Disciplining Children,
Disciplining Parents:
The Nature and Meaning of Advice
to Canadian Parents, 1945–1955

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Advice to parents of school-age children and adolescents in Canada in the postwar period was shaped in many ways by the discipline of psychology, and more specifically child psychology. The psychological imperative in parenting, promoted in postwar manuals and popular magazines, influenced the social construction of gender. Moreover, the teachings of child psychologists, strengthened by their claim of safeguarding the emotional well-being of the country’s children, justified the intervention of outside institutions such as the public school and public health department into the home. Close interpretive attention to the discourse surrounding “proper” parenting reveals much about the nature of social relations and social change in Canada’s recent past.

ON JUNE 3, 1948, Edmund Davie Fulton, a Conservative member for the riding of Kamloops, British Columbia, interrupted a Canada Evidence Act debate taking place in the House of Commons to draw the House’s attention

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to what he believed to be a much more pressing problem. According to him, the number of crime comic magazines making their way into the hands of young people had reached alarming proportions.1 Fulton informed his colleagues that in Kamloops, a city of 12,000, the circulation of crime comics had reached 15,000 issues in 1947 alone. The Honourable Member demanded that Parliament take swift action to “put a stop to this tendency”.2 His reason was straightforward and undeniable: crime comics were “producing or contributing to a child’s becoming a juvenile delinquent”.3 Following a spirited year-long debate, the Canadian Parliament ultimately agreed. On December 5, 1949, private member’s Bill 10, thereafter known as the Fulton Bill, was given its final reading. This amendment made it a criminal act to “print, publish, sell or distribute any magazine or book that was devoted to the pictorial presentation of crime”.4 Crime comics were, and to this day still are, outlawed in Canada.

Parliament’s decision to ban the crime comic was an important symbol of Canadians’ concern about family and childrearing in the postwar period. In their debate over the well-being of Canadian children and their place within the family, however, these parliamentarians were not alone. The writings of journalists in popular Canadian magazines and the advice of professional child psychologists such as Dr. William Blatz and Dr. Samuel Laycock exposed postwar parents to a novel approach to childrearing.5 The new emphases in childrearing, particularly regarding school-age children and adolescents, reflected larger anxieties that characterized the postwar years. The psychologically informed advice of the experts helped to shape attitudes towards gender and, by claiming to safeguard the mental health of the country’s children, legitimized the intervention of outside institutions into the private realm of the family. The development of my interpretive approach to postwar parenting advice is influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault. Foucault’s reading of the history of prisons, madness, and sexuality portrayed each as partaking in the disciplining and standardizing of human bodies into the “universal reign of the normative”; similarly, I see

2 Ibid., p. 4754.
3 Ibid., p. 4754.
5 Popular Canadian magazines surveyed for this study from approximately 1947 to 1955 include Maclean’s Magazine, Chatelaine, Saturday Night, Canadian Forum, and Food for Thought, the official organ of the Adult Education Association in Canada.
glimpses of this disciplining and normalizing process accompanying advice to parents in postwar Canada. The discourse regarding parenting reveals much about the nature of social relations and social change in Canada’s recent past.

Two aspects of the nature and meaning of advice to parents in postwar Canada are relevant here. First, the advocates of psychologically sensitive parenting contributed to the social construction of gender in a number of ways in their treatment of Canadian mothers and fathers. Experts tended to put much of the blame for “problem” children squarely on the shoulders of insensitive parents. Mothers were warned against giving their children either too much love and attention, or not enough. Fathers were scolded for their reluctance to get involved with their children and were encouraged to be likable and accessible role models. Not only did parenting advice reflect uneasiness and uncertainty about acceptable gender roles in the postwar period; it added its own mental health imperative to the maintenance of traditional meanings surrounding “man” and “woman”, “mother” and “father”.

A second important aspect of postwar parenting involves the place of the family in a larger, more public context and the ways in which the public school and the public health systems incorporated psychological thinking into their dealings with the family and with children. Efforts to ensure the psychological stability of young Canadians, quite apart from their physical well-being, shaped the impact public institutions made upon the family and the interactions between institutions and the home. The fact that experts understood healthy psychological development to be an ongoing concern added to the legitimacy of this interaction. While child psychologists pointed out the importance of the early years, “diseases” of the personality could apparently crop up at any stage in a child’s life. Whether five or fifteen, the experts counselled, young people were psychologically vulnerable to disruption and therefore in need of expert surveillance. Under the legitimizing mantle of science, child psychologists, much like medical doctors, encouraged Canadians to look to professional guidance rather than trust their own judgements or rely on past experience. Ironically, Canadian

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7 A number of the ground-breaking works on the history of parenting advice in Canada and the United States, cited in note 24, are concerned primarily with the care of babies and pre-school children. My study attempts to broaden our understanding of the significance of this phenomenon by exploring advice offered to parents of school-age and adolescent children.

8 The interpretive parallels between the rise of professional medicine and psychology as legitimate, scientific, and patriarchal is thought-provoking. For an account of this process in Canada’s medical profession see Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies — Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
parents were often left feeling inadequate and confused about how to be good parents. As much as it was aimed at producing happy and well-adjusted young people, psychologically inspired advice rested on the necessity of first disciplining parents.

