

# Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women During World War II

JEFF KESHEN\*

*Much evidence in Canada's wartime print media points to significant debate over the hopes and possible consequences of large-scale employment of women. Transformations in the daily lives of so many women during World War II raised fears about moral laxity and family instability and ultimately helped strengthen a post-war conservative reaction. Too much had transpired for women to permit things to return to the "status quo ante bellum", however. Progressive currents were also generated from the new and difficult wartime realities that women had confronted and surmounted, a trend that helped engender permanent changes then considered as significant breakthroughs.*

*La presse écrite du temps de la guerre témoigne largement de la tenue d'un vif débat, à l'époque, sur les espoirs suscités par la perspective d'un emploi massif des femmes et des conséquences possibles d'un tel mouvement. On craignait, devant la métamorphose du quotidien de tant de femmes durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, que cela n'incite à la laxité morale et à l'instabilité familiale, ce qui renforça en bout de ligne la réaction conservatrice survenue après la guerre. Mais il s'était passé trop de choses pour les femmes pour que l'on revienne au statu quo ante bellum. Des courants progressistes naquirent également des épreuves nouvelles et difficiles que les femmes avaient vécues et surmontées durant la guerre, une tendance qui favorisa l'émergence de changements permanents, considérés alors comme des percées majeures.*

"THEY'RE STILL WOMEN after all."<sup>1</sup> This title from Ruth Pierson's 1986 book still represents the standard interpretation of the impact that World War II had upon the "social construction of gender"<sup>2</sup> and hence on

\* Jeff Keshen is an assistant professor of history at the University of Ottawa. For their helpful suggestions, the author would like to express appreciation to Professors Chad Gaffield, Ruby Heap, and J. L. Granatstein, as well as two anonymous reviewers for *Histoire sociale/Social History*.

1 Ruth Roach Pierson, *They're Still Women After All: Canadian Women and the Second World War* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986).

2 A good analysis on the "social construction of gender" is found in Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *American Historical Review*, vol. 101 (1986), pp. 1053–1074.

the status of Canadian women.<sup>3</sup> Pierson argues that the persistence of gender-based stereotypes, as well as discriminatory government policies built upon such clichés, permitted only marginal accomplishments during the war, which were reversed once the shooting stopped.<sup>4</sup> Yet, while much first-rate work has appeared to explain the basis for social continuity, not enough attention has been devoted to mapping out the process of historical change.

The wartime print media, now the most readily accessible barometer of mass opinion, was in numerical terms the most prominent source of public information during the 1940s.<sup>5</sup> Newspapers and magazines that served a national audience, major urban centres, and focal points of war production, as well as sources geared to women, can serve as indicators to trace change. From many columns there emanated considerable concern over the migration of women into the paid labour market and a desire to reconstitute patriarchal order once the soldiers returned. Yet articles also emerged, particularly from women journalists, that emphasized female competence in numerous domains beyond the domestic sphere and which noted that more women yearned for greater equality. Such opinions were also evident among many women both at home and at work who, through the new challenges faced and usually conquered during the war years, increasingly came to realize their ability to perform skilfully in a wide array of traditional male jobs.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, though one cannot draw definitive conclusions about the

3 See, for example, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten: The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 15, no. 29 (1982), pp. 239–259; Ellen Scheinberg, "The Tale of Tessie the Textile Worker: Female Textile Workers in Cornwall During World War II", *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 33 (1994), pp. 153–186. Diane Forestell alludes to progressive attitudes that developed towards the employment of women during the war, but does not pursue this theme to suggest a possible impact. See "The Necessity of Sacrifice for the Nation at War: Women's Labour Force Participation, 1939–1946", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 22, no. 44 (1989), pp. 323–343.

4 Pierson's book also advances this thesis with respect to the approximately 40,000 women who joined the three auxiliary services of the Canadian military. *They're Still Women After All*, chaps. 3–6.

5 In 1945 the total circulation of daily newspapers in Canada stood at 2,230,929. The circulation of weekly newspapers added 1,979,903 subscribers. By comparison, in 1945 there were 1,759,100 yearly renewable radio licences issued to Canadians. *Canada Year Book, 1948–1949*, pp. 767, 789.

6 Admittedly, there are potential pitfalls in turning to press copy, public opinion polls, and especially oral testimony to obtain evidence: the possibility that political agendas, leading questions, the tendency to embellish, lapses in memory, and the influence of later events may create inaccurate reinterpretations. Ruth Pierson, who is dubious about the use of oral testimony from women who lived through World War II, writes that "we need to examine that memory in relation to the powerful wartime discourses of gender reinforcement." Nevertheless, such sources, when linked to concrete transformations, can go a long way towards explaining causation. Moreover, I view underlying social opinion as more divided than does Pierson and as having provided room for limited progress. See Ruth Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History" in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Randall, eds., *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 91–92. In adopting my methodology towards the use of printed and oral evidence, I have been guided by Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider, *How to Study History* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967);

power of the media to shift opinion, the potential impact of the popular press to shape as well as reflect reality certainly mounted during the war years. Multitudes migrated to urban centres for war jobs, earned extra money with which they could purchase newspapers and magazines, and, given the tumultuous times, developed a heightened interest in events.<sup>7</sup>

Press accounts, polls, and grassroots commentary all point to debate — not just to continuity or to progress — pitting expectations for permanent change against deep anxieties over the new wartime roles assumed by women, both of which had legacies into peacetime. Such is an interpretation advanced by scholars outside Canada, particularly in the United States. There, disagreement endures on the significance that World War II had for women, a debate that clearly requires some cultivation in Canada, at least beyond the usually perfunctory comments declaring progress during and after the conflict as negligible.<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly, transformations in the daily

John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1991); and Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 1988). A good example in which press opinion and wider factual information were joined to make an argument about the status of women, albeit somewhat at variance from the interpretation advanced here, is found in Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle-Class, 1945–60", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1994), pp. 5–25.

<sup>7</sup> Between 1937 and 1944, monthly sales of *Chatelaine* increased from 214,742 to 252,403. The *Toronto Star*, which served a major centre of war production, saw its average daily sales rise from 268,213 in 1943 to 306,839 by 1945. See *McKim's Directory of Canadian Publications* (Montreal: A. McKim Limited); N. W. Ayer & Son, *Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son, 1944). This notion of press power derives from the "interdependence theory" of mass communication. On its application to the issue of gender stereotyping, see Gertrude Joch Robinson, "The Media and Social Change: Thirty Years of Magazine Coverage of Women and Work (1950–1977)", *Atlantis*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1983), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Leila Rupp argues that government propaganda recruiting women into war-related jobs stressed "patriotism" as a rallying cry, thus indicating the "emergency" and hence temporary nature of the employment. See *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Also of that school emphasizing the limited impact that World War II had upon the status of women in the workplace are Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987). William Chafe's *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) maintains that the migration of so many women into unconventional jobs could not simply be brushed aside once the fighting stopped. Maureen Honey's study of government propaganda found not only imagery promoting traditional views of femininity, but also messages strengthening female self-esteem by highlighting their ability to perform a wide variety of so-called male occupations. See *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender and Propaganda during World War II* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). Susan Hartmann noted that by 1947 women began returning to the workplace in large numbers, and that by the end of the decade their aggregate presence in the paid employment market exceeded wartime peaks, thus indicating that things did not "return ... to the status quo ante bellum". See *The Home Front and*

lives of so many women during World War II raised widely reported fears over social instability and ultimately helped strengthen a post-war conservative reaction;<sup>9</sup> but it also appears that too much had transpired for too many women to permit things to return to the *status quo ante bellum*. One newcomer to the paid employment market during wartime likened these years to a “Pandora’s Box”. Many things “returned to the status quo”, but, she also insisted, “women proved their ability in many fields ... and now knew they had choices” — choices that in her case led to graduate-level study at McGill University and a post with the federal government.<sup>10</sup> A more modest and, in general terms, probably more accurate assessment of the significance that World War II had for civilian women came from another war worker who portrayed this period and its immediate aftermath as “two steps forward and one step back”.<sup>11</sup>

One could interpret wartime imagery as suggesting that things were changing slowly, if at all, for women. In the world of advertising, the Cutex Company promised women that, no matter how rough their new wartime jobs became, its hand cream would “soften the hard edges” to ensure that they retained a feminine appearance.<sup>12</sup> Yet, despite the persistence of stereotypes that trivialized or objectified women, such evidence might also lead one to propose that firms were moving with the times to serve, and perhaps inherently encourage, the modern working woman by suggesting that she could balance traditional concerns such as appearance with the new demands of the war economy. Accordingly, the Kotex Company let young women know about its improved brands for those now “on the go” for several

*Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), pp. 26–27. Moreover, recent work on the 1950s demonstrates that the domestication of women was not nearly as complete as folklore suggests. For the United States, see Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Surviving in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford, 1987); Eileen Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). Some Canadian scholarship alludes to the fact that women, as a result of their wartime experiences, obtained a stronger foothold in the job market or came to demonstrate disillusionment with the post-war emphasis upon domesticity. See Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), chap. 12; Veronica Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945–60”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1991), pp. 471–504, and “Canada’s Wage-Earning Wives”, pp. 5–25. However, the preponderance of scholarly opinion, particularly within Canada, conveys disappointment over a pattern of post-war female employment that still reflected a “social construction of gender” that justified widespread inequality.

