across the board, the same for a high percentage of Americans never before and never since experienced (Putnam 2000; Derks 2001; Hobbs and Stoops 2002). This unique dawn of automation prompted families from California to New York to buy into “*suburban*” culture, regardless of whether or not they lived there. If the household was not of the suburbs, they were incited to “desire” it. It was the *suburban developments* which specifically catered to this culture through constant exposure.

Buying in to the efficiency of the cheaper automative technology promised to make everyone's life better by shaving off valuable minutes in a culture with “more” choices (One 1959). Before this decade daily routines were much more dependant on living location, varying from the rural to the inner-urban lifestyles (Hobbs and Stoops 2002). The choices of convenience and leisure⁷, the foundation of 1950's suburban routine, made the Fifties a time where the “firsts” nearly three-quarters of the households experienced together⁸ (i.e. TV) unconsciously prompted the

⁷ 3, A. (1956). Special Issue On the Woman. *Time Life*. 41

⁸ By the end of the decade nearly three-fourths of the American households had televisions, vacuums, automobiles, radios, and telephones...all inventions which were introduced during different decades and infiltrated the “mass” population due to discretionary income. (Putnam 2000)

Jones' and the Cleaver's to DO the same things. After this decade the window of "firsts" grew to "seconds" and "third" choices, thereby diversifying Americans once again (Toffler 1970). Today this continues exponentially where an almost indiscernible amount of niches exist; never again was culture aligned by time and the daily routine around a set of common variables (Weiss 1988).

This culture pervaded households to a surprising degree, as explained later in detail. First, the correlation between social patterns and automation technology will be discussed. This section examines the skeletal social framework of the Fifties, including the sexual revolution behind closed doors. It will also explore the ideas of mass consumerism, media, and marketing, the creation of a unique blend of psychology, technology, and Post World-War II national sentiments. In addition, a distinctly new attitude towards leisure time will be discussed, a section that includes community philanthropy and club memberships.

Second, the distinctive family routines will be delineated. The surprising similarities between the societal expectations and actual behavior will be compared. While there are exceptions to every rule, a shocking number of marriages, employment patterns, and child rearing techniques were similar in effect; these, in turn, created similar behavior patterns in the suburbs.

The third section consists of the "other" family member of 1950—the television. During a period of seven years the household ownership went from a quarter of the households to nearly ninety percent by the end of the decade. This was the fastest diffusion of technology into the home ever recorded. Americans were ripe for the element they never knew they were missing until they had one...the television. This household mainstay over the course of the Fifties inundated viewers with advertising messages, expectations, and even went so far as to manipulate their daily routines to perhaps the greatest daily pace increase of any era.

Section four extrapolates how suburban culture became manifest physically in suburban development and design by the introduction of the open-format of housing. This new philosophy in physical design also created new dynamics between family members, yet another evolution of familial life in the Fifties. This section concludes with an examination into how the lifestyle education new to this era helped keep these homes "happy".

The last section concludes with, taking all of the aforementioned into account, an attempt to paint a portrait of suburban culture as outlined from clues and evidence left behind for future generations. The average weekday, leisure patterns, work schedules, and the weekends are all elements explored. The paper concludes with a note on how unique the Fifties were to have so many phenomenological elements aligned.

In short, what is presented throughout the following verbal presentation is the premise of time evolved and was spent in patterns not specific to the spaces of the ‘burbs, but aligned with a separate set of factors this epoch. Yet, the daily routines, while not place-based, were still suburban in concept; without this suburban culture, suburban developments may not have survived the housing-shortage experienced of Post-War America. These developments became popular not only for their affordability, but for their ability to be “custom-made” for these social patterns as well. The cultural ideal permeated the desires of the masses, thus constantly presenting the ideal of the physical suburbs to those not yet having “arrived”. It is time for the culture of the suburbs to be given due credit in making the design of the suburbs so appealing, a significant factor in their sustainability.

II. CULTURE OF TIME REMOVED FROM SPACE OF SUBURBS

The social norms of the Fifties, as alluded to earlier with population figures, deserve a bit more explanation. There was a significant amount of similarity between family and social patterns, almost always more significant than before and after this decade. It is important, first, to understand these similarities in order to begin correlating the daily routine with the physical suburban homes. Without understanding mass culture, the foundation of the lifestyles will be irrelevant.

