Handmade to Ready-made:
A Shift in Canadian Women's Sewing and Consumer Education (1950-1975)

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Abstract

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When did sewing become a niche hobby in Canada? How did the practice of sewing go from a common skill to all but disappearing in the average Canadian home? This thesis seeks to explore the shift from handmaking clothing to buying primarily ready-made fashion in Canada from 1950-1975. This project will address these questions through an examination of sewing and consumer education in different versions of the Ontario Home Economics curriculum, and Canadian consumer consciousness through advice from *Chatelaine*, a popular Canadian women's magazine. Discourses around quality both in terms of consuming and in terms of appearance and character help understand changes in attitudes towards sewing and purchasing clothing. This project examines the strong gendered norms and stereotypes associated with Home Economics, sewing, and reading *Chatelaine*. The impact of the women's movement and the 1970 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* will be studied in terms of their effect on sewing, consumer education, and the breakdown of Home Economics as a field. This thesis situates the decline of sewing skills in the context of weakening of Home Economics education, the increase of mass consumption in Canada and a decline in overall quality in clothing. This project reveals the consumer advice from the 1950-1975, centred around consuming slowly and thoughtfully, has modern relevance in the context of fast fashion and climate change.

Dedication

For my grandmothers
Irene Hancock (1927-2012) and Eileen Bateman (1917-1996)

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Introduction

Both my grandmothers were expert sewists. They made beautiful, high-quality clothing for themselves and their families. My own mother, while managing a busy career, still occasionally used the sewing machine stored in the basement. I fondly recall some fabulous *Little Mermaid* drapes she made for my childhood room. I grew up around many handmade items yet I, however, do not know how to sew. I took one sewing class as an elective in grade 9, and I loved it. Despite a desire to continue with sewing for the rest of high school, for the next three years, the sewing course conflicted with the mandatory courses of the academic stream I chose. I have yet to make the time to learn on my own. Within three generations, the skill of sewing in my family has all but disappeared. Anecdotal discussions with my peers suggest that my family is not unique. Rather, the loss of sewing knowledge has played out in families across Canada.

Despite not knowing how to sew, I have a deep interest in the clothing I wear. When making additions to my wardrobe, I take into considerations both the environmental impact of clothing production and the exploitative labour conditions present in much of the clothing industry.[1] I value wearing hand-me-downs from my family and thrifting/mending clothing when I can. Learning to sew would improve my ability to maintain an eco-friendly and labour-conscious closet.

The idea for this project took shape during an undergraduate seminar with Dr. Beatrice Craig titled "Consumer Revolutions in Canada?" The seminar introduced me to the field of consumer history. Examining what people valued and the choices they made in consuming

[1] Meredith Katz "The Sweatshop Effect: Consumer Activism and the Anti-Sweatshop Movement on College Campuses," in *Shopping for Change Change : Consumer Activism and the Possibilities of Purchasing Power*, edited by Louis Hyman and Joseph Tohill (Cornell: ILR Press, 2017). See Melike Bildirici, Irmak Türkkahraman, and Özgür Ömer Ersin "Unraveling the Environmental Impacts of the Fashion Industry: A Fourier-Based Analysis of Pollution Dynamics and Causality Across Five Countries," *Sustainability* volume 17, no. 1, 2025.

fascinated me and encouraged me to think more critically about the things I consume in my daily life. For the seminar, I read a paper by historian Joy Parr, who found that Canadian housewives in the 1950s furnished their homes slowly. Parr unearthed and analyzed a consumer pattern that valued the acquisition of well-made furniture that would last over the quick purchasing of trendy but short-lived pieces.[2] I wondered if these slow and conscious consumer patterns Parr observed in the context of home furnishings also applied to clothing consumption. If so, how did home-sewing impact this consumption?

This thesis began with asking: why is sewing no longer a common skill? When and why did this change occur? How did a decrease in sewing practices change consumer habits in relation to buying clothing? What began with questions about sewing and the consumption of clothing expanded into questions about Home Economics education more broadly, as Home Economics educators taught their students sewing skills, budgeting, and consumer practices. I decided to begin my inquiry in post-World War II (WWII) Canada in the 1950s, hoping to continue and expand Parr's line of research, but most importantly, challenge assumptions about Canadian consumer culture during the post-war economic period. The time period of my inquiry led to further questions about the prevalence and role that gender norms played in shaping the trends I was observing. For instance, how did women's increased workforce participation rate post WWII impact the making of garments at home? Did working outside of the home contribute to a decline in sewing knowledge? Could looking back towards older consumer practices in relation to sewing and buying clothing provide solutions to environmental and ethical concerns with clothing consumption in 2026?

"From Handmade to Ready-Made" thus studies the place and role of sewing in Canadian education and consumer culture from 1950 until 1975. My study shows that there

[2] Joy Parr, "Household Choices as Politics and Pleasure in 1950s Canada," *International labor and working class history* 55, no. 55 (1999).

was a decline in sewing education and knowledge over this period. I argue that multiple factors pertaining to Home Economics pedagogy, commercial and social contexts and imperatives, gender norms and second wave feminism all contributed to, and explain, this decline. The exploration of discourses around sewing and consumer habits are, in geographical scope, both national and provincial. Indeed, the women's magazine *Chatelaine* reached a national—English speaking—readership, and so did the *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, the publication of Canadian Home Economics Association. Both of these sources are central to my research. I further deepened my study of sewing and consumer education by analyzing Ontario Home Economics Curricula, which were revised three times over my period of study. Doing so, "From Handmade to Ready-Made" draws from and intervenes in three interrelated fields of history: Canadian consumer history, the history of Home Economics in Canada—a barely existing field of research—and the history of Canada's women's movements and gendered norms.

Historiographical review

Canadian Consumer History

History of consumption is a fairly recent field of study in the discipline of history. It emerged in the 1980s, and we can trace the first historical studies of Canadian consumption to the late 1990s and early 2000s. Noteworthy in the field of Canadian consumer history are the work of Douglas McCalla and Beatrice Craig, who both worked on late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Canadian settlers' consumerism. Both showed that Canadian households were integrated into a consumer society well before the turn of the twentieth century, arguing against the narrative of an abrupt transition from producers to consumers in twentieth-century Canada. In his book *Consumers in the Bush,* McCalla debunked the image of the self-sufficient Robinson Crusoe type Canadian family. Instead, he convincingly demonstrated that early

settlers in Upper Canada were connected to global supply chains.[3] Household production coexisted with global markets and goods. Craig added nuance to the argument against an abrupt transition from production to consumption in *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists*, through an exploration of a relatively remote New Brunswick community in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Craig documented how this community both produced homespun goods and participated in the Atlantic economy, selling and purchasing American, British and other global goods in a capitalist and consumer society.[4]

Another significant voice in the field of Canadian Consumer history is Bettina Liverant. In her 2018 book *Buying Happiness*, Liverant traces the emergence of consumer consciousness in Canada, which she argues emerged in the 1890s, and by the 1960s, the idea that Canada was a consumer society was widely accepted by Canadians.[5] Liverant's focus was to historicize the idea of a consumer society, not just the buying of things, but the ways in which each new generation thought about consumer experiences and practices, including the ways in which consumers' lived experience can impact attitudes towards consuming.

The Great Depression and World War II also provided rich terrain for the research of consumption in Canadian history. In his book *Food Will Win the War*, Ian Mosby explains that coming out of the Depression and into WWII, "abundance and choice were by no means the dominant characteristics of Canadians' consumption practices."[6] Needs over wants defined Canadian consumer habits before and during WWII. Bettina Liverant explains that during WWII Canadian policy makers used purchasing-power to manage the economy rather than encourage growth, viewing the purchasing power of consumers "as something to be controlled

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[3] Douglas McCalla, *Consumers in the Bush : Shopping in Rural Upper Canada.* 1st ed. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 153.
[4] Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists : The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada*, (University of Toronto Press, 2009).
[5] Bettina Liverant, *Buying Happiness. The Emergence of Consumer Consciousness in English Canada*, (University of British Columbia Press, 2018), 3.
[6] Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War : The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front*, (UBC Press, 2014), 12.

and directed rather than encouraged."[7] The policies relied on strong gendered assumptions, viewing Canadian housewives as the nation's main consumers. Liverant explains that Canadian housewives were "recruited as partners in the war effort, exhorted to demonstrate their patriotism by monitoring prices, limiting spending, shopping wisely, and directing every extra dollar towards Victory Bonds and war stamps."[8] During WWII, the message from the Canadian government "equated good citizenship with responsible consumption."[9]

Historians have also started to explore the long-lasting effects the Great Depression and WWII had on Canadian consumerism, particularly since Canada, contrary to popular belief, did not experience the same rapid rise of mass consumption as in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.[10] There were similarities between the wartime experiences in Canada and the United States during WWII. For instance, both countries promoted citizenship and duty through consumption.[11] However, after the war, Canada had a slower experience with consumerism, rather than following the United States with rapid mass consumption. Liverant notes that there has been a tendency among academics to view all of North America as following the same trajectory post-WWII.[12] Canadian post-war consumerism is distinct as an "era of cautious consumerism."[13] Joy Parr's study of Canadian consumerism in the two decades following WWII, *Domestic Goods* (1999), shows a slow process in which consumer decisions were made in combination with the political, moral, and household economies. Domestic spending was encouraged in the United States as a leisurely pursuit in a way that was yet to be seen in Canada.

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[7] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 132.
[8] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 132.
[9] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 132.
[10] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 11; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic : The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. 1st ed. (Knopf, 2003), 27.
[11] Cohen, *A Consumer's* Republic, 19.
[12] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 212.
[13] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 132.

For Canadian women in the 40s and 50s, Parr argued, "domestic consumption was more about labour than leisure."[14]

This thesis intervenes in the historiography of twentieth-century Canadian consumerism in several ways. First, it builds on the work of McCalla and Craig by challenging the persistent assumption that Canadian households underwent an abrupt shift from being sites of production to sites of consumption at the turn of the twentieth century. Instead, it demonstrates the continuity and coexistence of production and consumption within the household, particularly in the context of home sewing. Second, it extends scholarship on the 1930s and 1940s by tracing how discourses of responsible consumption and citizenship lingered and remained influential well into post-war Canada. While historians like Parr and Liverant have begun to map these discourses in earlier decades, their influence on clothing production and consumption after 1945 remains largely unexplored. In my thesis, I argue that cautious consumerism discourses remained impactful and continued to shape consumers' habits and practices regarding textiles and clothing in the 1950s and 1960s, before declining in influence in the 1970s.

Home Economics

The belief that the Canadian household as a site of production was disappearing to simply become a site of consumption—an apprehension that historians have been debunking—contributed, in the late nineteenth-century, to the emergence of Home Economics. The term "Home Economics" was first agreed upon in 1899 at the inaugural Lake Placid conference, which was organized by the founders of the American Home Economics Association.[15] Donica Belisle argues that in both Canada and the United States, "domestic science" was renamed to

[14] Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods : The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, (University of Toronto Press, 1999), 6.
[15] Edith Child Rowles, *Home Economics in Canada- The Early History of Six College Programs: Prologue to Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1964), 3.