9 This theory is mentioned in Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

10 Norma E. Walmsley, “The Gatineau Hills: Love at First Sight”, *Up the Gatineau!*, vol. 22 (1996), p. 9.

11 Author’s interview with Laura Harrison, Edmonton, May 20, 1993.

12 *Maclean’s*, July 1, 1941, p. 27.

hours, while the Gothic Brassiere firm put forth a new line that offered a "more youthful appearance" and the necessary support to perform "more physical labour".<sup>13</sup>

New messages were also conveyed in other "non-news" sections of the popular press. Such was the case with short stories serialized in many magazines. During the Great Depression, married women who worked outside the home were typically criticized in these features; clearly, their most important roles were as housewife and mother. In "That Girl", a 1939 story written by Evelyn Campbell and carried in *Chatelaine*, Canada's most important women's publication, the protagonist was considered an unsuitable wife by her mother-in-law because "her efforts at bed making were laughable".<sup>14</sup> In wartime accounts, the romantic plots typically associated with this genre usually remained, but, according to Phyllis Lassner, who wrote about the similar British experience, the pattern also saw women move away from being "passive, weak and naturally inferior".<sup>15</sup> Typical in Canada was John Delgado's tale of 1942, "Safe at Last". Set in a Vancouver shipyard, it told the story of a young woman who not only found true love among her co-workers, but, as their safety inspector, earned the respect of the "big and burly men" at the job site.<sup>16</sup>

News accounts in wartime Canada spotlighted a wide array of civilian women. Soon after the war commenced, it was noted that Canadian women were called upon to perform myriad volunteer activities. Such unpaid roles were not perceived as challenging male dominance; yet they may well have raised the self-esteem of women volunteers like those in the YWCA, as column after column detailed their fundraising efforts to aid refugees, purchase specific pieces of military equipment, and send soldiers various comforts.<sup>17</sup> "In innumerable ways", read one of many such accounts, "the women of Canada are helping, like our soldiers, to save the gallant people of Britain."<sup>18</sup> One woman from rural Alberta recalled the "growth in confidence" of her mother and her mother's friends after their efforts to "knit things for the boys" received coverage in the local paper.<sup>19</sup> Partially because of the growing importance of volunteer activities, the federal govern-

13 *Maclean's*, June 15, 1940, p. 26; M. Susan Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter: Images of Women in Advertising in *Maclean's* Magazine, 1939-1950", *Atlantis*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1983), p. 80.

14 *Chatelaine*, January 1939, p. 28.

15 Phyllis Lassner, "The Quiet Revolution: World War II and the English Domestic Novel", *Mosaic*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1990), p. 90.

16 *Chatelaine*, January 1945, pp. 6-7.

17 See, for example, *Chatelaine*, November 1939, pp. 10-11; *Maclean's*, June 1, 1941, p. 2.

18 National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), National Council of Women of Canada papers (hereafter NCWC), MG28 I 25, vol. 66, file 2, clipping from Toronto *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1939, n.p.

19 Author's interview with Laura Harrison, Edmonton, May 20, 1993.

ment established a Department of National War Services in June 1940, and in the autumn of 1941 added a special Women's Division to coordinate and maximize the efforts of some 50 organizations.<sup>20</sup> In addressing these facts, Pierson highlights gender bias by noting the delays in creating this Women's Division, despite the fact that most volunteers were female. Pierson also criticizes much of the Division's advertising for employing sexist stereotypes to encourage voluntarism (such as the slogan "from the frying pan and into the fire" to remind women to save grease for the production of munitions). However, one could also emphasize that the eventual creation of a Women's Division led to 44 female-run branches across Canada and produced extensive propaganda demonstrating the importance of women's volunteer activities, thus raising respect for women and, to an extent, their status. For example, *Canadian Welfare* magazine wrote in 1943 that "community jobs have become essential war jobs.... The two are interwoven and we find the woman volunteer playing a crucial role."<sup>21</sup>

From press accounts devoted to women's many voluntary activities, Canadians often became more aware of the demanding physical work females were capable of performing. Young women from high schools, as part of farm service programmes operated by the federal and several provincial governments, came out some 18,000 strong during their summer vacation to make up for a shortage of male agricultural labour.<sup>22</sup> Besides trite comments on their "fresh appearance", reports such as that from the *Calgary Herald* noted that "they have been mowing, raking, and pitching hay, working sweeps and building stacks", and, no doubt, would soon be "running threshing outfits".<sup>23</sup> In urban areas, women grew Victory Gardens to help conserve food, reduce consumer demand, and hence dampen inflation. To promote such goals, *Chatelaine's* editor, Byrne Hope Sanders, was put in charge in 1942 of a new Consumer's Division within the Wartime Prices and Trade Board that encouraged women shoppers to watch over merchants and citizens to ensure that they obeyed new pricing and rationing ordinances. While this may have stereotyped the image of women as household managers, it also provided women with a degree of authority within the community and a job that the government and print media presented as crucial, especially since, during the Great War, inflation had proven a prime catalyst of social strain. "You women are a much more important factor than you realize in Canada's fight," read a lead editorial in *Chatelaine*. Within the power of the housewife, it asserted, was the potential "to sabo-

20 NAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King papers (hereafter WLMK), MG26, series J2, vol. 226, file "National Reg of Women, 1940".

21 Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, pp. 33–39; *Canadian Welfare*, July 1943, p. 7.

22 Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, pp. 30–33.

23 *Mayfair*, July 1943, p. 85; Jean Bruce, *Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War — at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1985), p. 117.

tage Canada's war against inflation'', and thus the country's effectiveness as a participant in the conflict.<sup>24</sup>

As materiel shortages and rationing became more prominent features of daily life from 1942 onwards, shopping grew more difficult. Strict controls over petrol consumption and the purchase of tires resulted in the discontinuation of store delivery services. Women found themselves on long bus rides or even on bicycles, trudging from store to store to search for often scarce goods; they lugged back items in paper bags thinner than usual due to wartime restrictions and planned carefully to stretch a reduced food budget throughout the week. A number of popular sources heaped praise upon those often called "Canada's Housesoldiers", a term that, among other such phrases, admittedly tapped into sexist stereotypes; it was also a label, *Chatelaine* claimed, that denoted the rising importance of women within numerous families, and hence an altered perception of what many women had formerly considered the "rather dreary" position of housewife.<sup>25</sup>

The praise bestowed upon volunteers and housewives may well have raised the station and confidence of women within a number of families. Yet this trend, as several publications noted and many women confirmed, also derived from the simple reality of women being compelled to perform many new activities. With husbands overseas or perhaps working lengthy overtime shifts, women's dependency waned, especially when women assumed control over family finances and other responsibilities typically within male purview, such as arranging for coal and ice deliveries, chopping wood, and cleaning furnaces.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, since the skills of most repairmen were utilized for the war economy, many women successfully met the challenge of learning how to keep appliances (and maybe even the family car) in good working order. Mothers were forced to cope with fewer doctors as the Forces' Medical Corps laid claim to thousands of physicians.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, mothers often had to assume complete responsibility for the discipline of children, frequently a considerable challenge. Success provided a feeling of triumph — at least in the case of Grace Craig of Toronto, who let her husband in England know that "they acknowledge[d] my authority" despite the fact that one of her two teenaged daughters was "two inches taller and ... fifteen pounds heavier" than herself, and her 17-year-old son stood over six feet tall.<sup>28</sup>

Enhanced recognition and self-confidence acquired through voluntary

24 *Chatelaine*, June 1944, p. 76.

25 *Chatelaine*, November 1942, pp. 72, 75.

26 For example, Leena Turner of Toronto recalled the "sense of importance" she felt from "going into the bank myself to do the family finances". NAC, Audiovisual Division (hereafter AV), tape R-8550, interview with Leena Turner.

27 *Saturday Night*, October 31, 1942, p. 29. Also see Alan Brown, "Child Care in Wartime", *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 1940, p. 107.

28 Private collection held by Mary Tasker, Toronto. Grace Craig to Jim Craig, March 18, 1944.

activities or within the confines of the family unit were important, if not crucial, in the personal development of numerous women. Such gains are not usually emphasized by scholars as opening broad vistas of opportunity, however — at least in comparison with those attained through the educational system and in the workplace. In discussing Canada's wartime university system, Ruth Pierson and Nancy Keifer emphasize signs of continuity, such as the decision of the University of Toronto to reject a woman's military corps in favour of more suitable feminine activities such as Red Cross work.<sup>29</sup>

Undoubtedly, sexism was rife on college campuses. Causing a conundrum early in the war at several Canadian universities was the question of whether to house military trainees temporarily at dormitories. At the University of Alberta, noted the *Gateway*, the student newspaper, several men, no doubt fearing competition from soldiers, contended that "women who got drunk" with those in uniform "would ... do anything".<sup>30</sup> Also true, however, was that over the course of the war Canadian university women read more about themselves and their accomplishments. In the *Gateway*, the number of stories on women practically doubled between 1941 and 1943 to 82 — articles that included profiles on the university's first female engineering student as well as on a woman who was elected as student vice-president.<sup>31</sup> Such progress reflected the fact that Canada's female student body increased as men went off to war, as did their opportunities within subject areas traditionally monopolized by males. In 1945, 28.6 per cent of all undergraduate degrees in Canada were conferred upon women compared with 21.3 per cent in 1939. Moreover, the number of B.Sc. degrees granted to women increased from 51 in 1941 to 90 in 1945, or from 14.9 to 20.6 per cent of the total; whereas 25 women graduated as doctors in 1941, representing 4.4 per cent of the total, by 1946 these numbers reached 45 and 7.9 per cent respectively.<sup>32</sup>

The most noticeable change for Canadian women occurred in the paid labour market where, between 1939 and 1944, their number almost doubled to about 1.1 million (or from 24.4 to 33.5 per cent of those women eligible to work), with the rate of increase being most pronounced among married women and mothers. Some 300,000 women entered war-related jobs, many of which were in heavy industry, as well as a number of other posts former-

29 Nancy Keifer and Ruth Roach Pierson, "The War Effort and Women Students at the University of Toronto, 1939–1945" in Paul Axelrod, ed., *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the History of Higher Education* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), pp. 163–176.