There are both benefits and limitations in using postwar advice to parents as an interpretive tool. Critics have pointed out that parents do not always follow the advice of experts in the matter of childrearing or in any other life experience.9 This does not, however, undermine the potential importance of advice as a useful tool for historians. Conceptualizing advice as an ideological artifact in itself, rather than as a flawless blueprint of how parents actually behaved, allows social historians to learn something about the climate of ideas in the past.10 By examining what those in a position to shape social convention such as parenting experts had to say, we can learn a great deal about the society in which they circulated their ideas.

Despite its interpretive potential, the advice explored in this study addressed only a certain “type” of parent: a white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class mother and father. The experts made little attempt to accommodate the different needs of immigrant or single-parent families, various ethnic traditions, or working-class realities. They addressed a monolithic audience — a generic “every family”. The creation of a new ideal, a new model, for child-parent relations in Canada during this period ignored cultural and ethnic differences and aimed instead to homogenize and standardize parenting skills. The particular foray into the emotional life of the family represented by postwar advice to parents created a rather artificial standard at the same time as it collapsed differences along the lines of class, race, and ethnicity.11

A growing number of investigations have been devoted to the social history of childhood and the family in postwar Canada.12 The most recent

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10 Arnup gives thorough consideration of the problem in “Education for Motherhood”.

11 See, for example, the important work on the experience of ethnic families in postwar Canada in Franca Iacovetta, Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992).

12 See especially Neil Sutherland, Jean Barman, and Linda Hale, compilers, History of Childhood and Youth: A Bibliography (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992); Doug Owram, “Home and Family at Mid-Century”, paper presented at the 71st Conference of the Canadian Historical Association, May 29–June 2, 1992, University of Prince Edward Island; Veronica Strong-Boag,
assessments of this burgeoning field of historical inquiry have noted a shift in interpretive concentration. Early studies of childhood and youth focused primarily on a specific time, a specific “type” of child, and a specific place: namely the nineteenth century, delinquents and orphans, and the central provinces, especially Ontario. In more recent studies, however, historians have broadened their approach to include the experience of non-deviant children and young people and have begun to question all aspects of their past.\(^{13}\) My study attempts to contribute to these later investigations that explore the less tangible and less easily categorized characteristics of growing up in Canada. By focusing on the varying and often conflicting ways in which adults were advising each other to raise good children, we can learn something about what values Canadians held dear and about the plurality of opinion surrounding these values in the postwar period.\(^{14}\)

The considerable social value attached to the establishment and maintenance of family life was not simply a pleasant characteristic of the late forties and fifties, but rather signalled a powerful reaction on the part of Canadians to prolonged periods of turbulence and uncertainty. Doug Owram found that:

> The idea of home was ... invested with a great number of powerful meanings by the end of the war, ranging from material comfort to the end of the war itself. Underlying it all, however, was a search for stability on the part of a generation that had known nothing but instability. The home, coming home, and the formation of the family as a point of reference in an unstable world all merged into one vision.\(^{15}\)


13 See especially the collection of essays contained in Smadyh, Dodds, and Esau, eds., *Dimensions of Childhood*. In the introduction, the editors remark on the state of the history of childhood and youth in Canada and suggest future work.


Owram points out that the image of the family portrayed during the postwar years was, in a sense, a defence mechanism against the social mayhem that had characterized the years of depression and war. The widespread promotion of family living and marriage satiated a social craving for calm, happiness, and certainty.

This promotion was also partly the consequence of the belief of many Canadians that certain aspects of modern postwar society conspired to undermine the traditional family. A curious characteristic of the years after the war was the power of the perception of social disruption, regardless of proof to the contrary, to influence and shape public opinion. In addition to the perceived rise in juvenile delinquency, which motivated the members of Parliament to seek a ban on crime comics, other postwar social problems seemed to threaten the family. An article in a 1947 issue of *Maclean’s Magazine*, for example, declared:

> The fact that there was “only” one divorce for every 21 Canadian marriages in 1945, as compared to one divorce for every three marriages across the border in 1945, is grounds for little satisfaction when you dig a little deeper. For after the first world war only one Canadian couple were divorced for every 482 who married. What is the matter with us? Our grandparents seemed to get along pretty well in marriage — why can’t we?16

The increasing divorce rate that seemed to be a new fact of postwar life was not the only indication of a social breakdown that Canadians perceived to be confronting their generation. Child abuse was also discussed in the popular press. Journalist Sidney Katz reported that “according to the latest available estimate, 40,000 Canadian children are now under the care or supervision of social agencies.”17 In Ontario alone, the incidence rate of desertion, abuse, ill-treatment and neglect had risen from 2,771 cases in 1939 to 4,025 cases in 1947.18 In light of such shocking increases, Katz asked his readers:

> What are the reasons behind these alarming figures? Are we becoming more cruel as individuals? Have we been so brutalized by a long and bloody war that we are no longer sensitive to the sufferings of helpless youngsters unable to take care of themselves?19