Home Economics "due to the extent to which consumer issues preoccupied those who were developing and administering the programs."[16] Consumer issues were at the forefront of Home Economics from the beginning. Edith Child Rowles (1905-1997), a former professor of Home Economics at the University of Saskatchewan, wrote in 1964 that near the end of the nineteenth century, homemakers in Canada required more specialized skills to manage all household needs. Rowles stated that societal changes "made it impossible for a girl while growing up, to learn all this from her mother and from the other members of her family."[17] The emergence of consumer consciousness along with rapid social and technological changes all played a part in establishing Home Economics as a field. As consumer consciousness in Canada was growing, so was the belief that women and girls needed to be educated about both making and consuming. "Domestic Science" was first introduced in Ontario public schools in 1897.[18]

The historiography of Home Economics is almost entirely limited to the American context. An edited volume, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, from 1997 is the most complete and nuanced account I could find. The volume is full of fascinating chapters about the diverse history of American Home Economics, exploring the intersection of gender and professionalism, the history of women in higher education, the impact of Home Economics on public health, consumer education and more.[19] As this volume approaches thirty years old, it also demonstrates the lack of follow-up and how much remains left to explore in the history of Home Economics, particularly in the Canadian context. The evolution of Home Economics education in Canada has yet to be examined. A study on the Ontario curriculum reform to the include of women in textbooks is the exception. This article,

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[16] Donica Belisle, *Purchasing Power : Women and the Rise of Canadian Consumer Culture*, (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 73.
[17] Rowles, *Home Economics in Canada*, 93.
[18] Rowles, *Home Economics in Canada,* 4.
[19] Sarah Stage and Virginia B Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession.* (Cornell University Press, 1997).

however, centred around the entire Ontario curriculum, and not on Home Economics specifically.[20]

This thesis focuses on Home Economics classes because it was one of the main avenues through which Canadians learned how to be consumers and how to sew. This project thus begins the overdue exploration of the history of Canadian Home Economics by studying largely unexplored sources, which will be discussed shortly. Building on Liverant's conception of "consumer consciousness," I argue that the rise of Home Economics education in Ontario shaped Canadian's relationship to making and buying clothes.

Canadian Women's Movement

This project also draws on—and contributes to—the historiography of women's movements and second-wave feminism in Canada.[21] It builds particularly on the work of Joan Sangster, whose scholarship on working women has emphasized the need to move beyond rigid periodization of feminist history.[22] Sangster argues that feminism is better understood as "flowing in in streams, rather than cresting in congealed troughs and waves," allowing historians to "better trace more diverse currents and equality-seeking efforts, as they ebb and flow…"[23] This framework underscores the importance of recognizing that the women's movement was not a monolith, but instead comprised women from diverse socioeconomic, regional, and ethnic backgrounds. In this thesis, the term "second-wave" operates therefore

[20] Rose Fine-Meyer and Kristina Llewellyn, "Women Rarely Worthy of Study: A History of Curriculum Reform in Ontario Education," *Historical Studies in Education* 30, no. 1 (2018): 54. https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v30i1.4541.
[21] Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History*, (AU Press, 2011). See, Sharon A Cook, Lorna R McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, F*raming Our Past : Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). See, Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson, *Reading Canadian Women's and Gender History*, (University of Toronto Press, 2019). See, Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek*, Feminist History in Canada*, (Canada: UBC Press, 2013).
[22] See: Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect : The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).
[23] Joan Sangster, "Never Done: Feminists Reinterpret Their Own History," in *Reading Canadian Women's and Gender History, e*dited by Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson, (University of Toronto Press, 2019), 218.

primarily as a time marker, denoting the women's movements and feminist activism from the 1960s-1980s in Canada, rather than as a unified or homogeneous movement.

This thesis also situates itself within a distinctly Canadian context of feminist history, challenging the tendency to frame second-wave feminism as an American import, notably by focusing on *Chatelaine*. As a leading English-language Canadian women's magazine covering topics from food, style, home décor, health, and relationships, *Chatelaine* was also a key site of feminist discourse in mid-twentieth-century Canada. Founded in 1928, the magazine reached unprecedented influence under Doris Anderson's editorship (1957–1977), with circulation increasing from 480,000 when Anderson took over, to 1.8 million by the late 1960s.[24] Anderson' recollection of receiving an advance copy of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963, a book often credited with launching second-wave feminism—is instructive here: Anderson and *Chatelaine*'s editorial team decided against reviewing Friedan's book, as they noted *Chatelaine* had covered most of its content already, and they thought it was overly American.[25] Historian Valerie Korinek's *Roughing It in the Suburbs* (2000) demonstrates how *Chatelaine* was able to push the boundaries in terms of the content found in a women's magazine in the 1950s and 1960s. *Chatelaine* featured many feminist articles touching on topics like pay equity, birth control, and women in politics. Korinek argues that *Chatelaine*'s ability to present such subversive topics was rooted in its clever packaging of feminist critiques within the familiar landscape of fashion, beauty, and advertisements.

This thesis extends and revises Korinek's analysis by shifting the focus on the very topics—fashion, sewing and consumer advice—that Korinek kept in the margins of her own work. It argues that these sections were not just neutral or apolitical content, but actually played an important role in shaping how women thought about both feminism and consumption.

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[24] Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs : Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 33; and "Doris Anderson," https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/doris-hilda-anderson, accessed January 20, 2025.
[25] Doris Anderson, *Rebel Daughter : An Autobiography,* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1996), 174.

While *Chatelaine* clearly promoted feminist ideas, it also helped shape expectations around shopping, household practices, and everyday life. Through its advice columns, editorials, and features, the magazine sometimes challenged gender norms, but at other times reinforced them. In doing so, it encouraged women to think about consumption in relation to ideas of responsibility, citizenship, and modern womanhood. *Chatelaine* was not only a space for feminist discussion, but also an important influence on how women engaged with consumer culture in their daily lives.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the historiography of second-wave feminism by offering a new perspective on the impact of the 1970 report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW). Although historians have focused on its role in promoting gender equality and public opinion on the report, less attention has been given to its unintended effects.[26] This project connects the RCSW's recommendations on education to the uneven results of coeducational reforms, especially the limited success of encouraging boys to take Family Studies/Home Economics courses. It argues that these reforms contributed to a decline in sewing education in Ontario schools, showing how feminist reforms could have mixed and sometimes unexpected consequences for everyday skills and domestic practices.

Methodology and Sources

My thesis revolves around three main corpuses of primary sources: the *Chatelaine* magazine, the *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, and the Ontario Home Economics

[26] See Barbara Freeman, "Too Little… Too Late: The Coverage of the Commission's Report, 1970," in *The Satellite Sex : The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001). See Kimberly Spears, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada 1967-1970: Liberal Feminism and Its Radical Implications." In *Framing Our Past : Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Sharon A. Cook, Lorna R. McLean, and Kate O'Rourke (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). See Joan Sangster, "Words of Experience/Experiencing Words: Reading Working Women's Letters to Canada's Royal Commission on the Status of Women," In *Through Feminist Eyes* (Athabasca University Press, 2014).

curricula. Additional primary sources include former *Chatelaine* editor Doris Anderson's memoir, the 1970 Report from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, and other writings of home economists who were active in the field during my period of study.

Chatelaine

I chose *Chatelaine* to examine fashion and sewing advice, clothing advertisements and advertisements related to sewing, hoping to trace some changes from the 1950s through the 1970s. As the only national Canadian women's magazine in the 1960s, *Chatelaine* attained a market saturation, with a nation-wide reach. According to a 1968 study conducted by the Canadian Media Directors Council, *Chatelaine* was reaching 51% of the total female population of Canada, and its readers "hailed from all regions of the country, included both men and women, and represented all major socioeconomic groups."[27] The widespread, cross-country readership of *Chatelaine* speaks to its value as a source to understand prevalent discourses within English-speaking Canada. Although the advice and opinions presented in the magazine cannot be taken as universal, the reach of the magazine provides a window into generalized feelings, attitudes and values shared by Canadian women, the kind of advertisements targeted at them, and the ways in which *Chatelaine* helped to promote and shape certain Canadian consumer practices.

To get a sense of the changes in fashion, sewing, and consuming advice from 1950-1975, I built a sample of *Chatelaine* issues that comprised all the issues of a year, every five years. In other words, I gathered all twelve issues from 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975, for a total of 72 issues. I originally hoped to go up to 1980, but the microfilm at the University of Ottawa library stopped at 1978. I scanned all 72 issues, and created a PDF document for each issue with the ability to keyword-search (OCR—optical character recognition). The digitized versions of *Chatelaine* are now available through ProQuest (a

[27] Korinek, *Roughing it in the* Suburbs, 66.

collection which the University of Ottawa did not have access to when I started this project), but the exercise of consulting the microfilmed versions and recreating each issue in PDF proved to be very useful: I was able to scroll through the pages in order, as if reading the magazine. The digitized version on ProQuest is all fractionalized in each individual article and advertisement, making it impractical and quasi-impossible to peruse each issue as a whole. The ProQuest digital versions proved helpful later on in this project as a supplement to the microfilm, for consulting specific pages when my scans were of dubious quality, or to see some pages and advertisements in colour.

Canadian Home Economics Journal

To examine how the teaching of sewing skills changed, I looked for sources about Home Economics in Canada, and the *Canadian Home Economics Journal* was one of the first I found. The journal was prepared by and circulated for the Canadian Home Economics Association, which was founded in 1939 with the aim to "promote the welfare of the Canadian home and to serve the community life of Canada."[28] The journal was started in 1950 and ran until 2003. A former editor of the journal in the 1950s described it as the voice of the professional organization through which Canadian home economists could speak about their professional, personal, and organizational pursuits. The journal was important in solidifying the Canadian Home Economics Association as a national organization, connecting members all across Canada.[29] The journal presented articles and book reviews related to the field of Home Economics, and showcased the achievements of notable home economists. Debates regarding the role of Home Economics and how the field should adapt to a changing society recurrently featured in the journal.

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[28] Edith Rowles, "Message from the President," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 1, no. 1, 1950, 2.
[29] Norma Bannerman, Shirley Rebus, and Arlene Smith, *We Are Tomorrow's Past : History of the Canadian Home Economics* Association, (Canadian Home Economics Association, 1989), 22.

The *Canadian Home Economics Journal* was available at Library and Archives Canada. I took photos of the quarterly issues from 1950 to 1975, for a total of 60 issues. I mainly focused on analyzing individual articles about Home Economics as a field, its teaching, clothing, and consumer issues. It was not until the 1980s that the *Canadian Home Economics Journal* achieved recognition as a scholarly peer-reviewed journal.[30] The issues I examined revealed the challenges home economists faced during my period of study, and problems that were important to them. This source provided a window into the profession of Home Economics, and its leaders in Canada. The journal has so far been unexplored by historians. Both the journal and the impact of the Canadian Home Economics Association are areas worthy of further academic inquiry beyond this thesis.

Ontario Home Economics Curricula

To further examine the educational practices around sewing and clothing consumption, I went to the Archives of Ontario at York University to look through the Ontario Family Studies/Home Economic Educators Association fonds. The Ontario Home Economics curricula proved to be the most useful documents from the visit. The curriculum was revised three times over my period of study, in 1951, 1964, and 1974, with the final revision also renaming the program to "Family Studies." I decided to closely examine the curricula for the intermediate division (grade 7 to 10), as I was interested in exploring the skills that were taught to the wideset range of students. The senior division curricula (grade 11 and 12) during this period, especially in the 1950s, were largely vocational, and specialized for students pursuing sewing careers, rather than targeted at all students. I went through all three iterations of the intermediate division curricula, closely comparing the sections related to sewing, clothing, and consumer studies.

[30] Bannerman, Rebus, and Smith, *We Are Tomorrow's Past,* 28.

The curricula presented guidelines for what would have been taught throughout Ontario schools, with key learning outcomes and recommendations for teachers. Each school and teacher could interpret the guidelines differently and each Home Economics class was undoubtably different in its own way. Still, how the curricula changed over time revealed how priorities changed, at the provincial level, when it came to sewing and consumer education.

Structure

This project is organized into four chapters that are both thematic and broadly chronological, tracing a shift away from sewing and toward increased consumption. It explores the decline of Home Economics, the rise of second-wave feminism, and the ways Home Economics education adapted to changing social and gender norms.