30 *Gateway*, October 13, 1943, p. 3.

31 Author's survey of wartime issues of the *Gateway*, and the edition for October 16, 1942, p. 1.

32 M. C. Urquhart and K. A. H. Buckley, *Historical Statistics on Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), p. 601; *Canada Year Book*, 1940, p. 976, and 1948–1949, pp. 320–321.



ly monopolized by men, such as driving public transportation vehicles.<sup>33</sup> Official propaganda from Ottawa's National Selective Service highlighted "patriotism" as a rallying cry when recruiting women into new civilian jobs. The government sought to emphasize that such recruitment constituted an emergency measure designed to release more men for the front; when the war was over, it was assumed, women would return to the hearth. The seminal importance of family was also expressed through the pattern of government labour recruitment: single women were first enticed into the job market in March 1942; not until the end of the year was official encouragement offered to wives and mothers, through income tax breaks (permitting no levies on annual salaries up to \$660) and the creation of a dominion-provincial shared cost programme providing daycare and after-school supervision for the children of war workers.

Many women, in subscribing to current mores, accepted that theirs was a patriotic and therefore temporary sojourn in the workplace. Others, however, were perhaps open to change. One such group consisted of women left on their own who simply became bored and, in taking a war job rather than volunteer work, displayed a preference, like countless men, for receiving money for their efforts.<sup>34</sup> There was also economic need. Prior to a wage and price freeze imposed by Ottawa in November 1941, cumulative wartime inflation reached 17.8 per cent.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, with people pouring into cities for war jobs, rental rates soared. Even after the federal government enacted a rental freeze, illegalities such as the demand for "key money" persisted. Government dependent allowances supplemented by wages garnisheed from soldiers' salaries often proved inadequate.<sup>36</sup> As a result, in early 1942 the federal government, under pressure to improve recruitment figures and realizing that men would not leave their families destitute, created a Dependents' Board of Trustees to which, under certain circumstances, a soldier's wife could apply for a maximum 25-per-cent supplement on top of the regular dependent's allowance.<sup>37</sup>

33 Ruth Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, pp. 48–49; Ramona Rose, "'Keepers of Morale': The Vancouver Council of Women, 1939–1945" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1992), p. 70.

34 Such was the case, it seems, with Captain McDowell's wife, who wrote in a letter almost immediately after his departure from Canada that "this is the first ... day and I am afraid the beginning of many ... that I find myself sitting at home alone with not so much as a dickybird to talk to." York University Archives, J. L. Granatstein papers, box 4, Captain C. McDowell letters, Ruth McDowell to Captain C. McDowell, November 14, 1942.

35 J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War, 1939–1945* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), p. 36.

36 *Saturday Night*, December 15, 1943, p. 15. The dependent allowance for a wife with two children was \$79 per month, but rental rates in major centres of war production commonly reached \$60. *Maclean's*, December 15, 1940, p. 10; *Canadian Welfare*, November 1939, pp. 20–21.

37 Supplements were usually provided in cases where families exceeded six children (the top level of support under the regular dependent allowance programme), for emergency medical costs, and for

For many women, new positions in the war economy proved the answer to their financial problems, particularly employment in traditionally male jobs, where women, though paid a lower wage than men, still commonly earned 50 to 75 per cent more than in typical female occupations.<sup>38</sup> The relative financial stability that came into their lives was something that many women were anxious not to lose. Such an attachment to paid employment, one might reasonably assume, also prevailed among a relatively high proportion of women who entered the work force out of boredom — certainly a higher percentage than those who took jobs solely from patriotic motivations. Of considerable significance, therefore, was a March 1943 survey of female war workers in Toronto, which revealed that only 9 per cent identified “patriotism” as the most important reason for their decision to take a job, compared with 32 per cent who cited “personal reasons” including loneliness and boredom. Nearly all the rest, just under 60 per cent, cited financial need.<sup>39</sup>

The aspirations some women held, or developed over the course of the conflict, to keep their new jobs in peacetime faced stiff opposition, especially as concerns intensified over moral decline and family instability. Nationwide, between 1939 and 1941, reported cases of venereal disease among Canadian civilians climbed from 7,826 to 12,777 before levelling off.<sup>40</sup> For the military, in proportionate terms the grief was greater, as within Canada 35,036 soldiers were stricken between January 1, 1940, and June 20, 1943, a rate that exceeded that for any other illness among those in uniform.<sup>41</sup>

Trainees received lectures and even saw graphic technicolour films warning about V.D. For their leave time, soldiers had access to ointments for application after sexual contact and were informed as to the whereabouts of 24-hour prophylaxis stations.<sup>42</sup> Troops were also advised to distrust women, who were often portrayed in military propaganda as “booby traps”.<sup>43</sup> Many men heeded such warnings, but others, to relieve the tensions of training, prove their manhood, or, in light of an uncertain future, determined to live for the moment, threw caution to the wind. To protect the health of Canada’s fighting men, local authorities in several communities launched

funeral expenses. NAC, Department of National Defence Records (hereafter DND), RG24, vol. 6543, file 650-95-2, Minutes, Meeting of the Dependents’ Board of Trustees, June 10, 1943.

38 NAC, Robert England Papers, MG30 C181, vol. 3, file 21, “Maritime Women at Work and Peace”, December 1944.

39 NAC, Canada Youth Commission papers (hereafter CYC), MG28 I 11, series (c)7, vol. 42, file 5(3g), “Group Interview, General Engineering Company”, 1944.

40 Statistics Canada, *Incidence of Notifiable Diseases by Province, Number of Cases and Rates, 1924–1968* (Ottawa, 1970), pp. 86–87.

41 *Canadian School Journal*, vol. 23, no. 2 (February 1945), p. 48.

42 Lord Strathcona Horse Archives, Calgary, Regimental Orders, November 28, 1940.

43 NAC, DND, vol. 12,612, file 217-31, “Introduction to Training in Protection Against V.D.”

raids upon brothels and red-light districts soon after the war started.<sup>44</sup> The owners of several businesses, particularly dance halls, cafés, and bars, to avoid having their establishments declared “out of bounds” by the military or even shut down by the police (as they would be if named as a contact point by someone who contracted V.D.), often made it a policy to exclude unaccompanied women from their premises.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, cities hired more female police officers for their Morality Squads to watch over and often demand an explanation from “suspicious-looking” women, namely those found lingering about after dusk on streets, in parks, and in other public places.<sup>46</sup>

Working women sometimes complained about being denied the opportunity to enjoy themselves after a hard day's labour. Wrote one frustrated worker to a Toronto newspaper: “If women are capable of doing men's work to help win this war, then they are surely capable enough to decide whether they want a drink or not.”<sup>47</sup> Such comments appear to have had little impact, not only because many citizens perceived rising V.D. rates as a mortal threat to the community and the war effort, but also because numerous Canadians concluded that one of the best ways to reduce moral impropriety was to minimize, as soon as possible, the presence of women in the job market. Many people claimed that working women were out at all hours and, with their extra money, frequenting bars and dance halls. Calgary's Chief of Police accused “working girls” of being the principal cause of increased V.D.<sup>48</sup> In Quebec, where the stay-at-home wife was linked to maintenance of a moral Catholic society and where the war enjoyed less popularity than in English Canada, René Chalout, a member of the National Assembly, introduced a motion demanding that the employment of women in war plants be ended because it “encouraged prostitution”. Although censured by the Assembly, Chalout's motion was supported by 33 of 82 members.<sup>49</sup>

Concerns over children were also raised against working women. By 1942, with juvenile arrests reaching 13,802 compared with 9,497 in 1939, many Canadians concluded that the war was exerting a negative impact on

44 For example, in Calgary, arrests of those working at brothels rose from 44 in 1938 to 75 the next year. Provincial Archives of Alberta, 68.145, Report of the Attorney-General, 1939, p. 19.

45 NAC, Canadian Council on Social Development papers (hereafter CCSD), MG28 I 10, vol. 74, file 558, clipping from Winnipeg *Free Press*, November 20, 1942, n.p.

46 During the war, extra police women were hired in at least Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, Quebec City, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, and Vancouver. See Donna A. Zwicker, “Alberta Women and World War Two” (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 1985), pp. 93–94; Calgary Police Archives, Police Commission papers (hereafter PC), file 42.11, Secretary of the Board of Police Commission to J. Miller, February 9, 1943.