While there were people and households obviously not fitting the “perfect picture”, at least two-thirds of all households were married with children (Hobbs and Stoops 2002). Even those outside of this majority were encouraged to conform through the subsidation of marriage, credit and lending practices, and employment hiring (3 1956; Starr 1956; Whyte 1956; Friedan 1963;

Rodgers and Rodgers 1970; Harvey 1977; Derks 2001; Cohen 2003; Borich 2004). Even without these pressures it appeared fairly common for socialization and neighborhood support to come more easily for the “in crowd” (3 1956; Harvey 1977; Derks 2001). Yet, it must be remembered those choosing to seemingly “kowtow” didn’t necessarily mind doing so. Putnam and Palen (Palen 1995; Putnam 2000) extol how those moving to the suburbs (and those left behind) increasingly were integrated with those like them; these folks wanted to interact with those similar to themselves...it was safe for them to do so.

There were several factors shared as ideal by the majority of the population such as having a stable marriage, very high social trust (Putnam 2000), and a high “civicness” of kids (Putnam 2000). With of course, most moms living at home as housewives (Hobbs and Stoops 2002), a large percentage of men went to college (2 out of three were male) (Derks 2001) while those women who did go to college had a 37 percent rate of dropout (Derks 2001). A full quarter of the population had a family member in the service during WWII (Putnam 2000). In addition, there was not nearly the sense of vindication experienced after a WWII victory as the lacking decisive win resulting in combination with the nearly 54,000 lives lost in the Korean War (Derks 2001). Further, there was a significant increase in organizational membership and founding, indicating a sense of community spirit and a desire to “be involved” (Putnam 2000). According to Putnam, a full ninety percent of households felt their neighborliness, or their contact with their neighbors, was strong in the 1950’s (Putnam 2000).

Meanwhile, the often overlooked sexual revolution of the 1950’s was lurking behind the expectations and conformity to societal norms. With Alfred Kinsey’s report exposing the adulteration and sexual habits of both men and women (Friedan 1963) in the mainstream newspapers and magazines by 1953, Playboy was given a green light for acceptability (Derks 2001). Keeping in mind this is the private image of acceptable behavior, married life was “highly encouraged” in women’s magazines, advertisements, on television, in movies, novels, columns, and books by experts on marriage and family, child psychology, sexual adjustments in public. This pressure was also evident in divorce rates; for instance, in 1956, only 2.3 percent of marriages ended in divorce. This was the highest in western world, but it “could not account for active unhappiness in marriage.” (3 1956)

A full one fourth of those in marriage were adulterous by age forty. Half of these only cheated with one person, and a third of these cheated only once (Friedan 1963; Derks 2001). Kinsey, in fact, reported that by the fifteenth year of marriage half of men are having affairs (Derks 2001).

Dating was another phenomenon of this sexual revolution. While publicly gender roles and courtship expectations were reverting back to the Victorian era, an entire dating ritual had developed, again, in the privacy of couple's cars and behind closed doors (Derks 2001). The expectation, necessity, and desires were to marry, but half of the women were not virgins on their wedding day (Derks 2001). With the average age of folks getting married lowering, abortion and birth control taboo, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy unconscionable, early courtship was encouraged even to young teenagers in home economic books (3 1956; Friedan 1963; Harvey 1977). "Petting" during dates was a common occurrence with couples "going steady", but it was considered the girls responsibility to keep things within acceptable bounds (Hatcher and Andrews 1959; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Harvey 1977; Derks 2001).

With these altered public-versus-private expectations the birth rate rose dramatically as well across the nation. One third of the population in 1958 was fifteen or younger!!! (Derks 2001) This equated to a fifty million dollar industry in diapers and a 1.25 billion toy industry. While the number of new housing starts were suburban, the definite trend of the Fifties was moving towards increasing numbers of the population in the suburbs, (Derks 2001; Hobbs and Stoops 2002) and the majority of babies born were ideally raised in these neighborhoods, the birth rate was high in general. This "baby boom" helped drive folks into suburban homes, thus inadvertently positioning themselves to become prime recipients of a mass-marketing campaign for their family and others like it (Friedan 1963; Spigel 1992).

The relationship of families directly outside of their home supported their desire to be "private" inside of the house. This new ability to separate "society" from personal time (messy as it may be) created entire new industries and markets for consumerism (Cohen 2003). While suburban dwellers largely experienced homogenous lifestyles within suburban divisions, the new technological gadgets also let this development permeate into urban dwelling as well. As such, the home took on a new role and set of routines for family life.