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19 *Ibid.*, p. 42. For a timely appraisal of the situation in Quebec, see Chs.-E. Bourgeois, “Protection of
The danger to children in postwar Canada was not only to be found in the home; it was believed to be omnipresent. In particular, the young were being stalked by a new enemy: the “sexual psychopath”. An article in *Chatelaine*, written to “bring understanding to the average women who has had only the remotest acquaintance with such things before”, declared:

So many dangers exist to all our children everywhere, rich or poor, city or country. For the sexual psychopath can be found in any class of society, any calling, and with any degree of education ... in other words, they may appear in every other respect to be ordinary members of society.20

The increasing stresses accompanying urbanization and the failure of parents to spend time with their children were offered as probable explanations for the apparent social breakdown that confronted the immediate postwar years. One cure-all for these symptoms of social decay involved a return to “good old-fashioned family life”:

Much has happened, of course, and most of it can be traced back to industrialization, with the accompanying growth of large cities. In them the individual, not the family, becomes the unit. And so far as a simple formula can be suggested to curb divorces it is that the nation must again become family-minded.21

The reaction of Canadian parliamentarians to this apparent breakdown of the family was to advocate a return to the strict family upbringing that they...
themselves had experienced. To them, the growing popularity of the unsavoury crime comic represented the failure of Canadian parents to discipline their children effectively and to provide them with more cultured leisure pursuits. In speaking out against the effects of reading crime comics, the government members employed powerful rhetoric to castigate a generation of parents thought to be at risk of rearing a generation of delinquents. Through their arguments, the members were rallying to defend a vision of family life and of parenting that they feared was disappearing in the postwar era. Scholars such as Augustine Brannigan and Janice Dickin McGinnis have provided valuable investigations of the crime comic debate as it has affected the social and legal history of Canada. These postwar concerns also provided a window of opportunity for experts, particularly child psychologists, to influence Canadian family life.

As other historians have pointed out, advice to Canadians and parents’ concerns regarding the best way to raise their children were not new developments in postwar Canada. Canadian mothers and their babies had long...
been the favourite targets of childcare professionals. A number of influential
Canadians, such as the founder of the Institute of Child Study in Toronto,
Dr. William Blatz, who was active in the 1940s and 1950s, had been en-
gaged in studying child development since the 1920s and 1930s.25 Veroni-
cia Strong-Boag has demonstrated how the federal Division of Child Welfare
had become firmly established by the 1920s. Dr. Helen MacMurchy’s “Little
Blue Books” were immensely popular with Canadian mothers and went
through numerous reprints.26

The government’s interest in maternal welfare and prenatal care led to the
publication of many manuals. The Canadian Mother’s Book, produced by
MacMurchy throughout the twenties, was continually revised and updated.
In 1937 Dr. Ernest Couture was named head of the Division of Child and
Maternal Hygiene of the Department of Pensions and National Health and
undertook the production of the first edition of the immensely popular The
Canadian Mother and Child. By 1953 Couture’s contribution had gone
gone through 12 reprints.27 Likewise, as Katherine Arnup’s work on the con-
struction of mothering in Canada from 1920 to 1960 details, government
departments such as the Federal Department of Health, public health nurs-
ing, the Division of Child Hygiene, and the Bureau of Child Welfare were
well established by the 1920s.28 Other organizations such as the Canadian
Federation of Home and School Associations, founded in Ontario in 1919
and established in the other provinces shortly thereafter, had a long history
of providing Canadians with the “education of parenthood ... devoting time
and thought to the child in our midst”.29

Historians in Canada, the United States, and Britain tend to agree that
essential changes had taken place in the basic tenor and character of postwar
advice to parents. Parenting advice in the pre- and interwar years had fo-
cused on keeping children on rigid schedules for sleeping, eating, and
playing. In her study of experts’ influence on the training of preschool
children from 1920 to 1940, Veronica Strong-Boag characterizes advice to
parents during this period as highly regulated and mechanized. She quotes
from “one typical Toronto psychologist”, William Blatz, who stated in 1920

in British Columbia During the Intervar Years” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia,
1980); Keri Delhi, “Women and Class: The Social Organization of Mothers’ Relations to Schools in
Toronto, 1915–1940” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1988); Douglas Owram, “Draft
Manuscript — Babies” (forthcoming), pp. 9–18.
25 For a detailed study of the growth of the Institute of Child Study at the University of Toronto in
1925, see Mary L. Northway, “Child Study in Canada: A Casual History” in Lois Brockman, et al.,
28 Arnup, “Education for Motherhood”; Arnup et al., Delivering Motherhood.
Halifax, July 13–16, 1938, p. 3.
that, where “it formerly was believed that mother instinct or mother love was the simple and safe basis for the problems of training, it is now known that a much more reliable guide is the kitchen time piece.”  

By the postwar period, Blatz was still an advocate of employing routine and consistency in bringing up children. He and his colleagues, however, now spoke more frequently of the need to provide the child with, above all else, love, security, and understanding.

Consistency had been somewhat overrated; and so we have well-meaning but rigid parents who are afraid to change the rule because it might be “inconsistent”. You are more of a automaton than a parent if you are consistent all the time. If parents can remember to be consistent with their warmth and love, then some inconsistency in discipline does not ruin the child for life.