47 Diane G. Forestell, “The Victorian Legacy: Historical Perspectives on the Canadian Women's Army Corps” (Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1986), p. 172.

48 PC, file 42.12, undated clipping from Calgary *Albertan*, n.p.

49 NAC, DND, vol. 16,643, *Maple Leaf*, March 26, 1945, p. 2.

the behaviour of young people.<sup>50</sup> Several commentators worried that, rather than receiving guidance and care during these turbulent times, too many children were facing an unstable home life. While most Canadians accepted working mothers as an emergency wartime measure, many also viewed the trend as a high price to attain victory. Such worries led the Toronto *Star* to assume that, if the father was away, delinquency “increased”, but if the mother also worked outside the home “it doubled”.<sup>51</sup> To alleviate anxiety, subsidized government daycare centres and after-school supervision were provided, and several war factories created “housewife shifts” from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.<sup>52</sup> Still, reflecting and bolstering societal concerns, newspapers regularly bemoaned so-called “latchkey children” who returned at lunch or after school to “an empty house and cold meal” or “car babies” supposedly abandoned all day in parking lots while mothers worked.<sup>53</sup>

The determination that mothers not be permanently distanced from family duties by their new jobs was plainly evident in the management of day nurseries and after-school supervision authorized under a June 1942 federal-provincial shared-cost agreement. Despite promises by Ottawa to interpret eligibility “liberally”, administrators actually proved quite strict in implementing a rule that 75 per cent of children have mothers in jobs “directly related” to the war effort. This approach kept the number of spaces far below actual need — especially since state-supported daycare was established only in Ontario and Quebec.<sup>54</sup>

There were cases of child neglect and even some tragedies, but these were few considering the lack of government support for working mothers, as well as the fact that it took little extra demand to stretch underfunded charities and privately run creches past the breaking point.<sup>55</sup> While charges for “Non-Support of Family and Neglecting Children” rose from 1,547 in

50 *Canada Year Book*, 1945, p. 1116.

51 Forestell, “The Victorian Legacy”, p. 164.

52 Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, p. 30.

53 *Chatelaine*, June 1943, p. 8; *New Advance*, February 1943, p. 16.

54 In Ontario, where the concentration of war industry forced 28 government subsidized daycare centres to open, the 1,135 spaces provided equalled approximately one-quarter the number of eligible children of war workers. Meanwhile, severe opposition from Quebec’s powerful Catholic Church played a key role in keeping the number of daycare facilities in that province to just six. In Quebec, the federal government’s War Information Board was even compelled to dispel rumours claiming that children sent to daycare facilities would be confiscated by the state. Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), Department of Public Welfare records, RG29, series 1, file 1-872, Survey of Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nursery Programme, September 1942 – September 1945; Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, p. 53. NAC, Boards, Offices and Committees, War Information Board (hereafter BOC), RG36, series 31, vol. 13, file 8-5-2, War Information Board Current Rumour Clinic, July 17, 1943.

55 One case was the Montreal chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Mothers and Children, which faced a crisis of space in the early 1940s after receiving just 20 more applicants. NAC, WLMK, series J2, vol. 4, file “Feb. 18, 1942 to May 19, 1943”, President’s Report, 1942 Meeting of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Mothers and Children.

1938 to 2,546 in 1941 (an increase that government authorities accepted was primarily attributable to fathers abandoning their dependents for the military or new jobs in other provinces once the Depression ended), the large-scale employment of women starting the next year actually saw the figure dip to 2,403 charges. This figure only began rising again in 1945, to 3,148 charges, as apparently not all men returning from combat were prepared to resume family responsibilities.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, numerous employers discovered when questioning women about child care before making a job offer, fathers were frequently at home while the mother worked; grandparents were often called into action; older brothers and sisters pitched in; private creches and charities were utilized to the maximum; and some women workers banded together to hire babysitters.<sup>57</sup>

The issue of wartime delinquency, like child neglect, also appeared to be surrounded more by hyperbole and assumptions about proper gender roles than by dispassionate analysis. Few commentators mentioned or bothered to notice that between 1943 and 1945, while mothers were employed in record numbers, juvenile arrests followed a downward pattern of 12,225, 11,554, and 9,756 respectively.<sup>58</sup> This is not to deny that the constant presence of one parent at home would have helped keep some children on the straight and narrow during these difficult years, but statistical patterns also suggest that behind wartime trends in delinquency lay a number of other demographic factors. A delinquency peak might have been expected by the early 1940s since the mid- to late 1920s was a time of heavy migration into Canada that included thousands of young couples whose children became teenagers by wartime.<sup>59</sup> Equally important in explaining wartime delinq-

56 Charges stood at 2,099 in 1943 and 2,442 in 1944. *Canada Year Book*, 1942, p. 913; 1943, p. 984; 1946, p. 1113; and 1947, p. 283.

57 An October 1942 survey of 218 working mothers with 118 pre-school children in London, Ontario, revealed that 38.4% of youngsters stayed with fathers, siblings, or grandparents; 29.7% were in daycare; 15% had formal supervision from neighbours; 13.3% were with other relatives; and 3.6% enjoyed the services of a paid housekeeper. *Canadian Welfare*, October 1942, p. 15.

58 *Canada Year Book*, 1946, p. 247.

59 Between 1925 and 1929, migration into Canada stood at 84,907, 135,982, 158,886, 166,783, and 164,993 for each respective year. Urquhart and Buckley, *Historical Statistics on Canada*, Series A254–272. Meanwhile, the boom migration of the early twentieth century helps explain high delinquency rates during the 1920s through to the mid-1930s, while the trough in youth crime during the latter half of the 1930s derived in part from fewer newcomers and a low birth rate during the Great War, combined with strict immigration controls until the mid-1920s. Whereas immigration to Canada averaged 309,061 per annum from 1910 to 1914, over the next four years the mean dropped to 51,599. Urquhart and Buckley, *Historical Statistics on Canada*, series A254–272. Birth rates averaged 25.25 between 1910 and 1914 and over the next four years declined to a mean of 24.42. *Canada Year Book*, 1927–1928, pp. 109–110. In accounting for delinquency decreases during the mid- to late 1940s, one must note, besides the return of many working women into the home and the reappearance of fathers from the military, drastic cuts to immigration and a declining birth rate during the Great Depression. Between 1930 and 1931, immigration to Canada dropped from 104,806 to 27,530. As well, between 1929 and 1931, total births decreased from 242,246 to 228,296. Urquhart and Buckley, *Historical Statistics on Canada*, series A254–272, B1–14.

uency patterns was the changing nature of violations being prosecuted. While some serious crimes such as “assault” showed upward trends, most of the increase came from less serious offences such as “breaking curfew”. Between 1941 and 1943, minor offences committed by youth increased at a rate slightly double that of major violations.<sup>60</sup> Despite the shrinking number of police officers during the war (from 1.3 constables per 1,000 citizens in 1940 to 1.11 by 1944),<sup>61</sup> law enforcement authorities no longer had to concern themselves with so many 18- to 30-year-old males (the most crime-prone demographic group)<sup>62</sup> and could thus expand their focus to less serious matters.

To a large extent, social presumptions about the “woman’s place” influenced conclusions about the causes of and best solutions for wartime delinquency. The fact that juvenile delinquency peaked in 1942 confirmed to many Canadians - including numerous women - that wartime changes in gender roles had to be reversed as soon as the conflict ended in order to reconstitute the type of family stability that would prevent children from going awry, as well as to bolster moral standards that many perceived as under attack. Moreover, press commentary in wartime Canada also reassured worried citizens that women factory workers and those in other traditionally male occupations remained fully committed to staying feminine in both appearance and temperament, and sought only, as patriotic Canadians, to “back the attack” temporarily.<sup>63</sup> It was also asserted that the employment of women in areas such as heavy industry, while necessary to support the war effort, was impractical on a long-term basis because, as one male journalist explained, women’s supposedly inferior strength made them about 40 per cent less productive.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, as the war lengthened and the job-related demands upon women intensified, their exploits in the workplace received more coverage, as well as growing embellishment, within the popular press. While many columns celebrated or, more accurately, trivialized “pretty girl[s] in slacks and jackets”,<sup>65</sup> also appearing with increasing frequency, particularly from female correspondents, were references to the growing importance and relatively improved status of working women, as well as evidence of female competence to perform demanding tasks. To explain such skill, some journalists even utilized to advantage usually demeaning gender-based stereotypes. In October 1942, with some 150,000 women producing munitions, Anne Fromer, a columnist for *Saturday Night*, wrote with pride about a

60 Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Daily Bulletin*, vol. 13, no. 125, June 23, 1944.

61 *Canada Year Book*, 1942, p. 920, and 1946, p. 1121.

62 See Albert H. Burrows, “The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency”, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 19, no. 6 (1946), pp. 384–385.

63 Pierson, *They’re Still Women After All*, p. 47.

64 *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 31, 1943, p. 18.