The overriding *sense of community*, while not probably called or even recognized as such, of suburban culture was not refrained to suburban divisions, either (Whyte 1956; Putnam 2000) as it was transferred from the urban lifestyle. This first generation of the suburban lifestyle was an amalgamation of urban living, post-World War II sensibilities, and the suburban desire to connect. Putnam searched quite thoroughly on the sensibilities of trust⁹, and again, around ninety percent of folks in the Fifties said they had “strong” neighborliness affiliations (Putnam 2000). Inside the home was safe and “classified”, while this new generation of civic interaction and participation¹⁰ allowed suburban dwellers to return to their enclosed “compound” when they experienced enough.

In 1956, *Life* magazine dedicated an entire special issue to the new era of “leisure in America” and what it meant for society (5 1959). In terms of this newly-found time for leisure, the average American gained an additional weekly 6.2 hours over the course of this decade. (Putnam 2001) While folks across the nation had this increase, only the suburbs had an intense “concentration” of private AND public spaces catering to these new forms of free-time.

This new “respect” for pastimes brought about one of the most participated the participation in bowling leagues that began their immense rise during this time, and boating tripled in five years from 1951 (5 1959). Other pastimes shaping the idea of relaxation both within the house and outside of it were do-it-yourself (beauty care for women—workshop projects for men), gardening, golf, softball, weekend trips, cards (especially bridge) and movies (5 1959). This forty billion dollar per year industry nearly equaled the amount spent on national defense!! (5 1959)

Suburban sedation was no laughing matter; the closed front doors, whether directly consequential of the Post-War societal attitude, hid the dark side of home-life. Not unique to the

⁹ With a peak in 1952, more than half of Americans felt our society was then upright morally-good society as it was in the past (Putnam 2000). And, at the end of the decade, trust of “most people” was at its half-century highest near sixty percent (Putnam 2000). Coincidentally, at this time crime rates were at some of the lowest points of the century as well (Putnam 2000).

¹⁰ This “neighborliness” and community participation came about with the peak of numerous major organizations during this decade. 4-H in 1950, the American Association of American women in 1955, and the Boys and Girls Scouts (and adult leaders) were on the rise and near peak in 1957. The Business and Professional Women organization peaked in 1951, as well as the Elks, Jaycees, and the Kiwanis around 1956-1960. The Knights of Columbus peaked in 1954, and the Lions peak began in 1957. The League of Women Voters’ peak began in 1954, and the P.T.A. peaked with some of the largest membership of all in 1957-1960. In addition, the Red Cross peaked in 1956, the Rotary saw steady increases the entire decade, and the Shriners peaked from 1958-1960. Not to be forgotten, the professional associations (i.e. the American Institute of Architects) on average were founded in 1952. (Putnam 2001)

suburban communities, it was said in *Life* magazine that, “no matter what praises are sung of leisure, those who have the most of it in the United States seem to be the most miserable. It is common knowledge today that vigorous 60-year-olds show a tendency to fade away and die soon after they retire. Physicians have noted that middle-aged women whose children no longer require mothering and whose husbands supply every material want are among their unhappiest patients.” (5 1959) In fact, tension was great enough in 1955 for the nation (again, not just the suburbs) to lead to the consumption of 216 million gallons of hard liquor (more than one gallon per person, including kids, and not including beer or wine), \$172 million worth of sleeping pills, and \$254 of tranquilizers in (more than \$1 of pills *per person*) (5 1959; Friedan 1963).

Yet appearances had to be maintained. Philanthropic participation (i.e. helping out the United Way) was the style, and spectator sports were on the rise. Over seventy-five percent of the population played bridge, and four to five cents of every dollar went to pay club dues of fraternal and club organizations! (Putnam 2001) Women tended towards the P.T.A., church organizations and events, and Bridge to enjoy regular social interaction, while Tupperware parties were a new phenomenon that easily gave reason to new ladies to join social circles of new suburban developments without knowing anyone’s names (3 1956; Hatcher and Andrews 1959; Friedan 1963; Harvey 1977; Borich 2004; Borich 2004). Men tended towards participating in fraternal organizations and sometimes the P.T.A. (3 1956; 5 1959; Friedan 1963), and kids tended towards 4-H, the Scouts, and “hanging out” (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; 2 1959; Derks 2001; Borich 2004; Borich 2004). Men went out for leisure, women stayed in each others’ homes.