After the war, advice to parents became more relaxed and focused upon the mind of the child, his or her emotional health, in junction with physical health.

Advice was not merely aimed at parents of newborn babies and toddlers. In the postwar period, parents were schooled in the most psychologically healthy way to handle everything from their child’s first day at school, to formative experiences with friends, to whether or not their sons and daughters should engage in “petting.” Although the prevailing parent-

31 In his tireless promotion of the need for nursery schools along the lines of that found at his Institute of Child Studies, Blatz talks of the needs of children for “cultural fulfilment” and “unhampered thinking”. Blatz, Understanding the Young Child (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1944), p. 252. See also John Alan Lee, “Three Paradigms of Childhood”, Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, vol. 19, no. 4 (1982), p. 600.
34 Frank and Frank, How To Help Your Child in School, p. 103.
ing wisdom of the twenties and thirties had generally advocated strict regimentation in childcare and the avoidance of excess maternal emotion, by the end of the war experts were advocating a more relaxed, emotionally expressive approach that integrated the teachings of child psychology into parenting.35

Why did these changes happen in the first place and then take root? Any answer must necessarily consider a number of converging factors. The experience of two world wars had surely made Canadians receptive to alternative ways of understanding human conflict and hungry for ways to resolve it. Since his *Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1909, Freud’s psychological explanations for seemingly inexplicable human tragedy had enjoyed popularity among academics and elites.36 Freudian psychology and psychology in general became more and more widely accepted during subsequent years. As the discipline became allied less with philosophy and more with science, increased attention was focused upon psychology’s more practical applications.37 The use of psychological testing for military purposes by the Americans in 1917 had caused Canadian psychologists to become more “relevant” in the lives of ordinary citizens, according to Karl Bernhardt, an associate at the Institute of Child Study in Toronto. With the testing of the American army, reported Bernhardt, “Canadian psychologists were forced to broaden their horizons. Tests took them away from their soundproof rooms and their preoccupation with sensory analysis, into schools and clinics.”38 With the arrival of another world war, Canadian psychologists again had to assess their role in Canada’s efforts overseas and at home. Psychologist C. R. Myers pointed out that many Canadians were mindful of the fact that, while Canadians would be involved in the war from the beginning, their American counterparts would not. This was a particular problem since Canadian psychologists had been represented under the umbrella of the American Psychological Association. The action on the part of Canadian psychologists to form their own national organization in the late 1930s was a decisive move.

It was clear that there were many ways in which psychology and psychologists, if properly used, could make an important contribution to the nation’s war-effort. But it was also clear that this would only happen if there was a national body representative of Canada’s psychologists that could speak

Between 1945 and 1948, the Canadian Psychological Association had grown from approximately 158 members to 473. It had representatives in all provinces except Prince Edward Island and members in the United States, the United Kingdom, Holland, France, and Africa.

The effects of the two world wars, a movement towards a higher social profile and relevance, and the insistence on ties to scientific inquiry all influenced psychology’s relation to postwar parenting advice. As the discipline of psychology moved from the laboratory and “into the schools and clinics”, it received much more exposure to civilian problems and inevitably began to emerge in forms intended for popular consumption. In this complex process, Canadians were not just passive receptacles of a new trend in social thought. Bernhardt maintains, for example, that “even in the laboratory and the classroom the psychologist could no longer restrict his discussion to sensations, feelings and reaction times, for the student was demanding knowledge of how to get along with his room-mates and girl friends and how to manage difficult parents.”

The Canadian Youth Commission likewise reported in 1948 that more child psychologists were needed to help sort out young people’s problems. A representative of the Adult Education movement, adding her voice to the demand for psychological expertise, maintained “At the present time there is a growing body of parents who want to know and to use the knowledge and expertise of experts who have specialized in the scientific study of normal childhood development.”

Child psychologists were thus in a uniquely favourable position to influence discussions of human interaction in the postwar years. Recurring themes in the popular writing of the day revolved around the increasing complexity of modern life, the growing number of women working outside the home, the increasingly anonymous and impersonal nature of corporate

40 National Archives of Canada, Canadian Psychological Association Papers, MG28, I 161, vol. 5, file no. 7, Annual Meeting and Correspondence.
41 S. R. Laycock, “Parent Education is Adult Education”, Food for Thought, vol. 5, no. 3 (December 1944), pp. 3–7. Laycock insists that “it is necessary to point out that the science of child study has a vast array of data based not on the casual observation of untrained persons but on systematic observation and careful experimentation on thousands of cases” (p. 5).
44 Mary L. Doan, “Parents are Important”, Food for Thought, vol. 8 (December 1947), p. 34.
work, and the supposed crisis in masculinity that accompanied it. Social life in general and family life in particular were perceived to be in danger of disintegrating after the war, and the mentally and spiritually therapeutic expertise of psychologists seemed to offer some hope for redemption. In general, the period was one in which the “expert” was not only highly regarded, but sought out as a matter of course to advise on a variety of issues. Questions surrounding the “proper” stance to take in relation to young people — the next generation of Canadians — seemed to invite psychological answers. In one of his CBC radio addresses, Samuel Laycock, professor of educational psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, Director of the Division on Education and Mental Health of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, and a leading childcare expert, eloquently captured the promise that psychological thinking held out to postwar Canadians:

May I say, then that we don’t have to sit down in the face of crippled personalities and fold our hands in resignation and blame the Deity for our troubles. As we do a better job in the home and school we don’t have so many crippled personalities — the kind who create problems in family, community, national and international life.