65 *Maclean’s*, June 15, 1942, p. 10.

recent American study concluding that “of the 623 operations required in today’s war plants, women can perform all but 57”, many of which they did better than men because, as Fromer reasoned, “generations spent at the monotonous tasks of the housewife” had given women “more patience in handling repetitious machines”.<sup>66</sup> Canadians encountered approximately twice as many lead stories about women in 1944 as in 1939.<sup>67</sup> Many accounts dwelt upon changes in the workplace that, at the time, were considered revolutionary. Mary-Etta Macpherson, who succeeded Byrne Hope Sanders as *Chatelaine*’s editor, reminded her readers in 1943 that only four years earlier “the term ‘womanpower’ had yet to be coined ... [and that] in many cities the prejudice against married women holding jobs was active and powerful.”<sup>68</sup>

In describing the achievements of women workers, press accounts frequently focused upon new and physically demanding duties and sometimes provided the impression that almost all women who took on new tasks were performing and conquering the extraordinary to help win the war. In noting the tens of thousands of women who laboured in aircraft production plants,<sup>69</sup> *Mayfair*, a magazine once entirely devoted to covering the fashion and society scene for the debutante crowd, heralded those women who, it claimed, “perform[ed] with the skill of master-craftsmen”.<sup>70</sup> Considerable press coverage was also devoted to the 333 women in 12 Canadian cities who, starting in 1943, took jobs as bus drivers and streetcar conductors — duties that, even in the absence of newspaper reports, displayed female competence on a broad “public stage”, especially as the number of passengers on Canada’s public transportation systems more than doubled during the conflict. Some newspapers, playing upon stereotypes, offered jokes such as the demand by women drivers that powder rooms be installed on vehicles; but other columnists commended these women for their perseverance in contending with long hours, large crowds, and sometimes unruly customers, while maintaining an accident rate as low as, or even lower, than their male counterparts.<sup>71</sup>

The notion of breaking down barriers or, as *Saturday Night* columnist

66 *Saturday Night*, October 17, 1942, p. 10.

67 Author’s survey of the *Canadian Periodical Index*.

68 *Chatelaine*, September 1943, p. 76.

69 In 1944 women comprised 60% of British Columbia’s 8,600 aircraft workers and 32% of the 45,033 in Ontario. Zwicker, “Alberta Women”, p. 83.

70 *Mayfair*, September 1943, p. 88.

71 Between 1939 and 1944, ridership on public transportation vehicles in Canada increased from 639,631,589 to 1,404,576,434. This increase was attributable to the influx of people into cities for war jobs and the imposition of gasoline and tire rationing. See Barbara Lorenskowski, “‘Good Morning, Mrs. Motorman’ — Women Streetcar Operators and Conductors in Wartime Canada, 1943–1945” (unpublished manuscript, University of Ottawa, 1996), pp. 1–19.

Bernice Coffey contended, “blow[ing] away ... myths”<sup>72</sup> was also reflected in the personal feelings expressed by women. Noted at the time, or recollected in later years, was the conviction that women proved they “could cut it”<sup>73</sup> — whether the challenge involved dealing with and often earning the grudging respect of resentful male co-workers, winning over a wary public, or simply coping with long hours and physically demanding labour. Clara Clifford, 26 years old when hired as a streetcar conductor with the Toronto Transit Commission, felt herself able “to cope with anything in life” after a few months on the job.<sup>74</sup> Leena Turner, who made bullets at a factory in Ajax, Ontario, recalled with pride that she had successfully dealt with three different eight-hour shifts and had not allowed a magnesium burn to keep her away from work. “I showed”, she asserted, “that we were capable of doing so much more.”<sup>75</sup> Numerous women expressed feelings of “growth, and independence” for, as emphasized by one soldier’s wife who took a job in a Vancouver shipyard, “I had my own paycheque and could support myself.”<sup>76</sup>

Some journalists, the majority being female, anticipated radical change from the new wartime roles assumed by women. “You can tell your great-granddaughter some day that this was the time and the place it really started; the honest-to-goodness equality of Canadian women,” proclaimed Lotta Dempsey in 1943 to *Maclean’s* readers across the nation. “It began to happen that hour when Canadian girls left desks and kitchens ... stepped into overalls and took their places in the lines of workers at lathes and drills.”<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps Dempsey was too optimistic, but the mounting conviction that women were performing well on the job — as well as men in numerous cases — helped kick-start a campaign for equal pay legislation and other workplace improvements. Some of these campaigns drew notable public support. No doubt, partly as a consequence of extensive and often positive press coverage, more Canadians came to appreciate the importance of attracting women into the job market, as well as the wide array of duties that women were capable of performing. “You can feel ... the changing attitude of public men toward women and their capacities,” read another hopeful editorial in *Maclean’s* not long after the major influx of women into the job market commenced. “You can feel it ... in the education of foremen and bosses and factory heads, as they watch women quietly ... taking on the most difficult work, with little fuss and no feathers.”<sup>78</sup> One poll, taken in late 1942, showed 79 per cent of Canadians supporting the principle of

72 *Saturday Night*, June 19, 1943, p. 26.

73 NAC, AV, tape R-8548, interview with Irene Wheeler.

74 NAC, AV, tape R-8546, interview with Clara Clifford.

75 NAC, AV, tape R-8550, interview with Leena Turner.

76 Author’s interview with Minnie McMillan, Edmonton, Alberta, September 28, 1992.

77 Bruce, *Back the Attack!*, p. 56.

78 AO, MU 3542, *Women at Work* (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter, 1943), pp. 10–11.



equal pay for equal work.<sup>79</sup> The problem, however, was that too many people still remained easily convinced by employers that lower productivity resulted from the “weaker sex”, thus permitting firms to circumvent a commitment made by Canada's National War Labour Board to end unjustified pay discrimination in cases where federal contracts were being fulfilled.

Still, in early 1943, with the number of working women hovering around one million and with pressure building from several women's groups for greater workplace equity,<sup>80</sup> a subcommittee was established within the federal government's Advisory Committee on Reconstruction to examine employment issues of particular concern to women. In January 1944 the subcommittee's report recommended, among other measures, that Ottawa pass legislation guaranteeing equal pay for equal work and that it introduce retraining programmes so that female workers, if laid off after the war, could develop the necessary skills to seek decent employment.<sup>81</sup> The subcommittee's report did not receive an enthusiastic hearing when tabled in Parliament; most MPs ignored its existence. This, however, does not negate its significance. Neither the subcommittee nor the report emerged in a vacuum; both reflected a conviction among many women that wartime gains should not vanish, and it was upon such hopes and eventual disappointments that campaigns for workplace improvements persisted. Certainly, Margaret Stovel McWilliams, the subcommittee's chair, anticipated such a connection. “Canadian women have, through their war work, gained for themselves status which they had not achieved before,” she wrote in early 1944. “Happier homes” in the post-war period, she predicted, would occur where there existed “greater democracy”; conversely, “frustration” and familial “difficulties” would prevail if, after the shooting stopped, women “did not have the opportunity to exercise their abilities”.<sup>82</sup>

Several news articles reflected and likely encouraged the fact that many women, if given the choice, wished to retain their new and traditionally male jobs.<sup>83</sup> A number of women earning record salaries recalled the want of the Great Depression when they had not worked, saw themselves as having successfully balanced home and work life, and often expressed satisfaction with the independence derived from their new jobs. Therefore, as the momentum of the war turned against the Axis powers, public debate mounted over the “woman's place”. Many female columnists, like

79 Forestell, “The Necessity of Sacrifice”, pp. 341–342.

80 According to Gail Cuthbert-Brandt, the most concerted effort to create the subcommittee came from Margaret Wherry, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women. See “Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten”, pp. 240–241.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 247–250.

82 *Canadian Welfare*, March 1944, pp. 4–5.

83 One 1943 public opinion poll showed that 80% of working women planned, if possible, to keep their jobs after the war. However, it is unclear how many of these women were willing to see veterans go without work as a result. Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, p. 78.

McWilliams, hoped to parlay wartime changes into permanent progress. “The munition worker at the controls of her huge machine wants a chance to do the same sort of work after the war,” wrote Violet Anderson in the *Canadian Forum*.<sup>84</sup> Added Cynthia Carter in the *Pacific Advocate*: “They’ve learned what it’s like to make good money ... [and] most of them don’t want ‘postwar reconversion’ to include reconversion of the Woman Worker into the Little Woman.”<sup>85</sup> The *Toronto Star* reported that some 75 per cent of women working in aircraft plants hoped for the continuation of their jobs in peacetime and feared returning to badly underpaid posts in commercial laundries or as domestic servants.<sup>86</sup> However, polls also revealed that most women accepted the need to step aside to reintegrate veterans — 62 per cent, according to a 1945 survey, though one might reasonably assume that this willingness to sacrifice employment was higher among the approximately two-thirds of women who did not work.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, based upon interviews conducted in 1945 with working women in their early twenties, a report from the Canadian Youth Commission concluded that “quite a number ... express ... the wish to return to work ... and some [speak] of set[ting] up a business of their own on a small scale with the savings they have accrued during the war.” Such ambitions did not simply derive from economic considerations, this report maintained, but also from the fact that “many ... found release in wartime jobs from the relative monotony and ingrown atmosphere of their homes.”<sup>88</sup>

As German defences collapsed, pressure built upon women from several quarters to prepare for their exit from the job market. Advertisements from appliance companies displayed working women dreaming about their modern kitchens of the future. Other sources were more direct. Members of a Toronto-based Catholic forum expressed the hope that “‘home life’” would prevail over careerism in the post-war period because, as its participants resolved, “the gravest threat to society ... [comes from] the disinclination of women to marry and take up their traditional place.”<sup>89</sup> Bolstering this conviction were the perceived emotional needs of veterans. Reflecting upon the difficulties that often accompanied the repatriation of soldiers from the Great War, several publications advised wives and girlfriends to devote as much time as possible towards easing the readjustment of veterans to civilian life.<sup>90</sup>

84 *Canadian Forum*, July 1943, p. 90.