Perhaps the most important element, however, of the suburban culture was the rise of mass consumerism, media, and marketing. In the five years after World War II, consumer spending rose sixty percent, and by far the most significant rise was in household furnishings and consumer appliances with an increase of 240 percent! (Spigel 1992; Derks 2001) Discretionary income, a new development after the rations of the war were lifted, enabled this to happen for even the working class (Gans 1967; Spigel 1992; Putnam 2000; Derks 2001; Cohen 2003). This was important as the Fifties were to become the onset of The Era of the Consumer (Cohen 2003).

While inside the home was “private”, it was not impervious to the outside world’s influence. With media combating the serenity of this new sense of health, home, and family, the suburban culture demanded households continually reinvent and improve their dwellings. While daily routines stayed much the same throughout the Fifties the minute details “training” them to adhere to this schedule brought the advertising market into the subconscious of “down-time” at home.

One of the major elements behind the scenes promulgating this change in message delivery was the transition between the genders within the workforce (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Starr 1956; Hatcher and Andrews 1959; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Barclay and Champion 1961; Friedan 1963; Rodgers and Rodgers 1970; Borich 2004). A larger portion of men began making decisions about marketing by utilizing psychology, technology, and new market sector identification methods (Friedan 1963; Spigel 1992; Derks 2001; Cohen 2003). Meanwhile, with their discretionary incomes, consumers were creating this “suburban time” lifestyle. And, it didn’t hurt that a fifty billion dollar marketing campaign was in the works to advertise all these new “things” to ephemerally and tangibly “buy” into (Friedan 1963).

To give an example, Betty Friedan, author of the Feminine Mystique, (Friedan 1963) cited an interview of a million-dollar-persuasion man from who she learned that if, “properly manipulated (‘if you are not afraid to use that word,’ he said), American housewives can be given a sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, event the sexual joy they lack— by the buying of things. I suddenly realized the significance of the boast that women wield seventy-five percent of purchasing power in America.” (Friedan 1963) This hidden persuasion business was bringing the new automotive technologies and advertising arenas, such as the television to heights not imagined during decades previous. In fact, as further evidence to this amazing shift was another special issue of *Life* entirely dedicated to leisure and automation and its impacts on America (5 1959).

These campaigns collectively integrated several key consumer “goods” virtually and realistically connecting the similarities in societal patterns from the wealthy down to the working class, and within suburbs, rural, and urban communities. No one was “spared” the excitement. The telephone and the car, by end of Fifties, had reached 75 percent of households, although the car more important if a choice between the two had to be made. By about 1950, about eighty

percent of households had refrigerator, by the end of the decade nearly as many households had an electric vacuum cleaner, and between 1948 and 1955 television ownership went from one percent of households to seventy-five percent. By the end of the decade nearly ninety percent of households had a TV set. (Putnam 2001) In addition to these “must-haves” a whole other list of appliances, from mixers to dishwashers and clothes machines, were becoming affordable in terms of time and money saved, thereby allowing more consumption to take place.

The stage was set. Both voluntarily and by “encouragement” people were sporting the same lifestyles. From marital patterns, leisure time, and consumer-good mainstays, America was in a unique position where Culture was with a capital “C”. It not only revolved around the normal cultural attributes of neighborhood ethnicities, hobbies, and pastimes, but grew to encompass the *things they had* to the *people they were*, as these were strikingly similar across the nation (Wallace and McCullar 1960; Spigel 1992; Putnam 2000; Derks 2001; Cohen 2003). This culture of “suburban time” had spread to be “placeless”. In doing so it appears this ability to penetrate households not quite capable of making the move desire to an even greater degree to relocate to the ‘burbs, for the suburbs were “custom-built” to house this “culture”.

III. FAMILY DAILY LIFESTYLES

Familial roles within the house were yet another area of this culture where routine and the way time was spent was often common. These roles, while generalized¹¹, serve as a glimpse as to how each of the family members interacted. It is important to understand these identities, some of which were expected, some of which were natural behavior, in order to better understand how the design of the suburb was created to align with the hegemonic reality of the suburban society.