Chapter one addresses sewing, challenging the belief that sewing was just a hobby by the early twentieth century and that production had already moved entirely out of the home. By examining Ontario Home Economics curricula and *Chatelaine* magazine from the 1950s-1970s, I will show that sewing was still a common practice, while also showing that the importance and expectation of sewing proficiency was in decline over this period.

Chapter two centres around consumer education and how this was conveyed through Home Economics classes and *Chatelaine*. Home economics courses always featured units or sections on consumer education. However, the emphasis on consumer education increased over each curriculum revision. In the clothing sections of the curriculum, the importance about learning how to consume clothing properly increased at the same time as sewing education was decreasing. This chapter further argues that both *Chatelaine* and Home Economics curricula advocated for cautious and responsible consumer practices and connected them to engaged citizenship.

Chapter three examines discourses about quality both in terms of sewing and clothing consumption, and in terms of personal appearance and behaviour. I argue that these discourses contributed to the training and education of Canadians as discerning consumers, able to identify good quality, while also shaping Canadian consumers in their appearance and behaviour. This chapter also draws connections with current fast fashion consumer practices and a decline in overall quality in clothing.

Chapter four examines the gendered norms and stereotypes associated with Home Economics, sewing, and reading *Chatelaine*. By situating these within the context of the second-wave feminist movement in Canada, this chapter argues that persistent associations between sewing and traditional femininity contributed to the marginalization of Home Economics education. As a result, sewing was increasingly devalued, leading to a noticeable decline in both sewing education and home sewing practices after 1970.

Chapter 1

"If I Can Sew, You Can Sew": Sewing in Home Economics and *Chatelaine*

In 1996, Doris Anderson published her memoir, recounting her impressive career as the editor of *Chatelaine* for 20 years, a novelist, and a feminist activist. Throughout the memoir, the activity of sewing functions as a continuous thread, appearing and connecting the different eras of her life. First, Anderson recalls her mother's treadle sewing machine and how as a young child in the 1920s, she would fall asleep to the comforting sound of the machine as her mother made clothes for the family.[1] Anderson went on to explain how her mother's sewing became a necessity during the Great Depression, and how her mother made almost everything she wore growing up. Anderson details how all her clothes were reused and repurposed from hand-me-downs from other family members, "a worn-out shirt became rompers or a play dress for me, or patches for quilts."[2] She mentioned how her mother would purposely make clothing too big as to not be outgrown too quickly. In 1935, fourteen-year-old Doris argued so often with her mother about clothing that her mother gave her an allowance to dress herself rather than continue to fight. Anderson explained that "the allowance was sufficient only if my clothes continued to be sewn at home. I was a fair seamstress, but not nearly as expert as [my mother] was."[3] From early adolescence, Anderson made and mended her own clothing, a habit she carried into adulthood. When writing about her time at university, Anderson remembers continuing to make most of her own clothing in her spare time as a way to save money.[4] These savings later enabled her to move to Toronto to pursue her writing career. Reminiscing about her early days in Toronto, she wrote that she "always paid cash, abhorred debt, and still made many of my own clothes."[5] While complaining about the restrictive rules of some Toronto

[1] Doris Anderson, *Rebel Daughter : An Autobiography,* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1996), 19.
[2] Anderson, *Rebel Daughter*, 19.
[3] Anderson, *Rebel daughter*, 61.
[4] Anderson, *Rebel Daughter*, 72.
[5] Anderson, *Rebel Daughter*, 97.

landlords, Anderson gave the example that one potential landlord would not have let her use a second-hand sewing machine, as it would have been too noisy.[6] Anderson's story and the lasting habit of sewing her own clothing exemplifies her thriftiness and the enduring impact of her experience growing up during the Great Depression. Despite not having a career rooted in the skill of sewing, this activity was very much part of the fabric of her life, not only during times of economic hardship, but as a way to save money, and to consume wisely at all times. Anderson's experience would be entirely foreign to most Canadians in the twenty-first century, but when did this transition occur?

Why is making clothing no longer a commonplace pursuit in Canada? Some historians, like Dianne Dodd, have argued that by the 1920s, sewing had become a hobby in Canada and that gradually, the "task of sewing the families' clothes was transferred from home to industry."[7] This chapter seeks to challenge and add nuance to this account by establishing the prevalence of sewing practices up through the end of the 1970s. Doris Anderson's story complicates the picture drawn by Dodd, and shows that some Canadian families still relied on sewing clothing as a money-saver to dress themselves long after the 1920s. While some categorized sewing as a hobby, or as an obsolete activity as of the early twenty-first century, it persists as one of the most common associations with Home Economics as a discipline. Well into the 1950s and 60s, Home Economics curricula in Ontario considered sewing as an important skill. Sewing was neither the only aspect of Home Economics nor just a hobby. While Doris Anderson grew up in a household where sewing was commonplace, the importance put on passing the skill and knowledge of sewing has declined since her generation. I argue that over the 1950-1970s, the conception of sewing as a necessary and commonplace skill declined in importance and influence. This chapter explores this decline by tracing the shift away from

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[6] Anderson, *Rebel Daughter*, 93.
[7] Dianne Dodd, "Women and Domestic Technology: Household Drudgery, 'Democratized Consumption,' and Patriarchy," in Cook, Sharon A, Lorna R McLean, and Kate O'Rourke. *Framing Our Past : Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 102.

making and mending clothing in the Ontario Home Economics curricula of the 1950s-1970s. Analyzing discourses present in *Chatelaine* magazine, I observe that thriftiness—by which I mean ways consumers could be economical and prudent with limited funds and resources—as one way that sewing persisted. Many *Chatelaine* articles portray sewing as a means to save money while still enjoying new trends. Still, as time passed, *Chatelaine* writers and editors less and less assumed that their readers had making and mending abilities. In other words, while the discourse persisted, it reflected the understanding that these skills were no longer ubiquitous among its readership.

Sewing and Home Economics

Sewing occupies a highly contested place in the history of home economics. A common narrative throughout Home Economics literature holds that cooking and sewing are the two sole pillars on which the discipline rests. Not only does this story oversimplify the emergence of home economics, but it erases many of its components. Home Economics targeted a much wider range of skills than just sewing and cooking, from its onset. Still, 1960s experts in the field used this idea to show how far Home Economics had come since its early beginnings. In her 1964 book about the history of Home Economics programs in Canada, Edith Rowles indicated that early Home Economics programs focused on the teaching of cooking and sewing, stating that it "was a good beginning but it did not go far enough. An expert homemaker must not only be able to feed and clothe her family, she must be able to manage the family resources of time, money, and personnel."[8] Taking another example from the *Canadian Home Economics Journal* in 1960, an associate professor of Home Economics at the University of Manitoba argued that in 50 years, from 1910-1960, Home Economics grew from just cooking and sewing

[8] Edith Child Rowles, *Home Economics in Canada- The Early History of Six College Programs: Prologue to Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1964), 93.

skills into something more complex, with robust Home Economics faculties at many Canadian universities.[9] From my reading, it seems as though sewing and cooking were used as a sort of myth-like origin story for Home Economics, simplifying the story in order to demonstrate progress and modernity. Experts were reflecting back on the developments made in the field of Home Economics, by romanticizing and simplifying its beginnings.

The nuance that I aim to add to these contradictory accounts is that while sewing was indeed a foundational part of home economics, it always cohabited with the other parts of the curriculum: cooking, household management, and consumer education. Still, contrary to Dodd's assertion that it had become an obsolete hobby as of the 1920s, I will demonstrate that the emphasis on sewing peaked in the 1950s, well after some contemporaries argued that clothing production had moved outside the home. Despite the mid-century premise of Home Economics being all about teaching young women and girls how to manage a non-producing household in the modern world, learning to sew was still a major portion of the curriculum.

Sewing in Ontario Schools

Home Economics was developed during a time of rapid industrialization and social change. Learning how to properly manage all aspects of the home was the premise that underpinned the class.[10] Despite the availability of mass-produced clothing, sewing was present in early Home Economics education in Ontario. A 1923 sewing manual printed by "order of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario," provides a useful window into early sewing education in Ontario schools.[11] It focused on building skills of hand-sewing, operating the treadle sewing machine, pattern drafting, and garment construction. This early sewing manual encouraged

[9] Lillian B. Allen, "School of Home Economics- University of Manitoba," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 10, no.2, 1960, 3.
[10] Rowles, *Home Economics in Canada*, 1
[11] Manuals for Public and Separate Schools: Sewing 1923, F4435-7-0-1, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, front matter.

teachers to link sewing to other subjects, and find correlations with the other schoolwork. For example, connecting measurements and material cost to arithmetic, the history of sewing with developments in industrialization, and sewing subjects as possible interesting topics for English compositions.[12] This manual pre-dates my main time period of study, but it shows how sewing was incorporated into all aspects of learning, not just as its own course. The next three iterations of the Home Economics curriculum, did not continue with this holistic approach to sewing education.

In my review of the Ontario curricula, emphasis on sewing in the Home Economics curriculum peaked in the 1950s. The version from the 1960s still had many details about learning to sew, but the focus shifted towards textile education and learning about new kinds of synthetic fabric available on the market. By the 1970s, the aims for the clothing section of the curriculum became abstract, with a focus on the meaning of clothing, artistic expression, and conveying personality through clothing. There were no details about the hard skills of learning to make clothing in the curriculum outline.[13] Overall, the different versions of the sewing and clothing curriculum sections reveal priorities and how they shifted away from making, towards consuming. The curricula changed quite drastically over each iteration, revised by the Ontario Department of Education.

The 1951 Curriculum

Out of all the curricula I examined, the 1951 version had the most emphasis on sewing and provided ample detail about the best ways for students to develop the skill. The clothing

[12] Manuals for Public and Separate Schools: Sewing 1923, F4435-7-0-1, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 9.
[13] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Family Studies 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 5. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7).
Note that the name of the course changed to Family Studies in 1974, when discussing this curriculum, “Home Economics” is used in this chapter.

and textile sections were supposed to take up about a third of total class time. The guideline suggested to start with simple sewing projects, such as learning to sew cotton garments both by hand and by machine, and then introduced more advanced projects as the course went on. The guideline stated that "simple garments or household articles which are in vogue and which meet the needs and abilities of the pupils should be chosen,"[14] prioritizing projects that were both in style and practical to students. The learning objective was for students to realize how useful the skill of sewing could be in their daily lives. As students moved through the course, the difficulty level of the sewing projects rose. For grade 9 and 10 students, projects included garments for personal use like wool skirts, dresses, cotton blouses, dresses and shorts. Accessories like aprons belts and collars were also offered as project options.[15] By the end of grade 10, the expectation was that students had substantially developed their sewing skills through practical projects, which were recommended to take from two thirds to three quarters of the total time spent on the unit.[16] The 1951 curriculum outlined the progression of skills students needed to master in order to become proficient sewists. A section on crafts was also present in the 1951 guideline, which included knitting, embroidery, and weaving.[17]

Budgeting and other aspects of Home Economics education were featured in the clothing section of the 1951 curriculum. In a unit titled "Clothing Needs of the High School Girl," students learned how to apply a clothing budget to their personal wardrobe needs by separating what they would buy ready-made, and what they would make themselves.[18] Making garments was taught as a necessary skill and means to stretch a clothing budget. When students were taught about wardrobe planning, making clothes was presented as a useful strategy to

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[14] Outline of Courses for Experimental Use Intermediate Division, 1951, F4435-7-0-4, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 277. (Hereafter cited as Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4).
Note that the title for this file in the archive states "for experimental use" this was however, the official curriculum.
[15] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 286.
[16] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 273.
[17] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 278.
[18] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 285.

ensure a wardrobe was complete with essential items for all occasions. The clothing section also had learning outcomes for how to repair clothing and how to keep it looking good over time, ensuring that each student's clothing budget stretched as far as it could.[19]

The 1964 Curriculum

The clothing and textiles section of the 1964 curriculum contained five units: textiles, consumer education, personal appearance, clothing construction, and crafts."[20] Textiles, the first unit, was all about fabric—learning about different kinds, how fabric was produced, and the uses and care for all different compositions of fabric—which fits with the technological advancements in synthetic fibres during this time period. The unit had some practical elements, like experiments to identify different fabrics. The "burn test" allowed students to observe how materials reacted to fire, especially synthetic fabrics that would melt when burned.[21] The guide also included a "brief study of the manufacturing of cotton yarn including ginning, carding, combing, spinning."[22] Practically speaking, students would not be spinning their own cotton for personal use in the home in 1964. It is curious that so much of the guideline was dedicated to learning about the production of fabric. Perhaps this was all in an effort to help students recognize good fabrics when purchasing clothing or fabric in their own lives.