85 Rose, “Keepers of Morale”, p. 92.

86 *Toronto Star*, December 1, 1943, p. 1.

87 *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1945, p. 529.

88 The Canadian Youth Commission was established in 1940 by the YMCA to gauge the opinions of those between 15 and 24 years of age. NAC, CYC, series d, file 13, “Of Things to Come — A Citizen’s Forum”, November 7, 1944.

89 *New Advance*, December 1943, pp. 15–17.

90 Mary Jane Lennon, *On the Homefront: A Scrapbook of Canadian World War Two Memorabilia* (Erin, Ont.: Boston Mills Press, 1981), p. 120.

Economic and political concerns also affected the prospects of working women. Although eager for victory over the Axis powers, Canadians still expressed anxiety about post-war conditions. Asked in early 1945 as to what the future held, 61 per cent of respondents anticipated an economic downturn during reconstruction.<sup>91</sup> The federal Liberals promised citizens, especially as an election approached in mid-1945, that they would intervene in the economy as necessary to retain “high levels of income and employment”, particularly as there lay ahead the challenge of reintegrating some 600,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen during the first year after the conflict. In this context, it seemed essential to aim at women workers perceived as crowding what was anticipated to be a tight post-war job market.

Both directly and indirectly, several government programmes encouraged the removal of women from paid employment. The 1944 Family Allowance programme not only helped the federal Liberals undercut challenges from the political left and prime the economy during an expected post-war downturn,<sup>92</sup> but also inherently encouraged a domestic role for women. The monthly payments, scaling upwards from \$5 to \$8 until a child reached age 16, made it financially easier to have children, and the image of the mother as guardian of the family was reinforced by the fact that the Baby Bonus was one of the few government cheques mailed to the female head of the household.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, though not created with gender relations in mind, veterans' programmes helped tremendously to re-establish the breadwinner status of men. Canada's new Department of Veterans' Affairs provided various benefits: more generous pensions and post-discharge cash payouts than after the Great War; a guarantee of previous employment or a comparable job with one's former employer following military service (which had the effect of terminating the employment of many women in positions formerly held by men); vocational retraining for a period equal to one's time spent in uniform; the provision of free university education; preferences for a wide array of civil service posts; and grants and subsidized loans to start a farm or business.<sup>94</sup> At the end of the war, veterans collected an average of \$700 in gratuity payments; for those who decided to take a Re-establishment

91 *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1945, p. 375. Also see J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939–1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), chap. 7.

92 On political challenges to the King government from Canada's left-wing party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, as well as the adoption of Keynesian economic policies by the federal Liberals, see, *ibid.*; J. L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935–1957* (Toronto: Oxford, 1982), chap. 6; Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), chap. 11.

93 This connection between Family Allowances and the domestication of women is suggested in NAC, BOC, series 31, vol. 8, file 2-8, undated flyer entitled “What are Family Allowances?”, and CYC, series c(7), vol. 42, file 7 (3g), Quebec Conference, January 25, 1945.

94 NAC, Ian Mackenzie Papers, MG27 III B5, vol. 9, file 3-89, undated speech by Ian Mackenzie; DND, vol. 12,278, file 27-1, Bulletin on Vocational Training, 1944; BOC, series 31, vol. 14, file 8-14-C, pt. 2, Fieldon to Sutherland, January 13, 1944.

Credit instead of job retraining, free education, or the opportunity to start a farm or business, that figure climbed to approximately \$1,200.<sup>95</sup> Such assistance made possible the purchase of a home,<sup>96</sup> an acquisition that, during the initial post-war years, further encouraged the housewife role for women. By 1947, as housing stock became available, veterans eager to get on with their civilian lives acquired some \$200 million in accommodation.<sup>97</sup>

Wartime tax breaks designed to attract wives into the work force were eliminated by the end of 1946, as was state-supported daycare and after-school supervision.<sup>98</sup> In the civil service, the practice of excluding married women was reinstated.<sup>99</sup> As well, the application of Unemployment Insurance rules had the effect of pushing many married women into accepting domestic life. Government bureaucrats commonly denied wives financial support or help in finding alternative work if they refused to accept jobs they believed inferior to their wartime posts — an approach rarely applied to men.<sup>100</sup> All told, Canada's female participation rate in the paid employment market dropped from a 1944 peak of 33.5 per cent to 25.3 per cent by 1946.<sup>101</sup>

Many women were content to resume or commence a conventional, stay-at-home life. Like soldiers, they saw their "best years" passing them by, especially if they wished to start a family. Many such women had endured tremendous loneliness and were often worn out by years of performing the "double day". Whereas Canada's marriage rate stood at 8.9 per 1,000 in 1945, the next year it climbed to 10.9; in 1945, 24 babies were born per 1,000 women, and by 1948 this reached a peak of 28.9.<sup>102</sup>

95 NAC, Department of Veterans' Affairs records (hereafter DVA), RG38, vol. 372, file "D.V.A. New-Rel", news release entitled "Payments to Veterans", n.d.

96 Under the 1944 National Housing Act, one could acquire a home costing up to \$4,000 (which was quite common at the time) for a 10% down payment (with slightly higher down payment requirements for more expensive homes). The new Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation subsidized loans at 5% interest, amortized for up to 30 years; at that rate, monthly payments on a \$4,000 property came to approximately \$20. John T. Saywell, *Housing Canadians: Essays on the History of Residential Construction in Canada* (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1975), p. 188.

97 NAC, Ministry of Labour records, RG27, vol. 2349, file 22-5-14, Memorandum on Progress of Veteran Rehabilitation, 1947.

98 In Toronto, a Day Nurseries and Day Care Parents Association desperately tried to resist this trend. By 1951, however, the moderate funding it had obtained from provincial and municipal governments ended, a victim not only of post-war pressures upon women to place first priority on family life, but also of a new Cold War atmosphere in which the association of some Communists with the daycare movement proved unacceptable. See Susan Prentice, "Workers, Mothers, and Reds: Toronto's Postwar Daycare Fight", *Studies in Political Economy*, vol. 30 (1989), pp. 118–132.

99 *Canadian Forum*, March 1946, p. 274.

100 See Ann Porter, "Women and Income Security in the Post-War Period: The Case of Unemployment Insurance, 1945–1962", *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 31 (1993), p. 116.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

102 *Canada Year Book*, 1951, p. 166; F. H. Leacy, ed., *Historical Statistics on Canada* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1983), Series A–5.

Countless reunions were, as one veteran remembered, “fantastic”, as many a soldier who had dreamt in the thick of battle of a tranquil hearth and a dutiful spouse discovered women prepared to try to create such a reality.<sup>103</sup> But also, soon after the conflict ended, it became clear that things had changed — or, more specifically, that people had changed. Throughout the war, civilians and soldiers, separated by thousands of miles, kept in contact through letters that usually remained artificially upbeat so as not to upset the recipient.<sup>104</sup> Publications such as *Maclean's* told wives and sweethearts that “it [was] no less than a duty to write ... cheerful accounts.”<sup>105</sup> Not all women remained silent about the many difficulties of being left on their own, nor about the fact that they had become more independent. One woman warned her spouse that, to retain “emotional satisfaction”, she would “have to work [her] whole life”.<sup>106</sup> However, most personal correspondence did not dwell upon such matters. Undoubtedly, many women, just like soldiers, failed to appreciate how they had changed over the course of the war, but certainly some purposely hid potentially upsetting information that came to light soon after soldiers and civilians reunited.

Becoming a major concern in peacetime Canada was a sharp rise in divorce, from 2,068 cases in 1939 to 7,683 in 1946.<sup>107</sup> No doubt the roughness of many ex-soldiers was shocking to countless families; as part of the bonding process between troops or as a reflection of battlefield conditions, men frequently developed a penchant to drink and gamble, to become restless, arrogant, or angry, or, at the other extreme, to withdraw into bouts of silence. To explain rising post-war divorce, however, many people also focused upon women. While awaiting repatriation, soldiers had been warned that difficult times might lie ahead in their domestic relations. “Remember ... for three, four or five years she has lived without you,” went a sermon from an Army chaplain in North-West Europe. “She has had to make decisions and live her life without your daily help and presence. Allow for this.”<sup>108</sup> Cognizance of this reality was also sometimes evident in publications written for servicemen, but unfortunately such warnings were too often overwhelmed by macho attitudes, no doubt encouraged by military life, assuring those in uniform that everything would return to normal. “Women

103 Author's interview with George Macmillan, Edmonton, Alberta, October 22, 1992; Barry Broadfoot, *The Veterans' Years* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1989), p. 86.