Men were, as stated in the statistical portion the introduction, largely the sole or main breadwinners for the family. As the “path to success” was environmental in lending practices for

¹¹ Television schedules from daily newspapers, oral histories from books, an informal internet survey of sixty participants, and home economics textbooks were the main sources.

mortgages (cite housing), the type of lifestyle¹² expected of breadwinners was published in the media and socially rewarded among social circles. The division between private reality and public desires grew to be more influential over the decade the fashion followed “suit”. Much like the film the men *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, men were rewarded security, prosperity, and leisure in spending and time at home if they played along in public (Muzzio and Halper 2002). It appears the main function of the man’s role was to provide the security in *environment*, with an emphasis on the environment instead of the action of *providing*. Thus the majority of daytime was, for males, spent outside of the house.

Meanwhile, *their reward* of leisure time at home was often spent running errands and chauffeuring kids to practices and events due to the usual one-car-per-family. Leisure time, explained above, also included helping out with the lawn and the “honey-do-list”, the most common “acceptable” male chores of this culture¹³. In *Life Magazine*, an article extols on the new “Do-It-Yourselfers” phenomenon and points out nearly 12 billion is spent annually on projects during this decade! (1959) The “man’s” room was the workshop in the garage or the den (4 1959). Evening time was often spent watching television (Spigel 1992) or attending community meetings outside of the house (Borich 2004).

There was much more “evidence” about the expectations of females in comparison to their male counterparts (3 1956; Friedan 1963; Harvey 1977; Hobbs and Stoops 2002; Cohen 2003). With an admittedly maternal sense of fashion (Derks 2001) with padded hips and smaller waistlines women, though the mere idyllic adaptation in becoming the *motherly figure* women fulfilled their job within this culture. In fact, entire new courses and textbooks were developed to train young ladies to make this “life adjustment” of preparing for family life. Their responsibility of *creating* the atmosphere of the home life was comparable to the *providing* role of the male; it was supposed to be a seamless, unseen responsibility of the woman. (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Starr 1956; Hatcher and Andrews 1959; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Barclay and Champion 1961; Rodgers and Rodgers 1970) To women of the Fifties suburban culture, a large part of their day was spent *preparing the house* for family living.

¹² Meaning hobbies, consumer goods, and household necessities as well as financial and educational success for the family.

¹³ 3, A. (1956). Special Issue On the Woman. *Time Life*. 41

An issue of Life magazine devoted entirely to the Women of the Fifties successes and difficulties highlighted the life of a woman highly skilled at attending club or charity events, drives her kids to school, does weekly grocery shopping, makes ceramics, and studies French, helps with homework, makes clothes for her family, and most of all serves as a supreme hostess. Others spotlighted were an expecting *mom*, a housewife who *happened* to be State Representative, a full-time worker who organizes *weddings* and is a mom. Compared to the New Independent Career Woman of the 1930's magazines (Friedan 1963) this new image was a swift recession into Victorian mentality. (3 1956) Albeit housewives attending events outside of the house during afternoon social time, meetings were not always outside the "house" as the living room social was common. (3 1956; Starr 1956; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Friedan 1963; Rodgers and Rodgers 1970; Harvey 1977; Borich 2004; Borich 2004) Thus even if women worked outside, their primary routine was still the care and participation of the suburban house.

An entirely new approach to cooking, on the other end of things, was evolving with "time-saving¹⁴" automotive kitchen appliances (One 1959), the new importance of health and germ awareness (Starr 1956; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Barclay and Champion 1961), diet education on serving balanced and color coordinated meals (Hatcher and Andrews 1959), creating home-made derivatives in the newly christened frozen food industry (Hamilton 2003). These all made meal time more "efficient", yet elaborate, and often more time-consuming than generations of cooks preceding.

Cleaning the home was also immensely affected by automation and marketing as with new appliances for cleaning and a wide-new variety of cleaning products to use, homemakers were challenged with providing the best (cleanest) home possible (3 1956; Friedan 1963; Spigel 1992; Cohen 2003). After all, it was their "job". Yet, with all these "advances" and "improvements" in house cleaning, an interesting phenomenon developed where women who were solely housewives began to spend up to twice as long as working moms to make things clean (Friedan 1963; Spigel 1992). Monday Laundry Day, "a thing of the past with the new Bindex washer" (3

¹⁴ Although it now took longer to prepare the processed, frozen foods new to this decade—requiring the presence of these new appliances...in effect canceling out any time-saving factors in food preparation.