Practical sewing was only in the "clothing construction" unit, comprising of 1/5 of the section. This iteration of the curriculum suggested that educators dedicate less time to sewing skill development than previous curricula. While the unit description outlined the acquisition of basic sewing skill and garment construction, this description, lacked the details of the 1951 curriculum, and made few connections to previously acquired skills. There was a note that

[19] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 277.
[20] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Home Economics 1964, F4435-7-0-6, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 1. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6).
[21] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 39.
[22] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 36.

projects should be selected "based on the previous experience of the student."[23] This qualification implies that not all students gained the same proficiency through the course alone, perhaps leaning on skills learned outside of the classroom for more complicated projects. With this updated clothing section, it seems less likely that students would emerge (or were expected to emerge) as fully proficient sewists, as such proficiency was not part of the learning goals of this curriculum.

The 1974 Curriculum

In the 1974 curriculum, the pedagogy around textiles and clothing centered on clothing as an expression of oneself. There was a clear shift away from making clothing as a central theme. Instead, this version of the curriculum focused mainly on consumer studies and the acquisition of clothing, a clear departure from previous versions of the curriculum. The 1974 clothing guideline outlined various themes to explore different aspects of clothing, including the cultural significance of clothing. Past curricula included "personal appearance" sections, which tackled gendered expectations of how girls and women presented themselves.[24] The 1974 curriculum, however stated that "students will discover that clothing can reflect individuality, values, and roles in various situations. They will discover also that the choice of clothing helps an individual to create the image that he presents to others."[25] One way to interpret this shift is to contextualize it in the broader development of Canadian multiculturalism. Canada officially adopted a policy of multiculturalism in 1971, a product of ongoing debates around the Canadian identity and the desire to differentiate Canada with the assimilation-focused "melting pot" of the United States.[26] Another theme from the 1974

[23] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 47.
[24] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 285; and Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 42.
[25] Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, 6.
[26] Richard J. F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*, (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 23.

clothing section, "clothing: the silent language," focused on what students communicated through wardrobe choices and outfits, encouraging them to consider the link between clothing and culture. The cultural and artistic aspects of clothing were not present in previous iterations of the curricula. Much of the clothing section in the 1974 version was not about making clothing, but instead about the abstract meaning behind clothing, and how to buy good clothing.

The 1974 outline of Home Economics classes only alluded to practical sewing projects. The clothing section suggested that each theme should be accompanied with a project to provide an outlet for creativity and artistic expression (presumably some sort of project in which students made clothing). For their project, the outline provided that students were to apply their "understanding of the aesthetic, economic, scientific, social, and psychological aspects of clothing and textiles," and "the choice of project should be based on the interests, ability, and experience of the student."[27] The outline did not give specific examples of projects, leaving room for interpretation. The fact that projects were based on the ability of the student is particularly interesting as there was no mention of sewing skills or building those skills in the outline. Was this ability based on students' own knowledge? Perhaps students who learned how to sew at home were able to use their own skills for clothing projects in the classroom. The acquisition of sewing skills and garment construction was not the emphasis of the clothing section in 1974, demonstrating a decline in viewing sewing as an important skill, and the time dedicated to it.

Sewing Curriculum in Practice

Lydia Snow started teaching Home Economics during World War II. At the time, Lydia took on some extra work painting a schoolhouse. With the additional earnings, she bought her

[27] Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, 5.

own sewing machine, and took pride in making her own clothing for the rest of her career.[28] We know the story about the purchase of her first sewing machine because it featured in her retirement announcement in 1974. Throughout her career as an educator, that pride in making shone through her teaching, as she prioritized sewing education, as well as creative and engaging pedagogy. The story of Lydia Snow provides a striking example and an important reminder that the curriculum was just a guideline. Teachers in Ontario had room to adapt their own lessons and place emphasis on what they wanted to teach.

Lydia Snow set up the Home Economics program at Tecumseh school in Burlington, and grew it so that in the year of her retirement, over 300 pupils were enrolled in the course.[29] Her Home Economics course culminated in an end-of-year fashion show where her students presented their design and sewing skills. Several typed scripts to these fashion shows have been saved in the Archives of Ontario. Lydia's final fashion show in May 1974 showcased the creativity and skill students exercised in her classroom. The theme was "Spring Is…" presenting aspects of the spring season through fashion and different theatrical scenes featuring commentary on each outfit.[30] Each student presented an outfit they had designed and sewed themselves. The script for the narration outlined the fabric and construction choices for each outfit:

> Lisa is wearing a smart style called a wrap-and-go pinafore. It features a wrapped skirt, bibbed front and shoulder straps. She chose a fabric with navy and red cats on a navy and white check- a very attractive, very suitable cotton for spring and summer wear.[31]
>
> Laura made her version of the same pattern [as Lisa] using the zigzag stitch to add an interesting decoration.[32]

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[28] Papers: Lydia Snow —Home Economics Daybook 1973-1974 (1 of 2) 1969-1974, F4435-7-0-147, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario.
[29] Retiring Teachers 1974, Papers: Lydia Snow—Home Economics Daybook 1973-1974 (1 of 2) 1969-1974 F4435-7-0-147, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario.
[30] Papers: Lydia Snow—Fashion Show Tecumseh, Burlington, 1974, F4435-7-0-151, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 2. (Hereafter Papers: Lydia Snow—Fashion Show, 1974, F4435-7-0-151).
[31] Papers: Lydia Snow—Fashion Show, 1974, F4435-7-0-151, 4.
[32] Papers: Lydia Snow—Fashion Show, 1974, F4435-7-0-151, 4.

> Spring is… getting out of bulky winter clothes and into something light. Erna Schoutens has made these overalls of cotton in gay spring colours which look good on her. Although she had a few difficulties with her seams and hems, she is very pleased with her overalls.[33]

These excerpts illustrate the sewing education provided in this specific Home Economics course. Learning outcomes outlined in the 1951 and 1964 Ontario curricula were present, like the ability to select appropriate fabrics. The light cotton used by Lisa and Erna would have been excellent choices for spring and summer weather. The script not only described the clothing, but also the learning process: how Laura customized the wrap-and-go pinafore with a distinctive stitching, or how others overcame difficulties, like Erna's challenges with seams and hems. Lydia Snow clearly prioritized sewing skills in her classroom. Even after the curriculum updates, every school and every teacher in Ontario would be unique in the ways that they interpreted the curriculum. As teachers of Lydia Snow's generation retired, perhaps they took their enthusiasm for sewing with them.

Sewing in the Pages of *Chatelaine*

Although *Chatelaine* was never marketed primarily as sewing magazine, this topic appears repeatedly in its pages from the 1950s to the 1970s. Many examples of fashion advice that included sewing, and many advertisements for sewing patterns, notions, and machines peppered the content of the magazine. Historian Valerie Korinek argued that *Chatelaine* in the 50s *and* 60s provided a wide-reaching and accessible means of disseminating early second wave feminist ideas in editorials and articles.[34] The magazine was able to subvert the expectations and push the boundaries of what was acceptable in a women's magazine. Korinek did not spend much time on fashion advice or articles about sewing, as they were not necessarily pushing any boundaries, or explicitly feminist. She did note that some of the least

[33] Papers: Lydia Snow—Fashion Show, 1974, F4435-7-0-151, 4.
[34] Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs : Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 370.

popular articles were fashion, beauty or home articles that presented an out-of-touch lifestyle, or assumed higher incomes by recommending expensive products.[35] Despite not being the sole focus of the magazine, sewing articles and advice provide a widow into common practices, and sewing skills that the average *Chatelaine* reader might have possessed. In the 1950s and 60s *Chatelaine*, like Home Economics curricula, entangled advice about sewing skills, wardrobe management and budgeting.

In my analysis of *Chatelaine*, I found that fashion articles often presented accessible options through sewing, along with expensive ready-made selections. In October 1960, fashion editor, Vivian Wilcox, flagged a flowy top named the overblouse as being the next big thing in fashion. Wilcox began the article stating that there was "a version for every type of figure" and "a price for every budget" and that readers could "buy it or make it."[36] She further described several different ways of styling the overblouse and explained the history of the design. From the outset, Wilcox was appealing to a broad range of readers, with different body sizes, budgets, and sewing skills. The article advertised several versions of ready-made overblouses to buy. A blue wool overblouse described as fitting for every occasion including "office, shopping, and afternoon tea" it came in sizes 7 to 15 and was $14.95. Adjusting for inflation, this blouse would cost $159.15 in 2026.[37] An overblouse for casual wear was $9.95 ($105.92 in 2026). All of the ready-made versions of the overblouse that were featured in the article were quite expensive, even the most casual option was over $100 in 2026 dollars. If a reader's budget was anything less, they would need to make it themselves. There were no specific patterns mentioned or advertised. Instead, the article told readers that they could "find it in patterns as well as on the rack." The assumption here, by *Chatelaine*'s editorial team, is that readers would

[35] Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*, 218.
[36] Vivian Willcox, "What's new in Fashion," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 6.
[37] All inflation calculations have been made using the Bank of Canada inflation calculator. https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/.

know where to go for sewing patterns or potentially be able to draft their own from looking at examples on racks. A study about motivations for home sewing from the 1990s found five primary motivations for sewing at home: economics, better quality, improved fit, creativity, psychological/ physiological benefits.[38] *Chatelaine's* articles strongly conveyed the economic arguments, in other words, saving money, as a big selling point for home sewing.

Chatelaine also emphasized the endless possibilities that altering clothing at home presented, allowing its readership to follow trends. In a 1965 edition of *Chatelaine*, short hemlines were all the rage. Vivian Wilcox advised that readers should "wear [their] skirts as short as [they] wish but make sure they have generous-hems."[39] Short skirts with generous hems could be let out and lengthened if the trend changed. Altering rather than discarding or buying new would allow skirts to remain in the wardrobe rotation even when longer hems came back into vogue. In the same article, Wilcox noted that the best new suits have accompanying blouses, then asking the reader, "if yours doesn't, why not make one?"[40] Wilcox was presenting the newest fashion trends, but ensuring that they were accessible by offering ways readers could adapt pieces that they already owned, or make something to match a piece that was already owned, ensuring that latest fashions could appeal to all readers, without alienating those with smaller budgets.