104 For details on the pattern of personal correspondence between Canadian soldiers and civilians during World War II, see Jeff Keshen and David Mills, “‘Ich bereite mich auf den Tag vor, da es zu Ende geht!’ Briefwechsel von Kanadierinnen und Kanadiern im Krieg” in Detlef Vogel and Wolfram Wette, eds., *Andre Helme — Andre Menschen?* (Essen: Klartex, 1995), pp. 257–282.

105 *Maclean's*, November 15, 1943, p. 31.

106 Tasker collection, Grace Craig to Jim Craig, July 13, 1943.

107 *Canada Year Book*, 1948–1949, p. 189.

108 NAC, DND, vol. 10,513, file 215 A21.009, undated sermon.

are far too clever ... to place themselves on an equal footing with men," was an all-too-familiar refrain in the *Maple Leaf*, Canada's most important military publication. "There's not one of them ... who would take a man's position in life in favour of the privilege of stepping into a crowded street-car and having the nearest male stand up, tip his hat and offer her his seat."<sup>109</sup> It was therefore not surprising that many veterans had difficulty dealing with women who had grown more self-reliant and confident. Some returnees began to talk in resentful tones about wives or sweethearts who had "grown too independent"; as one veteran remarked, after "earning good money ... she didn't like doing kitchen work anymore."<sup>110</sup>

Nonetheless, the still dominant view of the initial post-war years is that life quickly settled into a more conservative, structured order, based in large part upon widespread confidence in a buoyant economy and acceptance of strictly defined gender roles. Finally, many Canadians concluded, prosperity and security, absent in their lives over the past generation, had arrived. The money saved by many workers during the war (due to a dearth of consumer goods and a government programme of compulsory savings to control inflation), when combined with the Baby Bonus and veterans' programmes, produced a post-war spending spree. Retooling to peacetime production proceeded rapidly not only in response to record consumer demand, but also as a result of generous tax breaks enabling industries to purchase new capital equipment more easily.<sup>111</sup> Following a brief post-war inflationary spurt, an extended period of prosperity took hold; not until 1957 did unemployment exceed 6 per cent.

Families moved *en masse* to suburbia to fulfil the dream of home ownership.<sup>112</sup> Mass and relatively uniform construction<sup>113</sup> provided affordable accommodation, especially since mortgages hovered at 5 per cent interest and were fixed for as long as 30 years.<sup>114</sup> Home ownership grew at a record rate, moving from 41 to 56 per cent of Canadian households between 1941 and 1951.<sup>115</sup> Popular imagery projected the picture of the happy stay-at-home suburban housewife with time for her children. Indeed, after years during which Canadians read numerous stories about child neglect and

109 NAC, DND, vol. 16,643, *Maple Leaf*, March 16, 1945, p. 2.

110 Forestell, "The Victorian Legacy", p. 171.

111 Robert Bothwell, "War into Peace: C. D. Howe as Minister of Reconstruction", *Proceedings of the Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War* (Ottawa, 1977), p. 12.

112 During the initial post-war decade, suburban areas grew three times faster than city centres. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams", p. 488.

113 Nearly 900,000 homes were built in Canada between 1945 and 1955, 65% of which were bungalows or ranch-style dwellings. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Annual Report*, 1955, p. 54.

114 Saywell, *Housing Canadians*, p. 202–203.

115 Buckley and Urquhart, *Historical Statistics on Canada*, p. 510. Also see John Miron, *Housing in Postwar Canada: Demographic Change, Housing Formation, and Housing Demand* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), p. 199.

delinquency, mothers were expected to devote more attention than ever to their offspring. Post-war advice manuals proliferated for the mothers of the new Baby Boom generation, the most influential being Dr. Benjamin Spock's 1946 classic, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, which instructed mothers to watch carefully for and encourage their child's natural inclinations. The post-war woman was also portrayed as devoted to advancing her husband's career; men climbing the corporate ladder, it was often said, had a right to expect dinner on the table after a long day, as well as a wife capable of planning, when necessary, that perfect party to impress the boss.<sup>116</sup>

The *Canadian Periodical Index* records a decline of approximately 60 per cent between 1945 and 1953 in lead stories about women, a pattern that indirectly reinforced the idea that people were settling into a comfortable social consensus.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, many stories conveyed the message that "the mark of a successful and wholesome personal life" was a good marriage and children.<sup>118</sup> Statistics appear to support the influence of such views. Between 1937 and 1954, the number of women 20 to 24 years of age who married rose from 77 to 100 per 1,000, while between 1940 and 1960 fertility rates within this age cohort soared from 130.3 to 233.5 per 1,000.<sup>119</sup>

Did this retreat into traditionalism constitute the only wartime legacy for women? After all, one might reasonably assume that, if wartime perceptions about increased promiscuity and family breakdown bolstered a post-war conservative reaction, then progressive currents would also flow from the more liberating aspects of this era. As the well-known American feminist scholar Alice Kessler-Harris argues, these currents could be viewed as precipitating "incremental" changes upon which more "radical" challenges to gender-based inequities were eventually constructed.<sup>120</sup>

There were many women who desired more than the supposed paradise of suburbia and who, after the war, spoke of lost opportunities. Such was the message in a number of sociological analyses, including the massive American-based Kelley Longitudinal Study in 1954–1955.<sup>121</sup> A 1956 investigation of an outlying area of Toronto entitled *Crestwood Heights* included commentary indicating not only satisfaction among suburban housewives, but also harsh judgements, such as one from a woman who, in describing her stay-at-home life, said that she was "slowly going out of

116 May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 193–205.

117 Author's survey of the *Canadian Periodical Index*.

118 Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams", p. 476.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 473; Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, p. 216.

120 Quoted in Sherna Berger Gluck, "What Did Rosie the Riveter Really Think? Change and Subjective Experience: Lessons from Oral History", *Southwest Economy and Society*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1983), p. 59.

121 May, *Homeward Bound*, pp. 176–193.

[her] mind’’.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, alongside advertisements and articles directed at *Chatelaine*’s female readership projecting the image of blissful domesticity were accounts such as ‘‘Housewives are a Sorry Lot’’, as well as reports on women who found satisfaction in the job market.<sup>123</sup>

Despite images of pervasive post-war domesticity, many women, as soon as veterans were reintegrated (either in retraining programmes or in jobs), re-entered paid employment. Although it took a generation after the war ended for the female job participation rate to reach its 1944 peak, still, by 1947, aggregate female employment exceeded the 1941 level (when the Great Depression had ended) and was 3 per cent higher in terms of women who were eligible to work.<sup>124</sup> Continued growth also occurred in the number of working wives and mothers, a group which tripled in terms of its percentage of the female work force to approximately 30 per cent between 1941 and 1951.<sup>125</sup> Also significant is the age pattern represented by the above-average increases in female labour force participation. The pattern indicates that women accounting for the largest increases were those likely to have participated in the war economy or, at the very least, to have known or read about women who joined the wartime labour market. Between 1941 and 1951, among those aged 14 to 19, the aggregate increase in work force participation was from 144,500 to 197,100 or 36 per cent; for those 20 to 24, from 215,000 to 257,600 or 24 per cent; for those 25 to 34, from 220,800 to 268,200 or 21 per cent; for those 35 to 44, from 111,300 to 200,200 or 80 per cent; for those 45 to 54, from 74,800 to 134,600 or 80 per cent; and for those 55 to 64, from 45,700 to 75,400 or 65 per cent.<sup>126</sup>

Certainly, barriers persisted for women in the post-war employment market. Job stereotyping remained prevalent. In 1950 nearly two-thirds of Canada’s female workers found themselves in the poorly paid clerical and retail sectors.<sup>127</sup> Unequal pay for women performing the same jobs as men remained common, as were women who drifted in and out of the work force or who laboured part-time depending upon the needs of their families. It was often said that the working wife was simply ‘‘supplementing’’ the family income. Yet, no matter what the shortcomings, stereotypes, or ration-

122 Strong-Boag, ‘‘Home Dreams’’, pp. 500–503.

123 *Chatelaine*, March 1950, p. 26. For more detail on the dichotomous pattern of magazine content directed at Canadian women during the 1950s, see Valerie Korinek, ‘‘Roughing it in Suburbia: Reading *Chatelaine* Magazine’’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1996).

124 One could argue that 1941 is a more appropriate benchmark for comparison than 1944 since the Depression had ended and massive government recruitment of women into the workplace had yet to commence; once exceptional factors are removed from the equation, the comparison indicates the impact of World War II on the proclivity of women to work outside the home. Pierson, *They’re Still Women After All*, pp. 215–216; *Canada Year Book*, 1950, pp. 670–674.

125 Strong Boag, ‘‘Canada’s Wage-Earning Wives’’, p. 7.

126 *Labour Gazette*, 1954, p. 373.