1956) still saw women washing and folding, and with the onset of daytime television (see below) a whole new era of “cleaning habits” began (Spigel 1992).

Kids of this era also had expectations which can be identified within the home lifestyles of suburban culture. With the constraints of the baby boom, in 1953 for example, the nation was 345,000 classrooms short and over sixty percent of existing classrooms were overcrowded (Derks 2001). When the Russian satellite Sputnik went up into space, a new wave of cultural doubt swept over the country, but is perhaps best evident with the increase of math and science courses offered at school to “help catch up”(Derks 2001). Parallel to these courses (heavily male-based) were the female “life adjustment”, or home economics courses (heavily female-directed) being implemented to prepare future generations with homemaking skills¹⁵.

Rock and roll records, the new McDonald’s franchises, drug store soda-counters, and drive-ins were all places to be with peers trying to pull the “bored” young adults outside of the common, open spaces of the suburban home. Conversely, *American Bandstand* and the *Lone Ranger* were just two of the shows created to acclimate the younger ages towards becoming a regular audience (for advertising) IN the house in front of the fixed TV screen (Spigel 1992; Borich 2004; Borich 2004). Assisting with chores, sports, playing with neighbors, and jeans and casual wear were all common to this generation (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Hatcher and Andrews 1959; Harvey 1977; Borich 2004).

IV. TV—THE OTHER FAMILY MEMBER

Television, the most influential “thing” of the Fifties, quietly pervaded the minds and attitudes of Americans by infiltrating the supposed bastion of safety from the outside world—the home. As cited earlier, in a little over a single decade the television went from finding a home within a mere one percent of the households nationwide to over ninety percent by the end of the era

¹⁵ Fleck, H., L. Fernandez, et al. (1956). *Living With Your Family*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ., Prentice Hall.
Starr, M. C. (1956). *Management for Better Living*. Boston, D.C. Heath and Company.
Hatcher, H. M. and M. E. Andrews (1959). *Adventuring in Home Living, Volumes I & II*. Boston, D. C. Heath and Company.
Wallace, I. and B. McCullar (1960). *Building Your Home Life*. Chicago, J. B. Lippincott Company.
Barclay, M. S. and F. Champion (1961). *Teen Guide to Homemaking*. New York, McGraw Hill.
Rodgers, D. and M. Rodgers (1970). *A Word to the Wives*. New York, Alfred A. Knopp.

(Putnam 2000). This was truly the caveat of suburban culture; the outside influence of commercialism and societal expectation began to infiltrate the inside realm through this largely “unregulated” medium (Spigel 1992). It was a 3D electronic coup d’etat.

Not since the introduction of the phonograph into the home did a consumer item receive such a welcome as a new “family member”. Magazines such as House Beautiful and American Home encouraged “programming” by utilizing language such as newborn baby, family friend, nurse, teacher, family pet (Spigel 1992). With this virtual member, the outside world could be turned on or “off” at any point, filling the void of being in public to learn about society. It was the best of the motherly role of *hostess* and the fatherly role of *security* all rolled into one.

Changing many dynamics and relationships, television programming developed from the direct hand of the most powerful “big brother” media entities at the time: the networks. By using this evolved radio format the TV media powerhouse inserted a sense of guilt when viewers did not, or were not *able* to conform to the perfect life (Baxandall and Ewen 2000). This message, in the beginning, came through shows sponsored by a single theme; however when NBC evolved to stand-alone commercials, or the “magazine concept,” a greatly expanded capacity for advertising was created (Spigel 1992). Yet, as the new fad, viewers were unwilling and did not desire to turn off this personal “programming” and influence (2 1959; Spigel 1992; Borich 2004).

In 1954, for example, the network calculated the audience was comprised of over half women, a quarter being men, and the final quarter being children (Spigel 1992). As such, daytime television was specifically tailored to reach the housewives during the time they gained these extra hours: daily cleaning time. By studying which television format would incite women to watch while they clean, the resulting early “soap opera” (an adaptation of some radio shows) evolved into a complimentary time-based activity with a woman’s activity. This TV philosophy of providing entertainment (and advertising) on a “catch as catch can” basis allowed the daily routine of cleaning and chores to become tolerable in retrospect (Spigel 1992). Stations even developed shows that would ring sounds to alert housewives a moment was approaching where watching *in addition* to listening would be a good idea for a moment (Spigel 1992). *This format, utilizing the “rhythms of reception”* (Spigel 1992) *would prove to be the beginning of daily*

segmentation of television time, specifically catering certain moments of the day to revolve with certain lifestyle patterns explained in sections above.