Wilcox's advice about generous-hems proved to be correct in 1970, when trendy hemlines were a midi-length (mid-calf), which posed a problem for women who had many mini-length outfits left over from the 1960s. An article from October 1970 addressed this issue and gave four outfits' modifications to achieve the mini-to-midi trendy length. The article began by stating: "if you have a cupboard full of minis (and who hasn't), you can stop

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[38] Sherry Schofield-Tomschin, "Home Sewing: Motivational Changes in the Twentieth Century," in Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing : Gender, Consumption, and Home Dressmaking,* (Oxford & Providence Berg, 1999), 106.
[39] Vivian Willcox*,* "What's new in Fashion," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 6.
[40] Vivian Willcox*,* "What's new in Fashion," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 6.

wondering how to keep up with the new down hem lines: simply midi your minis."[41] Instead of buying new items, the article explained how mini-length garments could be altered to stay fashionable. Altering clothing was not completely free, sewing supplies and fabric were needed. The four examples given in the article ranged in price from ¢45 to $18 ($3.68 to $ 147.03 in 2026), showing that altering clothing required an investment of time, skill, and money, though still less money than buying a completely new garment. The cheapest example given was changing a mini dress into a midi skirt: "we made a wide midriff band from top of dress [and] added a new back zipper just in midriff band." The only expense incurred for this alteration was the zipper, which was ¢45. [42] The most expensive alteration was for an evening dress. *Chatelaine* had cut a velour mini dress and added a band of cut velvet to create length. The velvet they used was one yard for $18. The expensive velvet shows that alterations could be made to luxury as well as casual outfits.

Throughout the 1950s to 1970s, *Chatelaine* fashion articles casually refer to readers' presumed sewing skills and ownership of a sewing machine. Even in a magazine full of advertisements for new things, advice for making do with what was already in the closet characterized the editorial line. Clothes were not perceived as an easily or readily disposable item. The examples of mini-to-midi alterations were not overly descriptive, nor did they give exact instructions. *Chatelaine* knew or assumed that a significant part of their readership had a baseline of sewing knowledge, and therefore the ability to take inspiration from the article and apply it to their own items. The article ended by advising the reader to "sew-to-it," a fun play on words that further suggest the ubiquity of sewing and altering. Similarly, mending was also assumed as common practice with *Chatelaine* readers. An article full of tips for busy working mothers advised that "if you have major mending jobs, do them while you watch TV. Small

[41] Eveleen Dollory, "Minis Go Midis," *Chatelaine*, October, 1970, 49.
[42] Eveleen Dollory, "Minis Go Midis," *Chatelaine*, October 1970, 48.

jobs of sewing buttons and fixing a seam are best done as the laundry is sorted and stowed away."[43] This advice for busy working mothers also speaks to the gendered labour and association with sewing, which will be further examined in Chapter 4. Finally, an article from 1970 about the dangers of credit card debt advised readers to: "make credit purchases as carefully as if you were paying cash. All those super-duper extras on that refrigerator or sewing machine are costing you capital and interest, are they really worth it?"[44] While the author is categorizing these purchases as unworthy of credit card indebtedness, it is also noteworthy they listed the sewing machine alongside the refrigerator as a necessary home appliance. In other words, a household was just as likely to have a sewing machine among its appliances as a refrigerator. This is no longer the case in Canada, where it is much rarer for households to have sewing machines today—now the exception, not the rule.

Simplicity Pattern Ads

Chatelaine had many advertisements for sewing supplies and patterns, not only ready-to-wear products. The Simplicity Patterns brand recurrently advertised in the pages of *Chatelaine* from the 50s through the 60s, often showcasing patterns with new trends. Ads for Simplicity were often accompanied by a note telling readers they could order from their Simplicity Pattern dealer, or directly through *Chatelaine*'s pattern department, which would send Simplicity Patterns out to readers through the mail. The existence of the *Chatelaine* pattern department speaks to the volume of readers who ordered their patterns through the magazine. Valerie Korinek noted that unlike their American counterparts, *Chatelaine* never included free sewing or crafting patterns, which resulted in many letters of complaint from readers.[45]

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[43] Una Abrahamson, "The mother who works needs a streamlined system for housekeeping*," Chatelaine*, January 1965, 68.
[44] Bonnie Buxton, "Why are we debt-prone?," *Chatelaine,* January, 1970, 73.
[45] Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*, 214.

The sewing patterns ads in *Chatelaine* evolved over the years I examined. In issues from 1950, photographs and illustrations of models wearing clothing made from Simplicity Patterns usually occupied a full page in the magazine. A small article accompanying the patterns also featured in the advertisement. Content of the ads often aligned with seasonality and holidays.



Figure 1.1: "Holiday Belles," *Chatelaine*, December 1950, 53.



Figure 1.2: "Sew Pretty for Midwinter," *Chatelaine*, January 1950, 22.

For instance, in December 1950, there were examples of holiday dresses with the title "Holiday Belles."[46] The June 1950 issue had some patterns for nylon lingerie, which were perfect for summer heat, being "sheer, cool and just right for summer."[47] Another example from January 1950, titled "Sew Pretty for Midwinter," featured four dress patterns that were marketed for their functionality in both winter and spring weather and for how they would complement

[46] "Holiday Belles," *Chatelaine*, December 1950, 53.
[47] "The prettiest things are yours in nylon," *Chatelaine*, June 1950, 42.

accessories that readers had just received as Christmas gifts.[48] The pattern ads were integrated into the flow of the magazine and of editorial comments from the fashion editor about sewing. In 1955, the ads still occupied one or two full pages, featured photographs and aligned the advertised patterns with the seasons, but were now titled: "*Chatelaine* Says: Make it from a Pattern." For example, the April issue featured "Prints and Polka Dots" with patterns to be made from fabrics that were "crisp and clear cut in a season that's flower-packed."[49]



Figure 1.3: "Summer After-Five," *Chatelaine*, July 1955, 31.

July 1955 had "Summer After-Five: Polished cottons and leafy prints," featuring dress patterns for summer parties, and the September 1955 issue featured the tunic dress that brought "its new, special sophistication to the fall silhouette.[50] The amount of space such ads occupied in the magazine speaks to the consumers' appetite for patterns, as the prime ad space was not

[48] "Sew Pretty for Midwinter," *Chatelaine*, January 1950, 22.
[49] "Prints and Polka Dots," *Chatelaine*, April 1955, 42.
[50] "Summer After-Five: Polished cottons and leafy prints," *Chatelaine*, July 1955, 31; and "*Chatelaine* says make it from a pattern," *Chatelaine,* September 1955, 50.

cheap.[51] It also speaks to the strong commercial partnership between *Chatelaine* and Simplicity and to *Chatelaine's* role as a strong sponsor and advocate for the practice of home sewing trendy clothing from patterns.

In 1960 editions of *Chatelaine*, Simplicity Patterns ads were also woven into other features in the magazine. For example, the "Teen Tempo"[52] article from December 1960 featured an ad for Simplicity patterns that included a full storyline and two characters: Miss Blonde and Miss Brunette. To be able to both have a party dress for the "gay glittery season" and buy Christmas presents, Miss Blonde and Miss Brunette sewed their own party dresses. Both outfits were described in detail:

> Miss Blonde adores the feminine razzle-dazzle of red with touches of lace. She chose Simplicity pattern 3347, to make in holiday-cracker-red velveteen with frothy lace sleeves. This is a simple-to-make pattern too (one really ambitious day would do it) …
> Miss brunette is a dreamer who loves the romantic rustle of taffeta with a portrait collar of white organza. Collar is edged with black velvet, another narrow line circles the bouffant skirt. Pattern 3490 comes in teen sizes 10 to 16, fifty cents.[53]



TEEN TEMPO

By SUSAN COOPER

Pity the girl who's always right...plus, holiday manners

For the gay glittery season . . . our Christmas belles sew party dresses

Sketches by Eugenie Groh

LIFT HERE

21

Figure 1.4: "Teen Tempo," *Chatelaine* December 1960, 21.

[51] Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs*, 96.
[52] Teen Tempo was the section of the magazine that appealed to younger readers in particular
[53] Susan Cooper, "Teen Tempo," *Chatelaine* December 1960, 21.

Both patterns were advertised as being accessible enough for teenagers to make themselves and not be too time-consuming. The fabric was also recommended in holiday colours, as to be appropriately fancy for the occasion. The article concluded with "the happy ending: many pennies saved, many compliments earned, a very merry Christmas to you!"[54] Interestingly, the ad's concerns with skill-level, time and budget management as well as appropriateness of garments align with the 1960s Home Economics curriculum that had a similar demographic to this advertisement.



Figure 1.5: "If I can sew, you can sew," *Chatelaine*, May 1965, 16.

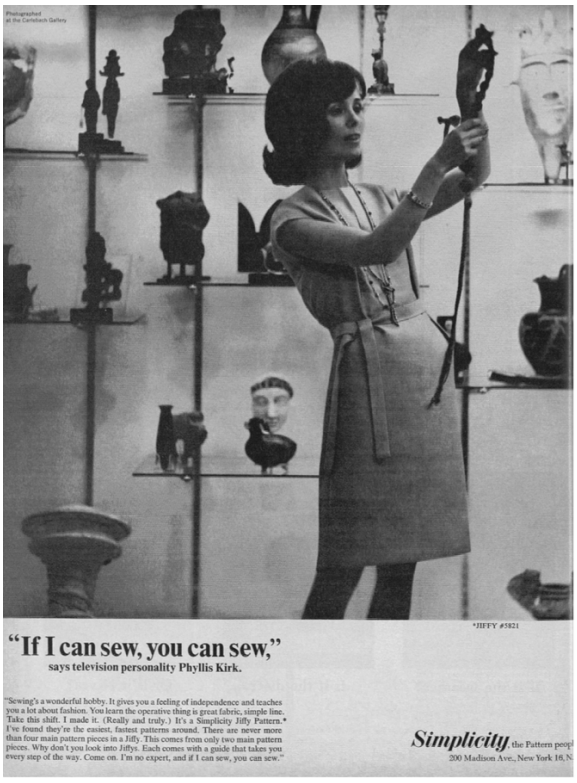


Figure 1.6: "If I can sew, you can sew, says television personality Phyllis Kirk," *Chatelaine* March 1965, 4.

In 1965, the tone of the Simplicity Patterns ads changed to include testimonials from famous women with the tagline "if I can sew, you can sew."[55] The tone of these ads seems to target readers who were not necessarily confident in their sewing skills. Instead of assuming

[54] Susan Cooper, "Teen Tempo," *Chatelaine* December 1960, 21.
[55] "If I can sew, you can sew," *Chatelaine*, May 1965, 16.

complete mastery of the skill, these ads focus on beginners or those too intimidated to make complete patterns by themselves. The Simplicity ads from 1965 emphasised straightforwardness and ease, stating that "today's fashions are simpler—patterns too," boasting that their patterns were "the simplest patterns you can find. Each comes with a guide that takes you every step of the way. Before you know it, you've made a dress for a fraction of the price you'd have to pay in the store."[56] By highlighting the clear instructions and basic designs, the ad seems to be assuaging any concerns around skill. Even those without sewing expertise could follow the pattern instructions and reap the financial benefits of making clothing at home rather than buying ready-made. In March 1965, the Simplicity ad featured "television personality Phyllis Kirk," who praised the ease of Simplicity Patterns, comprising minimal pattern pieces, and assured readers that "I'm no expert, and if I can sew, you can sew."[57] The shift from Simplicity ads from 1950 to 1965 show a weakening in the assumption of sewing proficiency. The ads went from showing off complicated patterns that fit with current trends, to aiming more at novice sewers. In 1970 and 1975, only a few pattern ads from specific designers featured in *Chatelaine,* while Simplicity Pattern ads essentially disappeared from the magazine's pages.

[56] "If I can sew, you can sew," *Chatelaine*, April 1965, 77.
[57] "If I can sew, you can sew, says television personality Phyllis Kirk," *Chatelaine* March 1965, 4.