According to the experts, attempting to “do a better job” meant that parents had to become familiar with psychological teachings and skilful at avoiding mental trauma in their children. Yet becoming a successful parent began with an even more rudimentary step: recognizing personal inadequacies and renouncing them. To achieve this, Laycock encouraged postwar parents to “let go” of their children. He counselled that:

This does not mean indifference to their children — far from it.... Rather it means providing the child with a secure home base in the shape of parents who are so truly fond of him that they desire his best interest rather than their own narrow satisfaction.

46 On the creation of social convention by experts in the United States during this period, see Beth Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 119, 121, 123, 126, 139; Owram, “Draft Manuscript — Babies”, p. 10.
48 University of Saskatchewan Archives, Samuel R. Laycock Papers, vol. 5, Publications, file A — Address and Publications, no. 22, Samuel Laycock, “Boys and Girls Need a Life of Their Own”, n.d. In most cases, the masculine gender, “he”, is used in reference to “child”.

The pressure on parents to strive for the proper balance between authority and nurturing did not apply only to direct contact with their children; it was a constant concern. Even when they were not acting in their capacity as parents, postwar adults were warned against producing unwanted psychological consequences in their children. A brief article in *Chatelaine* entitled “Mother and Daughter Act” testified to the degree of personal “monitoring” that parents, particularly mothers, were to do:

A youngster really suffers if her mother doesn’t measure up to other parents at birthday parties and school functions. But if her mother is well groomed a child glows with pride. She may not say it in actual words but you can read it in her face — “This is MY mother, the most beautiful person on the world.”

Playing on parents’ efforts to safeguard the psychological “health” of their children, this particular advice made an effective pitch for women to “keep up appearances”.

The postwar period witnessed a particularly virulent attack on the parenting skills of mothers. Written during the late 1940s and early 1950s, books such as Phillip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers*, eminent psychiatrist Dr. Edward Strecker’s *Their Mothers’ Sons*, and child psychologist Erik Erikson’s *Childhood and Society* blamed the “overprotective mother” for much of the ills of postwar society.50 Erikson, for example, berated the overbearing and pathological mother, suffering from what he dubbed “momism”, for transferring her ills upon her children: “‘Mom’ is a woman in whose life cycle remnants of infantility join advanced senility to crowd out the middle range of mature womanhood, which thus becomes self-absorbed and stagnant.”

In a variation on Erikson’s “momism”, prominent Canadian paediatrician Dr. Alton Goldbloom took postwar mothers to task for doing too little. Goldbloom scolded parents, in particular mothers, for refusing to make decisions on their own. In a difficult double-bind, Canadian mothers were told on one hand to depend on the experts, and on the other to exercise their skills independently. Reflecting on his practice in the 1950s, Goldbloom complained:

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50 While it is impossible to measure the real popularity of these books in Canada, evidence suggests that they were influential. Both *Generation of Vipers* and *Their Mother’s Sons* were reviewed in Canadian magazines and newspapers. In several of the articles cited in this paper, direct reference is often made to these books, both positively and negatively. Often the pop psychology jargon introduced by these books, such as the term “momism”, is used freely in magazine articles. For a useful critique of the thrust of these works and of the perception of women and mothers upon which they are based, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1978), pp. 211–269.
[M]other guidance has lost its vogue in this era of industrialization and the social liberation of women from the thraldom of the home. This is why the paediatrician is plagued by the incessant telephone calls over trivialities, why every article of clothing, every procedure, every choice that is of no consequence or importance, becomes a subject of decision for the overworked paediatrician.\(^52\)

Rather than attributing mothers’ indecision to the possible effects of too much psychologically influenced advice, Goldbloom assumed that lack of skill and initiative was to blame. Whether doing too much or too little, postwar mothers were often the scapegoats for negative effects on their children.

Mothers, it seemed, also had to control their tendency to “nag” children and to make them feel inferior. If children got into trouble, Canadian doctor W. W. Bauer warned, an insensitive mother might well be to blame:

> Suppose somebody you thought was the most wonderful person in the world — your mother — told you day in and day out that you were the naughtiest and the dirtiest and the most no ‘count brat she ever saw — and you began to believe it must be so. Would you be anxious to go home?\(^53\)

Even in her relationship with her husband, mothers were warned of the potential danger of lashing out in anger. Discontentment between parents, Canadian experts warned, was sure to harm the emotional well-being of children. In their manual for Canadian parents entitled *The Normal Child*, doctors Elizabeth Chant Robertson and Alan Brown reminded mothers:

> Although you may think you are concealing the differences that exist between yourself and your husband, your child can sense them in an almost uncanny way and they affect him unfavourably. The children of parents who are not congenial to each other develop far more behaviour difficulties than youngsters living with parents who are generally happy. The greater the disagreement between the parents, the more serious the children’s problem will be as a general rule.\(^54\)

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If mother tended to be the problem parent in the postwar years, father was often considered the correcting influence. Advice to fathers, however, did not include the accusatory (often misogynist) undertones that characterized so much of that directed at mothers. A common theme running through advice directed towards fathers was a plea to become more involved with their children. Parenting experts agreed that in addition to his role as primary disciplinarian, a good father was an entertaining playmate: “Boys and girls are pleased when Daddy plays a joke, or brings back a memento when he has been on a trip.... They like the favourite routine of hiding under the bedcovers at night while Daddy pretends to be looking for them.”

Experts tended to talk about the postwar father as a “new man” — one who was both approachable and sensitive, yet strong and dependable. Canadian children were to be made to feel comfortable in talking to their fathers about personal problems, and fathers were instructed to encourage this. In his report on the state of the French-Canadian family in the postwar period, Guy Rocher maintained that traditional sources of patriarchal authority over the family were quickly disappearing. Rocher noted that “the balance of power of the traditional family is destroyed ... a new definition of the father’s role and authority is therefore to be developed in order to meet a new situation.” While Rocher focused upon what the French-Canadian father seemed to be losing in the postwar years, most experts talked instead about what was to be gained in a rethinking of the father role. Fathers were still to be good models of masculinity, yet this masculinity was to be balanced with a healthy dose of sensitivity:

Fathers must remember that young children, boys and girls, often feel that only women cry and feel sad, only women or “sissies” are fearful and timid. Therefore, you will find little boys who think that, even if they don’t show sadness or fright, they are disappointing Daddy by feeling that way inside — they are cowards ... a child needs to hear the words, “I understand; I know how you feel.”

Mothers were warned against undermining this sensitively masculine model of fatherhood. Most women were expected to be at home most of the day, tending to housework and looking after the children. Despite the fact

56 Frank and Frank, How to Help Your Child in School, p. 93; Baruch Silverman and Herbert R. Matthews, “A Happy Home is Most Important to the Pre-School Child”, Canadian Home and School, vol. 10, no. 2 (November 1950), pp. 4, 5, 32.
57 Rocher, “Le Père”.
58 Frank and Frank, How to Help Your Child in School, p. 122.
that they were expected to spend the greatest amount of time actively looking after their offspring, experts pointed out that mothers might complicate or sabotage the relationship built up between fathers and children. This was especially true when the problem of discipline entered the fray. Dr. Laycock warned parents not to threaten children with psychologically damaging punishments, such as refusing to love them. He singled out mothers and told them not to “use a father as a threat held over the child”. A mother who engaged in this type of threatening behaviour, in Laycock’s opinion, “destroys the father’s relationship with his children and makes him a sort of tyrant”.  

Parenting advice then, like all aspects of postwar society, was shaped by and reflected gendered thinking. While husbands and wives were told that the postwar period had ushered in a new democratic attitude towards marriage and family, the roles of “mother” and “father” were very much subject to the dictates of gender. The potentially devastating effects on Canadian children of independent women who acted outside their roles as mothers and wives were noted by many writers. Child psychologists also contributed to the social construction of gender through their teachings about what it meant to be a good mother and a good father. The most dangerous effect of parents, particularly mothers, who failed to act as proper gender models for their children was the spectre of homosexuality. In “How Parents Hinder Adolescents’ Adjustments to the Opposite Sex”, Laycock warned that bad parenting caused homosexuality. A bad parent, among various other things, was one who acted outside accepted gender roles and upset the traditional power balances:

The first pattern of masculinity for either a boy or a girl is the father. Likewise the first pattern of femininity is the mother. Deep-seated ideas and attitudes as to the role of men and women are laid down in the child’s early life. If the mother is the dominating partner in the home and the father is merely a pay-check or a meek and willing servant, that is the pattern which a child has deeply engrained in him.

Maintaining traditional gender roles, girls learning to emulate their mothers and boys their fathers, was important if serious personality disorders were to be prevented. Parenting experts added their own mental health imperative to the maintenance of separate gender roles for men and women. The possi-

bility of causing homosexual tendencies in children was the price that parents might pay for doing otherwise:

If the mother wanted a girl when a boy arrived the situation may be even more tragic ... she encourages him in feminine manners and interests. Such a boy is likely to remain dependent on his mother with an infantile type of affection.... Such boys find it difficult when they reach adolescence to accept the male role in our society. Some of them never do accept it.62

Parents were not the only ones encouraged to adopt the mantle of psychological thinking in the postwar period, however. Representatives of public institutions, like school teachers and public health officials, were also encouraged to do the same.63 The fact that these public workers were exposed to psychology as a means of performing their duties more successfully testifies to the discipline’s increasing visibility and profile in the postwar years. Karl Bernhardt pointed to the initial success, decades earlier, of the mental hygiene movement and the dedication of its leader, Dr. C. M. Hincks, for the subsequent influence of child psychology in the postwar years in Canada.64 Based on this influence, he concluded that “the world became the psychologist’s laboratory ... and made child psychology a topic for the living room. It created a new category of public servant — the psychologist in the school, the social agency, the shop and the clinic.”65