“The position of the programs in the television schedule reflects and is determined by the work-structured order of the real social world. The patterns of position and flow imply the question of who is home, and through complicated social relays and temporal mediations, link television to the modes, processes, and scheduling of production characteristic of the general population.” (Spigel 1992) Through network executive decisions about scheduling, advertising executives decisions about marketing what to whom and when, and the television sitcom’s consistent representation of the “ideal life”, the culture of “suburban time” was able to perpetuate and grow (Borich 2004). The trends that developed in the early Fifties were perpetuated and molded to fit suburban ideals; and by utilizing a mobile institution such as culture, these ethics and standards then began to pervade the rural and urban communities as well through these devices (Putnam 2000).

Interpersonal family relationships also changed with the introduction of the TV into the house. While some shows catered towards families, many shows did not; with often only one set per household, this began to create friction among members. Television placement became a topic of dispute among many families (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Starr 1956; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Spigel 1992; Hamilton 2003).

By 1960, the average American was watching over five hours per day, which was more time daily than kids normally spent at school (Spigel 1992). Three until ten o’clock PM appears to be the most common times for families to watch television together, with Sunday night TV time becoming an actual ritual for some (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Friedan 1963; Harvey 1977; Spigel 1992; Borich 2004; Borich 2004) And, sometimes, when not all households had their own set yet, neighbors would descend upon households with sets to get their TV fix, an interesting intrusion into the complete “fortress”, the house normally capable of automatically providing a sense of security and entertainment without opening the front door (Spigel 1992).

The normal versions of daily segmentation of television programming began with early morning classroom shows to educate mothers, breakfast news and children’s shows, morning soap operas and game shows for cleaning time, after school television kids programming with some female-

oriented shows for those moms who were still home alone, early evening television with the news, late evening television with family sitcoms, variety shows, and the late news (Spigel 1992; Borich 2004; Borich 2004). In addition, network programmers identified early on the ability of Saturday morning cartoon programming to reach a captive audience of kids (as mentioned earlier, to recall, the toy industry during this period was gigantic) (Spigel 1992; Borich 2004; Borich 2004).

V. HOUSE DESIGN

While the directive of the culture of “suburban time” came from both within and outside the home, and in both private and public messages, the *piece de resistance* was custom-designing environments magnifying the qualities of this routine and lifestyle. In combination with the usual “causes” of the suburbs cited by Hayden and Palen (Palen 1995; Hayden 2003), the whole idea of supporting the realities of society and the economic demands of the Consumers Republic became complete when the suburbs began to fill in the missing pieces with complimentary physical design (Cohen 2003).

For example, a popular adjustment in suburban housing development became the open format design (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Starr 1956; 2 1959; Derks 2001). This helped create an illusion of more space for less money (Friedan 1963), an important principle revered by this “culture”. There were other elements, such as each member of the family having their own havens, whether the designations are as bedroom (children), kitchen (housewives), or garage workshop (fathers) (Spigel 1992).

This notion of zoning also, perhaps inadvertently, altered the routines and time patterns of family members. For instance, when one family member was watching a particular show (or listening to a rock and roll record for that matter) which really only catered towards him or her, the rest of the family was essentially driven to their separate “safe zones” (Spigel 1992; Cohen 2003; Borich 2004). The question of ownership of time and space had, at this point, permeated even

the most (before) private, unique personal institutions. Thus, the last bastions of individualizations were challenged with elements of this culture.

VI. LIFESTYLE EDUCATION

Home economics, or lifestyle education, became a dominant role perpetuating the suburban culture. In retrospect, it seems shocking for public and private schools to essentially “program” the way to live, virtually extolling upon the societal norms of suburban culture. While these norms may have been taught in both urban and suburban settings through “home ec.” textbooks¹⁶, as seen in the sections above, the suburbs were *made* for this living.

Teaching young adults (the future heads of households and housewives) the roles they were to grow into by outlining “proper” sports, activities, dating protocol, and future acceptable professions for each gender (that is, if females must have one). Nutrition and health, food preparation techniques and serving methods, the role of the good hostess, and taking care of babies were all commonly included. While the books appear to be for both genders, at least three-fourths of the material appears to speak only to the female student preparing her for her “clandestine” role of housewife.