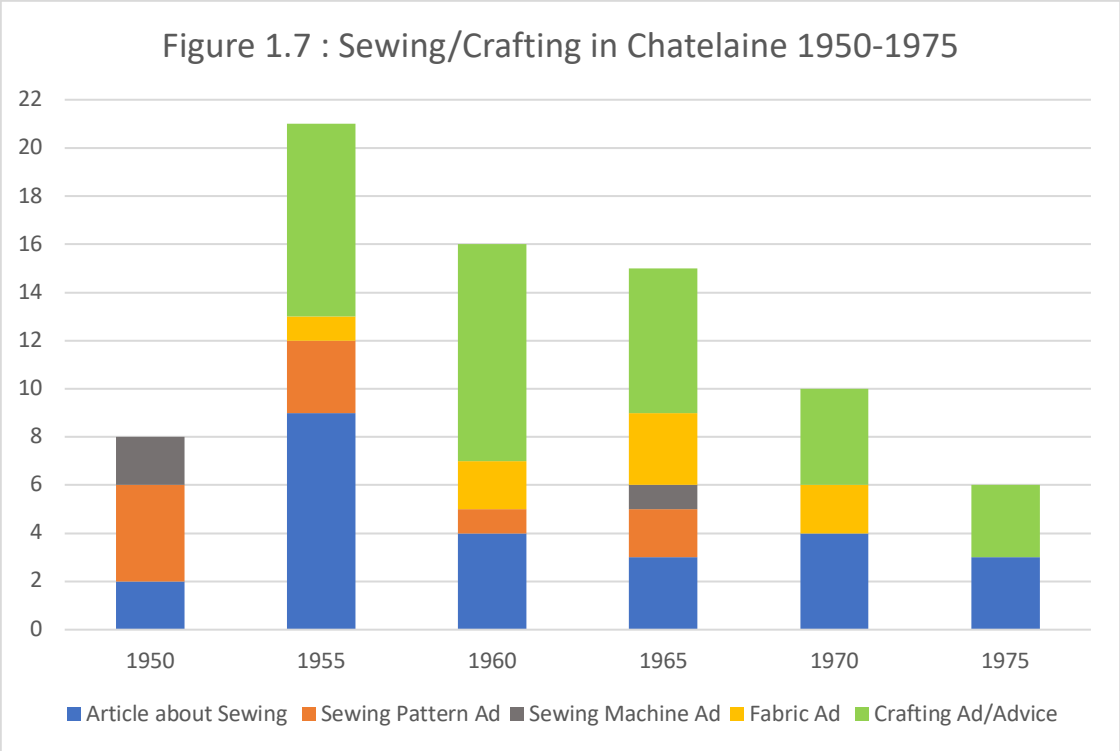


Figure 1.7: I sampled issues from December, April, and August for all 6 years of *Chatelaine* used for this project (1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975). Going through each issue, I used keyword search to track articles about sewing, ads for sewing patterns, ads for sewing machines, ads for fabric, and ads/advice about textile-related crafts (like knitting, needlepoint, etc.) The keywords used were as follows: "pattern," "simplicity," "sew," "craft," and "knit."

The disappearance of Simplicity Pattern ads from *Chatelaine*'s page in the 1970s is symptomatic of a broader trend observed in the magazine's sewing-related content. Using key word searches through 3 months of *Chatelaine* issues for all the years I collected for this project, I was able to gather data about the occurrence of articles about sewing, ads for sewing patterns, fabric, and sewing machines, as well as ads for crafts, like knitting and needlepoint. By closely examining a quarter of the issues every five years, I was able to make some observations and track how the magazine's focus shifted. Articles about sewing were consistently found in every year, though they peaked in 1955. This correlates with the peak of sewing education I found in the Ontario curriculum. Similarly, ads for fabric peaked in 1965, which correlates with the 1964 Ontario curriculum that focused so much on fabric types and compositions. Although there were still articles about sewing, I found that ads for sewing

patterns disappeared altogether in the 1970s in the issues I reviewed while collecting these data. The presence of sewing patterns declined in tandem with the sewing education present in the Ontario Home Economics curriculum. Crafting was a consistent feature, excluding issues from 1950, which did not have any craft section. Starting in 1955, the crafting ads and advice became the most consistent feature that continued to 1975. Overall, this analysis shows that sewing was a constant theme, present throughout this period. Though never the sole focus of the magazine, sewing was a standard part of *Chatelaine* from the 1950s-1970s.

Conclusion

Doris Anderson provides one window into how sewing was a common part of some women's lives, despite not necessarily relating to their career. The emphasis on sewing in the Ontario Home Economics curriculum declined from the 1950s to the 1970s, but was still an important aspect of Home Economics education long after some have argued production moved outside of the home. Sewing was also present in advice from *Chatelaine* up into the 1970s, though losing some significance, as shown by the disappearance of sewing patterns ads in the 1970s. I found that although there was an observable decline in sewing education and the assumption of sewing proficiency, a driving factor that kept sewing relevant in the 1950s to 1970s was the concept of thrift and budget, which continued to be prioritized in Canadian society in the wake of the Depression and WWII.

Chapter 2

"Be Smarter in 1950!": Learning to Consume through *Chatelaine* and Home Economics

When you think about Home Economics as a discipline or a class, learning how to shop might not be the first thing that comes to mind. As shown in the previous chapter, learning how to sew or cook—skills that produce something—are most commonly associated with the field. However, learning the best consumer practices was always a part of Home Economics education or courses in Canada. The emergence of Home Economics in the late nineteenth-century can be traced to the belief that there was a significant shift happening: production was leaving the home so people could consume outside of it, thereby necessitating the formal teaching of consumer education to adapt to modern living. Consumer studies was present in Home Economics courses in Ontario secondary schools, through budget planning, learning to shop efficiently, and maintaining goods once purchased. Learning to consume well was seen as an integral part of Home Economics to equip Canadian women with the necessary skills to run a home.

This chapter examines the information delivered to women through Home Economics courses. Despite the belief that production had moved out of the home, long before the post-war era, Home Economics continued to teach home-sewing as an important skill well into the 1950s and 1960s. Donica Belisle has argued that the coexistence of home production and consumption was a central part of Home Economics education in Canada, explaining that to be a good housewife, "one had to be both a producer and a consumer."[1] This chapter argues that as the emphasis on sewing decreased in Home Economics curricula, education about the best consumer practices progressively occupied a greater space in the curricula. This chapter begins with the analysis of three Ontario Home Economics curricula, a version from 1951, revised in

[1] Donica Belisle, *Purchasing Power : Women and the Rise of Canadian Consumer Culture*, (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 73.

1964 and ten years later again in 1974. Over the curriculum revisions, I will show that a significant trend emerges: as skills related to "making" were relegated to secondary positions, consumer education took the forefront.

Indeed, advice around consuming was also present in female-focused media like *Chatelaine*. The chapter then examines the discourses of thoughtful consumerism that were present in *Chatelaine* at the time, expanding on the work of Joy Parr and Bettina Liverant, both of whom have examined Canada's cautious consumerism post-WWII.[2] My analysis not only shows the many parallels contained in both corpuses of sources—Ontario Home Economics curricula and *Chatelaine*—but also how they encouraged responsible and cautious forms of consumerism that valued both sewing skills and restrained consumerism.

I will also analyze and compare the discourses around credit and debt that appear in the curriculum and the magazine in the 1970s. Both the Home Economics curricula and *Chatelaine*'s advice on spending and credit usage aligns with their attempts at shaping Canadians as thoughtful, thrifty yet elegant consumers. I argue that the advice on spending, credit usage, and debt management reflects a tension that emerged in the 1970s in Canada. On the one hand, the two preceding decades were a time of incredible consumer growth in Canada, with average disposable income rising 745% from 1950 to 1975.[3] The rise of credit usage is also a testament to rising consumerism of Canadians at the time. On the other hand, the dominant conversation around consumer habits and practices conveyed in the education system continued to promote values of thrift and prudence. The chapter suggests that the different generational experiences of consumerism between the group of Canadians writing advice on

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[2] Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods : The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, (University of Toronto Press, 1999). And Bettina Liverant, *Buying Happiness. The Emergence of Consumer Consciousness in English Canada*, (University of British Columbia Press, 2018). See also Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War : The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front*, (UBC Press, 2014).

[3] Statistics Canada, "Personal income, personal income per person, and personal disposable income, annual, 1926 – 1990," (2000), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610028701, accessed August 31, 2025.

consumer practices, and the Canadians doing the consuming, explain, in part, this growing tension.

Consumer Education in Ontario Curricula

When analyzing the different iterations of the Ontario Home Economics Curriculum, I noticed a clear shift towards consumer education—including the purchase of clothing—and away from making clothing through each curriculum revision into the 1970s. In the 1951 curriculum, time was allotted evenly between three main subjects: family, clothing and textiles, and food.[4] The family section included lessons on family budgeting and how to get the most out of your dollar when consuming. The 1964 curriculum was organized into two main sections—food and nutrition, and clothing and textiles—with family and home management not appearing in the main table of contents, but as additional sections near the end of the curriculum.[5] Consumer education appeared in some sections throughout the 1964 version, including the section focused on wardrobe planning.[6] In 1974 however, this topic was at the forefront of each section, including the textile and cooking sections. In the 1951 and 1964 curricula, the clothing and textiles sections emphasized the acquisition of sewing skills and the making of clothing rather than consuming. By the 1974 curriculum however, the clothing section focused on consuming ready-made clothing as the main objective.[7] Smart buying and quality were constant themes throughout all versions of the curricula during this period, though the emphasis on consumer practices increased with each curriculum revision.

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[4] Outline of Courses for Experimental Use Intermediate Division, 1951, F4435-7-0-4, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 273. (Hereafter cited as Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4).

[5] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Home Economics 1964, F4435-7-0-6, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 55. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6).

[6] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 41.

[7] Home Economics in Ontario Schools has a new name, 1976, F4435-7-0-22, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 14.

In the 1951 curriculum, consumer studies fit within the "family" section where students were taught money management. The goal of managing a family's finances outlined in the curriculum was for students to learn how to "get their money's worth in goods and personal satisfactions."[8] The curriculum further emphasized thriftiness and a desire to make sure you were getting good value out of every purchase. The curriculum did not treat shopping as a leisure activity, but as a necessary skill to be learned. The best shopping practices listed in the curriculum included learning about "standards for specific goods, informative labelling, bargains and sales, and advertising."[9] The ability to identify good deals through standards, labelling, and advertising was the desired learning outcome. Another pedagogical goal was to recognize what was suitable to wear for different occasions, including "appropriate clothing for individual, occasion, and weather."[10] Having all the necessities for every occasion, but never an excess of clothing was seen as the ideal in terms of consuming clothing. The underlying/overarching recommendation of the curriculum was to buy only what was necessary and to be parsimonious with purchases. The 1951 curriculum had strict budgeting guidelines, including keeping a record of one's own spending, only spending on necessities, and carefully planning purchases.[11]

Similar themes were present in the 1964 revision, which presented the careful curation and planning of one's wardrobe as a best consumer practice. A key component of the 1964 curriculum was for students to develop the "ability to plan a suitable, co-ordinated wardrobe."[12] Students were taught to fit within the family's budget while ensuring they had a cohesive wardrobe. A learning outcome from 1964 was for students to become "aware of the economic aspect of family clothing and to make the best use of resources to meet clothing needs."[13] Such

[8] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 280.
[9] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 280.
[10] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 285.
[11] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 280, 285.
[12] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 41.
[13] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 41.

expectations included curating a wardrobe as well as the maintenance and care of clothing items once they were acquired. The 1964 curriculum, included "care of clothing, daily and seasonal...brushing, hanging, air-drying…storage and protection of woolens."[14] Students learned to view the purchasing of clothing as an investment. Being a good consumer was conveyed to students in part, through learning how to properly care for purchases.