The particular shape of psychology’s influence on these public institutions suggests a number of significant things about postwar Canada and the family’s place within it. To promote and safeguard happy, well-adjusted children, public workers, especially teachers, were advised to adopt and use psychological theories about human behaviour and development. The psychological mindset, in other words, was to be an influential one in the classroom and for the public health nurse:

Whenever a child presents difficulties in development, the teacher should ask herself “which of his basic psychological needs is the child attempting to satisfy by his behaviour?” ... If the school is not wise enough to provide him with socially-approved methods of meeting these needs, he will be forced to try anti-social ones.66

62 Ibid., pp. 35–39.
63 For a discussion of a similar process in the American context, see Robert Castel, Françoise Castel, and Anne Lovell (translated by A. Goldhammer), The Psychiatric Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
64 For more on the mental hygiene movement in Canada, see Theresa Richardson, Century of the Child: The Mental Hygiene Movement and Social Policy in the United States and Canada (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), especially chap. 5.
66 S. R. Laycock, “Do Our Schools Meet the Basic Needs of Children?”, The School, vol. 31, no. 10
While teachers were to integrate psychological thinking into their approach to students, they also became the targets of psychological scrutiny. If they had a problem child in their midst, teachers were to turn their psychological training inward, analysing their own mental dispositions for clues to the child’s behaviour. For his courses on educational psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, for example, Laycock developed his “Mental Hygiene Self-Rating Scale for Teachers”. Many of the questions on the rating scale clearly demonstrated the degree to which good, competent teachers were also those found to be psychologically “fit”:

I look upon a behaviour difficulty as being a symptom of some underlying maladjustment and I try to discover the cause and to remedy it? I think it is as important for me to give my pupils guidance in social and emotional development as to develop them in knowledge and skills? I am free from such characteristics as fussiness, fastidiousness, over-sensitiveness, being too-too efficient, gushing and coddling students.67

Teachers, like parents, were the targets of psychological theory and were often blamed for an unruly classroom or for unsuccessful students.68 Like mothers, female teachers were to receive the lion’s share of this advice and scrutiny.

Despite this psychological disciplining, teachers, along with public health officials, were presented to Canadian parents as “partners” in the training of healthy children. According to the experts, each shared equally in the considerable task of building psychologically balanced young Canadians.

In the old days when teachers merely taught “the three R’s” and a few facts in geography, history and literature, they could afford to ignore and even resent parents. That day is gone. To develop John and Mary as mentally healthy and wholesome citizens of our Canadian democracy is a joint job of the home and the school. Parents and teachers are partners — tied together like Siamese twins whether they like it or not.69

(June 1943), p. 6. In his promotion of the nursery school system, Blatz bases a great deal of its importance on its ability to look after the psychological needs of young children. See Blatz, Understanding the Young Child, p. 236.

67 S. R. Laycock, The Laycock Mental Hygiene Self-Rating Scale for Teachers (Saskatchewan: University of Saskatchewan Bookstore, n.d.), p. 3–4. The scale contains 45 questions in which student teachers are to rate their responses to the statements along a scale from complete disagreement to complete agreement.

68 Laycock, in particular, stressed the importance of a well-adjusted teacher in his writing. He warned against the “dithery teacher who has a dithery classroom, the tense teacher a tense one and the domineering teacher a resentful or cowed one”. Laycock, “Education and the Home”, The United Church Observer, August 1, 1946, p. 10; “Must Parents and Teachers Disagree?”, Canadian Home and School, vol. 8, no. 1 (November 1948), pp. 1–4; “Do Our Schools Meet the Basic Needs of Children?”, and “Discipline and Supervision: How Much Freedom?”

Florence Emory stressed the need for psychological training in her 1953 manual for public health nurses, who were to work with teachers and parents to create a healthy “mental and emotional environment.” Parents were advised to co-operate with these outsiders in the interest of their children. They were to help teachers and health officials “weed out” any problem children who might surface at school. In an article entitled “Is Your Child a Problem?”, written in 1945 by journalist Marjorie Winspear, parents were taken through the process by which their child could be referred to a psychologist or a psychiatrist for counselling by the public health nurse:

Instead of being indignant and refusing to admit that Tommy can do wrong ... the wise parent will take the nurse into their confidence. They will assume the nurse is interested in the erring child and together they will plan the rehabilitation of Tommy.... The nurse will report what she sees about the home — attitudes of parents, family history, overcrowded or unsanitary conditions. Then she will make an appointment for the child to see a psychologist.71

As this scenario demonstrates, public health workers had the real potential to undermine parental authority in childrearing. In so doing, they made well-adjusted children a matter of public concern rather than a private, familial concern. In Foucault’s terms, this “universal reign of the normative” achieved by psychologists legitimized and made possible considerable intervention and surveillance on the part of experts.