127 *Ibid.*, p. 136.



alizations restricting women on the job site, the steady increase in the number of working wives was perceived at the time as a major shift that, just as it had during the war years, engendered consternation among numerous Canadians.<sup>128</sup> According to one commentator, a husband, after finishing a day's work, had "a right to expect his wife's undivided attention", as well as to be secure in the knowledge that "he ... was head of the family".<sup>129</sup> Still, the post-war employment of women, particularly wives, continued to rise. Obviously, this occurred with at least the tacit approval or acceptance of many Canadians who, one suspects, had grown more accustomed to working women during the recent war. Furthermore, a number of men came to covet their wives' incomes; though rarely rising above 60 per cent of what men earned, this pay still often proved crucial in attaining for families a middle-class lifestyle, especially as women worked, on average, only four hours less per week than men.<sup>130</sup>

In the post-war press, in spite of the decreased number of articles on women and alongside stories boosting the social benefits of domesticity, some entries carried forward the more liberal opinions expressed on gender roles during World War II. Once more this trend was most prominent among women journalists. Although accepting many of the sexist standards of their era — like women's prime responsibility to ensure adequate child care — a number of columnists championed the right of wives to take paid employment and women's right to receive the same pay as men for performing equal work. In advancing such demands, writers often made reference to the wartime period. Tanis Lee, writing in *Saturday Night* in 1947, claimed that women had recently proven their "strength" in adversity, and that it was high time "to stop pushing them in and out of the home in war and peace" and "to give them the freedom ... to work from choice or necessity".<sup>131</sup> Two years later, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation carried a radio series hosted by newspaper columnist Ann Francis, entitled "Why Women Work?". To make her case for improvements in the employment market, Francis referred to the World War II era when, she claimed, "women proved they could do jobs which had always been considered too difficult for female brains."<sup>132</sup>

Although the pattern of post-war female employment commonly reflected

128 In 1954 Canada's Chief Statistician concluded that "the woman's place is no longer in the home, and the Canadian home is no longer what it used to be." Prentice *et. al.*, eds., *Canadian Women: A History*, p. 312. This was a trend that the *Labour Gazette* connected to "the 1939–45 war" because "prior" to that point "the number of women working outside their homes ... was negligible". *Labour Gazette*, 1954, p. 530.

129 Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives", p. 12–13.

130 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9; *Canada Year Book*, 1955, p. 786.

131 *Saturday Night*, February 15, 1947, p. 32.

132 NAC, Canadian Labour Congress papers, MG28 I 103, vol. 362, file "Ann Francis", CBC radio script entitled "Why Women Work?", December 2, 1949.

the ongoing influence of restrictive stereotypes, still there remained after the war a broader base upon which women could build better opportunities. Public transportation companies in several cities were impressed enough with the wartime performance of women that, soon after hostilities ceased, they created the new position of “passenger guide”, a post that admittedly reflected the clichéd female quality of “cheerfulness”, but nonetheless was a job that did not exist before the war in a sector that had formerly been an “all male bastion”.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, between 1941 and 1951, small but noteworthy increases occurred in the number of women performing traditionally male jobs, such as chemists and metallurgists, where the number of women rose from 3.5 to 10.2 per cent of the total; draughtsmen and designers, where the proportion of women rose from 2.7 to 4.9 per cent; and physicians, where the female presence increased from 3.6 to 4.6 per cent.<sup>134</sup> In accounting for such trends, several publications turned to the war years, including the *Financial Post*, which in the late 1940s also began running profiles on Canada's relatively few female executives, many of whom linked their accomplishments to the recent conflict. “In the war years as never before Canadian women were given an opportunity to prove their worth in positions carrying high ... responsibilities,” asserted Eva Lett, a manager with the Canadian Shipbuilding and Ship Repairing Association. “That they succeeded in measuring up to the unexpected is evidenced by the gradual but nonetheless definite recognition today of their capacity to fill executive positions.”<sup>135</sup>

Some of these new professionals came from universities and other advanced training centres that women continued to attend in increased numbers after the war. For many women, the connection between World War II and higher learning or training was direct: under benefits offered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), some 2,000 ex-servicewomen entered university, and another 8,000 attended vocational training programmes. Most ended up in traditional female fields — such as hairdressing, office work, and teaching — as a result of pressure applied by DVA counsellors and their own recognition that society would be most prepared to accept their presence in particular occupations. Along with the increased number of women in more advanced education and training programmes, however, came more exceptions — namely, more women who entered areas such as metallurgy, chemistry, and other highly skilled and, for women, unconventional fields of study.<sup>136</sup>

The proportion of women within universities declined in the immediate post-war era, since approximately 95 per cent of the 40,000 new students from

133 Lorenzkowski, “‘Good Morning, Mrs. Motorman’”, p. 18.

134 *Women at Work in Canada* (Ottawa: Women's Bureau, Department of Labour, 1957), pp. 24–25.

135 *Financial Post*, July 30, 1949, p. 8.

136 For a positive interpretation of DVA programmes for female veterans, see Peter Neary and Shaun Brown, “The Veterans Charter and Canadian Women” in J. L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, eds., *The Good Fight: Canada and the Second World War* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995), pp. 387–415. For a more critical view, consult Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, pp. 80–94.

the military were male. Still, in aggregate terms, with the enrolment of ex-servicewomen, Canada's female student body rose to a peak of 9,729 undergraduates in 1947; that year, a record number of women qualified as doctors — 54 or 8.3 per cent of the total.<sup>137</sup> As male veterans graduated, the number of female students increased from 23.8 per cent of undergraduates in 1949 to 27.7 per cent in 1952. The total number of women in universities, though decreasing as female veterans finished their studies, still stood at 1,811 B.A. graduates in 1952, nearly two-thirds above the 1939 level of 1,119, a rate of increase that kept pace with that experienced by males within Canada's burgeoning post-war university system. Furthermore, in 1953 the number of female B.Sc. graduates was more than triple the 1940 level (139 compared to 45). At 17.7 per cent of the total, this figure was slightly above the average of 14.5 per cent that prevailed between 1939 and 1941.<sup>138</sup> The migration of women into typically male disciplines was by no means spectacular. Nevertheless, as historian Susan Hartmann writes with respect to the similar American pattern, any movement that further unlocked the doors of academe was significant because it created a larger pool of women with a "vision of life beyond domesticity and ... beyond the ... subordinate".<sup>139</sup>

The steadily increasing presence of women within the job market and places of higher learning as well as, one might plausibly conjecture, ongoing press coverage highlighting female competence and the right to better treatment at the job site, encouraged some women to campaign for greater workplace equity as they had done during World War II. Furthermore, polls suggested that such efforts were being conducted before a population that, though often expressing conservative notions about woman's place, also appeared to have retained considerable flexibility. While surveys during the 1950s revealed that 90 per cent of Canadians agreed with the proposition that it was best for women with pre-school children to stay at home, other polls showed that 69 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men believed that women who did take jobs should receive equal pay for equal work.<sup>140</sup>

Led by prominent women trade unionists such as Eileen Tallman and Margaret Lazarus, and receiving the active support of the National Council of Women of Canada and the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, this crusade hit paydirt in 1951 with the passage of the Ontario Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act. The statute prompted eight other provinces and the federal government (in 1956, with regard to federal employees) to follow suit over the next decade.<sup>141</sup> Certainly, these

137 *Canada Year Book*, 1951, pp. 302–303.

138 *Ibid.*, 1948–1949, pp. 320–321, and 1955, p. 343.

139 Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, p. 116.

140 Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, survey of April 18, 1959; Monica Boyd, *Canadian Attitudes Towards Women: Thirty Years of Change* (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1984), p. 45.

141 Prentice *et. al.*, eds., *Canadian Women: A History*, p. 313; Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920–1950* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), pp. 201–204.

statutes possessed notable loopholes and did not begin to address the matter of job ghettos.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, such legislation was a step forward and part of an incremental process of change that gained strength from an expanding number of women workers and their growing unwillingness to accept blatant discrimination — trends that had augmented significantly during World War II. Furthermore, as married women continued to increase their rate of job participation following the war, other archaic rules fell by the wayside. In 1955 married women were permitted equal access to the civil service, and two years later discriminatory practices applied against wives under the Unemployment Insurance scheme were ended.<sup>143</sup>

During World War II, many women from all walks of life acquired greater self-esteem and heightened ambition from new challenges in their lives and, like the soldiers, often emerged at the end of the conflict as different people. The print media, in reflecting social trends, not only bolstered moves towards a post-war conservative reaction (such as by publicizing a perceived link between female employment and increased moral laxity and family instability), but also encouraged progressive currents by providing a picture of female strength and skill under adversity. This image enhanced the confidence and aspirations of numerous women, and one might reasonably assume that it also helped soften the attitudes of many citizens towards the presence and rights of women in the workplace.

The experiences of Canadian women during World War II, while by no means overturning a “social construction of gender” accounting for tremendous inequality, cannot be written off as ephemeral. Progress was limited and, after the war, curtailed, but it also seems that too much had occurred in too many lives — both in concrete and psychological terms — to permit things to return to square one. Even if the alterations encouraged by World War II proved small when measured against the gender-based inequities that remained, this cannot negate the fact that, a half-century earlier, transformations such as the more open acceptance of working wives and the principle of equal pay for equal work stood as notable breakthroughs. Such transitions, as well as others connected to the hopes, achievements, frustrations, and fears raised by the wartime migration of women into the work force, all produced a pattern of historic change. While these changes prompted many Canadians to emphasize the need for a post-war patriarchal order, they also laid down a wider and stronger base upon which a later generation of women could, during more sympathetic and revolutionary times, launch a more substantial, successful initiative on behalf of gender equity.

142 For details, see Shirley Tillotson, “Human Rights Law as Prism: Women’s Organizations, Unions, and Ontario’s Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, 1951”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 4 (1991), pp. 532–557.

143 Porter, “Women and Income Security”, p. 137.