Consumer education was the main focus of the 1974 curriculum, which suggested that "money management, considered as consumer education relating to food, housing, and clothing, be emphasized."[15] The curriculum guideline was divided into five sections: Family and Child Development, Management of Family Resources, Housing, Food and Nutrition, and Clothing—consumer education was present in each.[16] As discussed in the previous chapter, the clothing section of the 1974 curriculum was not focused on making clothing, but rather learning how to buy good clothing. The goals of the 1974 clothing section included: "to appreciate that the amount of money available to an individual for clothing is dependent on the needs of other family members and on family goals" and, "to develop the decision-making skills required of a discriminating consumer of clothing."[17] The course presented how learning proper consumer habits related to living well overall.

Although each version of the curriculum contained some consumer education, conveying the important principles of thrift and budgeting, the focus on consuming increased from the 1950s to 1970s. The amount of class time allocated to consumer studies was contained to a relatively small portion of the Family section in the 1951 curriculum. By 1974, consumer studies was a key focus throughout all units. This reflects a significant change in the learning objectives for Home Economics students in Ontario over a fairly narrow period of time.

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[14] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 43.
[15] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Family Studies 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 3. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7).
[16] Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, 1.
[17] Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, 5.

Thoughtful Consumerism in *Chatelaine*

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the pages of *Chatelaine* also placed emphasis on consumer education for its readership. Articles from *Chatelaine* often advocated for slow and thoughtful consumption, and even reusing or remaking garments over buying new. The advice was in contrast to some of the advertisements present in the magazine, which promoted consumption, but also helped the magazine turn a profit. A *Chatelaine* article from January 1950 titled “Be Smarter in 1950!” offered advice for caring for clothing items that were already in readers’ wardrobes. Tips and tricks were explained for how to get various stains like lipstick, coffee, tea, and ink, out of garments, and how to take care of and revive suede shoes. Only a third of the article was about buying anything new, the other two thirds was about maintaining and taking care of what readers already owned. The article presented using what you had rather than buying everything new as the ideal consumer practice. The same article advised readers to consider versatility when buying new wardrobe pieces. If a garment could be worn in multiple ways, it added more value to a reader’s wardrobe. Fashion editor Mildred Spicer exclaimed that there was "neckline news!” describing a new trend—the shutter neckline—a style that “opens for night, closes for day."[18] The shutter neckline was presented as a versatile neckline, worn high or low, able to compliment different outfits and occasions, and adaptable for both evening and daytime wear. Spicer also presented some winter fashions, including gloves with fur cuffs. Instead of advising readers to buy new gloves, Spicer described how they could elevate their own gloves to match the trend, with only "a needle and thread… make your gloves look elegant. Sew a band of fur around the cuffs of black suede ones or on your white

[18] Mildred Spicer, “Be Smarter in 1950!,” *Chatelaine*, January, 1950, 16.

evening gloves"[19] Spicer presented the ability to follow trends without buying all new accessories as a way for readers to consume without being wasteful.

There are many examples of *Chatelaine* offering advice on how garments could be altered to fit the current trends, rather than buying new. Sewing was a part of being a savvy shopper. Sewing patterns were marketed in a way to show how women could keep up with trends without necessarily buying everything new. In 1950, Simplicity was selling their dress patterns for 25 cents, which would be about $3.50 in 2026, when accounting for inflation.[20] Fashion editor Vivian Wilcox profiled some *Chatelaine* staff who made several of their own outfits for work in 1965. The article featured photos of the work outfits along with the Simplicity Pattern number, presenting "$410 worth of fashion for $136."[21] Someone with the necessary sewing skills could consume these new trends through making their own versions, without over-spending or breaking the budget.

Quality over quantity was a key theme in the consuming guidance *Chatelaine* presented. A 1965 article aimed at working mothers advised having fewer outfits for the office. Rather than a different dress for each day, Vivian Wilcox recommended that readers instead invest in a variety of nice accessories to help dress up the same outfit in new ways. The article explained how accessories could transform the same basic outfits into a variety of different looks. It advised readers to "forget that extra dress. Instead, spend the money on a strand of pearls with a non-tarnishing clasp; the latest in reading glasses; a fine leather handbag or a pair of the new round-toe shoes."[22] Wilcox recommended that working mothers invest in good quality accessories in order to dress up the same outfits rather than buying an excess of clothing. Different accessories could also make the same dress suitable for the office and the home when

[19] Mildred Spicer, "Be Smarter in 1950!," *Chatelaine*, January, 1950, 16.
[20] Mildred Spicer, "Be Smarter in 1950!," *Chatelaine*, January, 1950, 22. And Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator, https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/.
[21] Vivian Wilcox, "Five Smart Girls Who Sew," *Chatelaine*, August 1965, 31-35. ($410 = $4135 and $136 = $1375 in 2026).
[22] Vivian Wilcox, "The Mother who works needs a formula for fashion," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 31.

styled differently, expanding the versatility of outfits. The article concluded by saying "such accessories can make that 29.95$ dress look like a million and you the best dressed woman on the job."[23] When adjusting for inflation, a $29.95 dress would cost $286.74 in 2024. The price indicates that the article was referring to the $29.95 dress as a wardrobe staple, not a cheap piece disguised with accessories. Wilcox described ways in which women could get the absolute most wear out of one investment, by making various outfits with the same base dress.

Ease of care and garment maintenance can be found as a selling point for clothing in advertisements from *Chatelaine*. A wool suit from 1955 was advertised by boasting its mothproofing that "protects it against moth damage for its lifetime, despite cleaning, weathering, and wear."[24] This lifetime protection against moths would have appealed to consumers who valued and prioritized long-lasting items when shopping. A full-page ad from 1965 showcased different brands that all used Scotch Rain and Stain Repeller in their garments. Sabre Slim pants boasted that "spills and stains can't disfigure the trim sleek look of these sabre slims—they are treated with Scotchgard Repeller! Rain and spills roll right off—even after repeated cleanings."[25] Not only did this fabric claim to repel stains, but it was also said to hold up after frequent washes and cleanings, which would have appealed to consumers who prioritized the best value in their purchases.

Taking good care of clothing was part of consuming well, however, it could also be time consuming. *Chatelaine* presented consumer advice that doubled as time-saving consumer tips for working women. A 1965 article titled "The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping" offered some clothing consuming advice aimed at saving a working mother's time. The article advised readers to prioritize fabrics that did not require ironing, such

[23] Vivian Wilcox, "The Mother who works needs a formula for fashion," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 31.
[24] "Durably Mothproofed with Mitin," *Chatelaine* April 1955, 4.
[25] "Scotchgard" *Chatelaine* April 1965, 59.

as seer-sucker, corduroy, and denim, when purchasing clothing.[26] It also recommended that readers' ensure clothing was machine washable before buying and to "use instant dissolve-in-the-washer starch to keep linens smooth with minimum pressing."[27] Strategically buying clothing items that were not too high-maintenance to keep in good condition was key for those who did not have as much time, but who still prioritized maintaining clothing in the best condition.

The customary pace of consumption was conveyed through *Chatelaine* as being slow and thoughtful, and exceptions to this pace were explained. For instance, a Canadian woman named Margaret won a makeover and a completely new wardrobe from *Chatelaine* for the January 1970 edition of the magazine. The Beauty and Fashion editors of *Chatelaine* cautioned readers that buying a complete new wardrobe all together at one time was not a normal pace of consumption, stating that "although *we* bought the clothes all at once, normally Margaret would buy one big item a year—a coat or dress—plus smaller items such as a pair of slacks and shirt."[28] Instead of encouraging the readers of *Chatelaine* to mimic this makeover, and buy all the new things outlined in the article, the authors made a point to state that regular consumers should pace themselves when buying staple wardrobe pieces, and mindfully build a wardrobe over time. Although articles in *Chatelaine* were often advising slow consumption of clothing, consumer debt in Canada was on the rise, indicating that readers did not always take the advice presented in the magazine.

Fabric Composition and Consumer Education

[26] Una Abrahamson, The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 25.
[27] Una Abrahamson, The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 25.
[28] Vivian Wilcox and Eveleen Dollery, "Margaret Snyder gets a whole new wardrobe for $154!," *Chatelaine*, January, 1970, 30-31.

With an influx of new materials and production techniques, fabric composition was a pressing consumer issue in the 1950s and 1960s. The aims for consumer education from the 1964 Home Economics curriculum were quite focused around recognizing quality fabric, both in terms of fabrics bought for sewing projects and the fabrics of ready-made garments. The aims for grade seven and eight included recognizing "the characteristics of good quality in cotton fabrics," and recognizing the "quality of fabrics and workmanship in ready-made articles."[29] Textile education was seen as an essential aspect of consumer education. A 1959 article from the *Canadian Home Economics Journal* explained how the Canadian Fabric Foundation was promoting textile education, and simultaneously promoting quality Canadian textiles. The article was written by Martha Job Miles, who, was described as "a full-time homemaker and mother, [who] formerly worked in textile sales promotion and development for Canadian Industries Limited and Du Pont Company of Canada."[30] Martha also had a Bachelor of Arts in Home Economics from the University of Toronto. In her article, Martha explained how, with the rapid technological advancements in the textile industry, it was becoming more difficult for the average Canadian consumer to keep up to date and be able to shop confidently.

The Canadian Fabrics Foundation, founded in 1955, aimed to help Canadian consumers decipher quality amongst the influx of new fabrics. The Canadian Fabrics Foundation created an educational fashion show, using survey data gathered from Canadians, with the dual goal of educating about good quality fabrics, while also promoting Canadian-made textiles. The show was called "Fashion and Function" and was taken all across Canada to 36 cities, with a combined audience of 15,000 Canadians in 1957-58.[31] The show featured more commentary

[29] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 40.
[30] Martha Job Milne, "The Canadian Fabric Foundation Accepts a Challenge," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 9, no.1 (1959), 5.
[31] Martha Job Milne, "The Canadian Fabric Foundation Accepts a Challenge," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 9, no.1 (1959), 6.

than the average fashion show, and used the opportunity to speak about the fibres, construction, finishes, performance, and how to care for each garment. The main message of the show was to educate consumers on quality fabric, and equip them with the knowledge to make good and informed consumer choices with their clothing. The show also stressed that Canadian-made items were of excellent quality. Every item in the show was both from a Canadian manufacturer and used Canadian fabric. The items showcased were also from a "medium price bracket," as to be relevant to the average consumer. The amount of time used to describe how to properly care for each garment indicates that this fashion was not seen as disposable, but meant to have a long life in a consumer's possession.

The Canadian Fabric Foundation also worked with the Textile Committee of the Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) to produce a pamphlet titled "Fibre and Fabric Facts." It was designed with secondary school use in mind and also for the Canadian consumer in general.[32] The Pamphlet had been sent out with a previous issue of the *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, and had been distributed to secondary schools across English speaking Canada. Martha mentioned in her article that based on the positive response, the pamphlet was being translated to French, and was to be distributed to Quebec secondary schools in 1959.[33] The goal of the pamphlet was similar to the fashion show, but was more easily able to reach young consumers through distribution in schools.

Credit, Debts, and Increasing Tension Between Discourses and Practices

The increasing access to consumer credit is another theme that emerged in my examination of educational and media sources from the 1950s to 1970s. There was no mention of buying anything on credit in the 1951 Home Economics curriculum. In the 1964 update,

[32] Martha Job Milne, "The Canadian Fabric Foundation Accepts a Challenge," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 9, no.1 (1959), 27.
[33] Martha Job Milne, "The Canadian Fabric Foundation Accepts a Challenge," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 9, no.1 (1959), 27.