In the postwar period, both mothers and fathers were under pressure to develop certain kinds of parenting skills which incorporated the psychological theories of leading childcare experts of the day. According to Dr. Laycock, the authority of childcare specialists should be taken very seriously. In his presidential address to the Canadian Federation of Home and School in October of 1946, Laycock stated:

We have learned that it is better for children to be born under the care of a trained obstetrician, who, being usually a man, has never had a baby himself, rather than have the services of a midwife be she the mother of twenty children. We have not, however, learned that the person who gives his or her life to a study of research in child development and to the clinical study of hundreds of every kind of child should know more about the problems of child

development than the so-called “expert” who has had experience with two or three children.\textsuperscript{72}

Laycock’s comments underscored the premium increasingly placed upon the opinions of childcare specialists rather than the experiential knowledge of untrained parents. The cost of not listening, warned the experts, was not only an unhappy home life, but possibly a threat to the mental and emotional well-being of one’s children.

With the adoption of these more intricate psychological theories, parents were under considerable pressure to avoid harming their children in all sorts of unseen ways. Parents were encouraged, for example, to give their children “a sort of ‘psychological tanning’ which will protect them against being injured by day-to-day experiences just as the tanning of their skin in the summer protects them against the rays of the sun”.\textsuperscript{73} The business of giving Canadian children this necessary “psychological tanning” demanded that parents become amateur psychologists. Between establishing too many rules or too few, being too overbearing or too aloof, parents had to find the perfect balance in their approach to raising their children.\textsuperscript{74}

The pressure on parents to keep up to date with the new theories prompted one child psychologist, Dr. Timothy Williams, to pen an article entitled “Don’t Let the Child Care Experts Scare You” in 1955. In it, Williams tried to calm and reassure overburdened parents:

\begin{quote}
You don’t need to be right all the time. Your child wants a man for a father, not a formula. He wants a woman for a mother, not a theory. He wants real parents, real people, capable of making mistakes without moping about it. You’re not going to do any harm as long as you do your best.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

As Williams suggests, parents seemed to be in danger of becoming immobilized by the weight of expert opinion on how to raise their children properly. Enforcing rules and behaviour was a delicate matter that involved, the experts agreed, sensitivity and understanding on the part of parents. Punishment deemed overly harsh was thought to pose a very real threat to a child’s psychological state. On the other hand, punishment that was not well thought out or too sporadic could be equally dangerous. That postwar parents consequently felt confused seemed understandable. One commentator lamented that, while in the past “parents didn’t worry too much about

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} S. R. Laycock, “Building for Children”, \textit{Canadian Home and School}, vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1946), p. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{73} S. R. Laycock, “Learning to Live”, \textit{Maclean’s Magazine} (February 1, 1947), p. 18.
\item \textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{75} T. Williams, “Don’t Let the Child Care Experts Scare You!”, \textit{Maclean’s Magazine}, vol. 68 (May 15, 1955), p. 20.
\end{itemize}
rearing a family”, those days were long gone. With the birth of child psychology, “Parents discovered they had been making terrible mistakes — mistakes which could transform their sons and daughters into problem children, social misfits, juvenile delinquents and even potential schizophrenics.”76 The exasperation of one such postwar father, trying to adhere to the new emphasis in childrearing, is unmistakable:

It’s all very well to say, when a child squirms, rubs food in her hair, kicks you rhythmically on the shin under the table and spills milk down your leg, that this is typical behaviour for a six-year-old.... In the old days her father would have kicked her back. That’s what you feel like doing, but instead you’ll try gritting your teeth and repeating to yourself: “This is typically behaviour for a six-year-old.... She’s developing her little motor mechanism.”77

Canadians were thus encouraged in the postwar period to incorporate the teachings of child psychologists into their parenting. Child psychologists such as William Blatz, Samuel Laycock, and Karl Bernhardt taught parents much more than the proper physical care of babies and toddlers. They sought to shape and reshape beliefs and attitudes towards the child’s place in the family and towards the parent’s role in determining that place. Parents, in particular mothers, were closely scrutinized by the experts and were warned against acting outside their traditional roles. If they became outspoken or “domineering”, mothers could produce homosexual children.

From the patriarchal attitudes evident in the opinions of members of Parliament to the often negative treatment of mothers in other more popular forms of advice, gender constraints contributed to the social construction of good parenting after the war. Fathers in this period were portrayed as a potent corrective to the ills that had supposedly befallen the family in the postwar years. This advice also tended to be directed at a generic Canadian family, inevitably white, Anglo-Saxon, and middle-class, and therefore made no attempt to recognize familial differences along racial, cultural, ethnic, or class lines.

Psychologically informed advice to parents intersected and at times merged with that being promoted in the classroom and the public health department. By adopting a psychological stance, outside experts could insinuate themselves into the family. The “problem” child and the “problem” family became part of a public discourse fostered by postwar psychologists and circulated in newspapers, magazines, and manuals, through schools and municipal governmental agencies. While it was aimed at ensur-


ing and promoting happy and well-adjusted Canadian children, parenting advice in this period did much more. Influenced by psychological theories, parenting advice carried on a complex negotiation with postwar society. It sought, for better or worse, to influence Canadians’ vision of the future and their role in creating it.