Furthermore, self presentation through fashion (always only for women’s apparel, however), home decoration guidelines and ideas, and how to relate to your “girl” friends were all “hot” topics of the day. And, interestingly enough, time management explained how to juggle cleaning priorities versus those of cooking—they rarely, if ever, mentioned how to balance the dual life of housewife and the professional woman. Most of the textbooks stressed for men to allow the women of the house to aid in balancing the budget and the finances of their home—this seemed to be the only empowerment of the female gender.

¹⁶ The home economic textbooks used for this study were:

Fleck, H., L. Fernandez, et al. (1956). *Living With Your Family*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall.

Starr, M. C. (1956). *Management for Better Living*. Boston, D.C. Heath and Company.

Hatcher, H. M. and M. E. Andrews (1959). *Adventuring in Home Living, Volumes I & II*. Boston, D. C. Heath and Company.

Wallace, I. and B. McCullar (1960). *Building Your Home Life*. Chicago, J. B. Lippincott Company.

Barclay, M. S. and F. Champion (1961). *Teen Guide to Homemaking*. New York, McGraw Hill.

(footnote continued)

VII. NORMAL DAILY ROUTINE

The following show, through evidence cited in the bibliography, an “average day” for the 1950’s American family. This is the timeline of how the culture of “suburban time” operated (Fleck, Fernandez et al. 1956; Starr 1956; 2 1959; Hatcher and Andrews 1959; Wallace and McCullar 1960; Barclay and Champion 1961; Rodgers and Rodgers 1970; Borich 2004; Borich 2004).

WEEKDAYS

- Mother and father wake up, prepare themselves for day.
- Mother wakes children up to get ready for school.
- Everyone eats breakfast and watches Captain Kangaroo and the morning News.
- Father and kids are dropped off to school and work.
- Mother spends morning cleaning, mending clothes, and watching television.
- Father returns sometimes for lunch.
- Mother spends afternoons at community meetings, luncheons, and paying visits to social circles, but makes sure she is home for...
- The kids’ return to school. If there are community organizations, practices, or events they are most often during this time. If not playing with neighbors, homework, and television are the top choices.
- Meanwhile Mom is cooking a homemade dinner utilizing frozen elements that require appliances to make edible.
- Dinner, sometimes with TV.
- Kids clean dishes while parents relax in front of TV, or vice versa depending on the family.
- Late evening is family TV time, or homework time. If father is involved in any community organizations, he will go to meetings after dinner. If it is a Thursday night, females of household prepare for weekend socializing by an intensive beautification routine. If it is a Friday evening high school sports are important; also—dates on Friday evenings are not as important as those on Saturdays.
- Kids are put to bed.
- Mother does beauty regimen.
- Parents go to sleep.

SATURDAY

- Parents sleep in.
- Kids watch morning cartoons.
- Groceries are obtained if need be at grocery store.
- Errands are run such as shoe repair, haircuts, etc.
- Mom does deep cleaning while Dad and kids are distracted
- Dad does workshop projects.
- Sometimes during the afternoon organizations hold meetings or practice.
- During the evening parents socialize and the teenagers have dates!!!

SUNDAY

- Morning church.
- Special dinner is made my Mom that is more elaborate.
- Family TV time.

Rodgers, D. and M. Rodgers (1970). *A Word to the Wives*. New York, Alfred A. Knopp.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Other decades' successes must be recognized; some have boasted higher¹⁷ birth rates (1900-1909) in the United States, other have had more complex¹⁸ and have more technological advances (such as the one we are in currently), and even others were quite uniform in routine (the early 1700's for instance without the luxury of electricity). Yet, the Fifties were exceptional as a great many phenomenological elements became *aligned*. No other era experienced such private and public directive on how to spend time WHILE a largely uniform type of household set of traits existed for such a large percentage of the population. The Fifties were even more special as they accomplished the dissemination and availability of this suburban culture to the *masses*, as mentioned above, without the *necessity* of place-based elements. And, finally, this decade was unique because of its ability to preserve this culture through the creation of an environment that is still the most preferred today, that of the "tailor-made" suburban development. While there has been much debate about the ethics behind this temporal point of intersection of culture and place, it was a vital turning point for the United States in an era ridden with the stretch marks of social, economic, and technological growing pains.

¹⁷ (Hobbs and Stoops 2002)

¹⁸ (Toffler 1970)

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