"credit buying" appeared as a part of the money management section.[34] Credit took up much more space in the 1974 curriculum, consuming with credit and the risks associated with it occupied major sections. In the budgeting section of the 1951 and 1964 versions, it was strongly recommended that students only purchase what was in their family budget, without mentioning payment plans or credit cards. Credit buying was certainly used in the 1950s for things like major appliances, however not at the fast pace of buying on consumer credit seen in later decades.[35] In the consumer studies outline from 1974, the *Age of Majority and Accountability Act, 1971*, is mentioned as one reason credit buying was necessary to include in the high school curriculum. The Act lowered the age of majority from 21 to 18 in Ontario. This increased the number of Ontarians, especially young Ontarians, eligible to make purchases using credit. It seems as if the 1974 update of the Home Economics curriculum, adding so much content about credit and how to budget with it, was responding to the rise in consumer debt and the anxieties surrounding it.

In a 1965 article, *Chatelaine* spoke with shopping experts to give advice about buying on credit. One key takeaway from the article was to only use credit for large purchases, such as major appliances, not for everyday shopping. The experts advised shoppers to "make as large a downpayment as possible and to pay the balance as quickly as they can" and warned that "those who can't afford at least ten per cent down and can't repay within two years, can't afford to buy."[36] The article also warned that credit could have the consequence of encouraging compulsive buying, which could in turn, "curb your freedom to shop around for bargains and discounts at other stores."[37] The experts were concerned that overspending on credit, and being locked in to minimum payments, would lead to consumers not having the flexibility to stock-

[34] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 55.
[35] Bettina Liverant, *Buying Happiness* : *The Emergence of Consumer Consciousness in English Canada*, University of British Columbia Press, (2018), 168.
[36] Mildred Istona, "How to be a 'Savvy' Shopper," *Chatelaine*, September 1965, 36-37.
[37] Mildred Istona, "How to be a 'Savvy' Shopper," *Chatelaine*, September 1965, 51.

up on good deals when they came about. This article presented buying things on credit as useful in certain scenarios, but not as an everyday practice, and as something to be approached with caution.

Anxieties about consumer debt in Canada can be seen in a *Chatelaine* article from 1970 that stated, "we 'thrifty, sober' Canadians are more in debt than any other people—including Americans. If you're hooked on credit or just getting there, here's what you can do about it"[38] This article presents being "thrifty" as the baseline, expected consumer behaviour for Canadians, that readers should strive for. *Chatelaine* contributor, Bonnie Buxton, noted that since WWII, consumer credit grew three times as fast as incomes in Canada, stating that "not counting oil company credit cards, mortgages, and medical bills, [Canadians] owed $10 billion to creditors by March 31, 1969, compared with $4 billion in 1960 and only $835 million in 1948."[39] Even if *Chatelaine* was consistently delivering advice that consumers should be mindful when shopping, the abundance of consumer debt in Canada indicates that not all readers were listening. Buxton suggested that one possible contributor of the rising debt was that some Canadian consumers wanted to "keep up with the American Joneses," by trying to match the consumer habits of Americans.[40] The article concluded that an important reason for the change in consumer spending, or in their words, "charge-a-mania," was actually a social evolution in Canada that changed attitudes towards spending.[41] Despite the advice presented through *Chatelaine* and Home Economics courses during this time period, some consumer attitudes were moving away from the "thrifty" outlook.

The tension between emerging consumer practices and the advice in *Chatelaine* continued in 1975. An article titled "33 Ways to Stretch a Buck," claimed that "penny-pinching is our new national pastime, replacing hockey and football as the most talked-about, agonized-

[38] Bonnie Buxton, "Why are we Debt-Prone?," *Chatelaine*, January 1970, 28-29.
[39] Bonnie Buxton, "Why are we Debt-Prone?," *Chatelaine*, January 1970, 28.
[40] Bonnie Buxton, "Why are we Debt-Prone?," *Chatelaine*, January 1970, 28.
[41] Bonnie Buxton, "Why are we Debt-Prone?," *Chatelaine*, January 1970, 28.

over and emotive subject."[42] Bonnie Cornell provided money-saving tips for readers in many different capacities, starting with food, recommending that readers make their own melba toast, save bacon drippings to use as a butter replacement in baking, try milk powder, and buy sugar in bulk. There were also tips about cheap crafts and hobbies to pursue, and tips about clothing. The clothing tips included advising mothers to buy machine washable 'tri-blend' jeans for their children, which would "be outgrown before outworn."[43] The durable mix of fabrics was advertised as being extra long-lasting. The article declared that "nylon is stronger than steel for hand-to-hand and body-to-street combat: polyester provides shape retention and resists tearing and abrasion: cotton 'breathes' for wearing comfort."[44] The price of the pants ranged from $8 to $12 ($45.00 to $68.00 when accounting for inflation), but were advertised as being well-worth the price tag as they would be long-lasting pieces of clothing. It is notable that this article presents penny-pinching as a new trendy piece of advice in 1975. My review suggests that penny-pinching was a constant theme in consumer advice presented in *Chatelaine* from the 1950s-1970s.

Generational Experiences of Consumerism

Bettina Liverant's book *Buying Happiness* argues that by the 1960s, Canadians thought of themselves as living in a consumer society. She notes that cultures are defined by tensions, in the context consumption in Canada, thoughts of abundance were also met with warnings of over-indulgence.[45] The differences between consumer advice and practices in the 1970s emerged from this cultural tension. Through my analysis of *Chatelain*e, I add that by the 1970s, Canadians were living in a consumer society that was far more comfortable with debt that previous generations had been. Changing social attitudes and pressures impacted the evolution

[42] Bonnie Cornell, "33 Ways to Stretch a Buck," *Chatelaine*, September 1975, 45.
[43] Bonnie Cornell, "33 Ways to Stretch a Buck," *Chatelaine*, September 1975, 45.
[44] Bonnie Cornell, "33 Ways to Stretch a Buck," *Chatelaine*, September 1975, 77.
[45] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 213.

of the Ontario Home Economics curriculum. As consumer consciousness grew in Canada, the amount of focus on consuming and how to consume was reflected in the curricula. Despite the increased focus around consumer education, which presented advice on curbing spending and consuming carefully, there was an increased opposition between the advice and the actual consumer behaviour.

As discussed in the introduction, the legacy of the Great Depression and WWII had a lasting impact on Canadian's attitudes towards consuming, with the spectre of hardship and financial collapse still fresh in the memories of many Canadians.[46] In her memoir, Doris Anderson, described herself and her brothers as being typical of their generation growing up in the 1930s. She described that coming out of the Great Depression, they had been "determined to use whatever opportunities [they] were given to avoid that kind of privation" and that "any child of the Great Depression was never sure that it couldn't happen again."[47] The generational impact of both the Depression and WWII are important to consider while examining my primary sources. The Ontario Home Economics curriculum from the 1950s-1970s would have been written and revised by educators and policy makers who had lived through WWII, and potentially the Depression as well. Home Economics teachers from the time would have had similar generational experiences, and the same can be said about the writers of *Chatelaine*. The themes of thriftiness and cautious spending reflect the experience of those who wrote the curriculum. Students taking Home Economics from the 1950s to the 1970s would have brought a different generational perspective to the classroom. Students born during the Baby Boom (born 1946-1965[48]), would not have had the firsthand experience of the Depression or war-time price controls and rationing. Diverse generational contexts can serve as a potential explanation

[46] Liverant, *Buying Happiness*, 11; and Doris Anderson, *Rebel Daughter : An Autobiography,* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1996), 99.
[47] Anderson, *Rebel Daughter,* 99.
[48] Statistics Canada, "Generations in Canada," https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-311-x/98-311-x2011003_2-eng.cfm, accessed September 7, 2025.

of the contrast between the thriftiness advised in the curriculum and *Chatelaine* articles, and the actual consumer patterns.

Conclusion: Parallels with Today

As of November 2024, consumer debt in Canada rose to a record $2.5 trillion.[49] Overconsumption is a current hot topic as it relates to climate change, exploitation of workers, and other impacts of buying things to throw away. Discourse around overconsumption and environmental disaster were present during my period of study; one example comes from Doris Anderson's *Chatelaine* January 1970 editorial. As a reflection on the 1960s she wrote:

> It was a time for obsolescence with throw-away-everything from pop bottles to built-to-wear-out hard goods and a time when we began to realize that we had to stop polluting our water and air or we might end up in the seventies sitting in the middle of a large garbage dump surrounded by poisoned sludge.[50]

Doris Anderson warned of environmental impacts of how Canadians were consuming and creating waste at unsustainable rates in several editorials. In the opening to the April 1975 issue, Anderson cautioned that "in a short 15 years, at the rate we're going, we will be looking back on the 1950s and 1960s as the Good Old Days — and also wondering how we could possibly have been so stupid."[51] The consequences of overconsumption were known decades ago, however, the advice from *Chatelaine* and Home Economics curricula about buying slowly and being intentional with purchases does not seem to have stuck. As this chapter has shown, advice of consuming slowly, being thrifty and not wasteful was in conflict with actual consumer practices. Curating a wardrobe slowly and taking care of what you already have are lessons worth revisiting today in the context of fast fashion.

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[49] Canadian Press Staff, "Cost of living, unemployment factors in record-breaking Canadian consumer debt," *CTV News* https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/cost-of-living-unemployment-factors-in-record-breaking-canadian-consumer-debt-1.7123376, accessed January 9, 2025.
[50] Doris Anderson, "The Swinging, Shocking Sixties," *Chatelaine*, January, 1970, 2.
[51] Doris Anderson, "Stop the Waste Now," *Chatelaine*, April 1975, 2.

Chapter 3

"Of Consuming Interest": Quality Consumers Buy and Make Quality Goods

Origins of the Current State of Affairs – A Disposable Culture

A 2024 *Walrus* article titled "We're in a Golden Age of Garbage Clothing" asked the question: what happened to good garments?[1] The author quips that the closest thing she has to a family heirloom is a miniskirt from the 1970s, and that she has been unable to find a comparable replacement for it in 2024. In the last 30 years or so, the quality of clothing plummeted. One contributing factor to this decline in quality has been the rise of "fast fashion" since the early 2000s, which accelerated consumer cycles to unprecedented heights. "Fast Fashion" refers to the accelerated consumption of clothing where clothing retailers rapidly produce low-price clothing, capitalizing on new trends with quick inventory turnover.[2] Today, social media feeds regularly feature influencers "unboxing" large "hauls" of cheap clothing, with affiliate links to every item, encouraging viewers to buy. The fast and low-cost production has been accomplished through globalization, and the exploitation of labour in the global south. Cheap prices and trendiness contribute to consumers impulsively buying an abundance of cheap clothing.[3] A 2021 report estimated that Canadians throw away 500,000 tonnes of clothing every year.[4]

This current state of clothing consumption stands in stark contrast to the learning goals of Ontario Home Economics courses from the 1950s-1970s, and the advice on clothing consumption relayed in *Chatelaine* over the same period. Recall an example from Chapter 2—

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[1] Monika Warzecha, "We're in a Gold Age of Garbage Clothing," *The Walrus*, October 23, 2024, https://thewalrus.ca/the-golden-age-of-garbage-clothing/ accessed April 7, 2026.
[2] Sang-Eun Byun and Brenda Sternquist. "Fast Fashion and In-Store Hoarding: The Drivers, Moderator, and Consequences." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (Los Angeles, CA) 29, no. 3 (2011), 187.
[3] Hyun-Mee Joung, "Fast-Fashion Consumers' Post-Purchase Behaviours." *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* (Bradford) 42, no. 8 (2014), 689.
[4] Fashion Takes Action, "A Feasibility Study of Textile Recycling in Canada" Commissioned by Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2021, 2.

the winner of a whole new wardrobe, courtesy of *Chatelaine*?[5] The announcement of this great prize came with explicit and repeated warnings that buying a whole new wardrobe, all at once, was not normal consumer behaviour, and that it should not be replicated by readers.[6]

The majority of clothing purchased by Canadians in the 1950s-1970s was made in Canada, and therefore, more expensive than what consumers are used to in 2026.[7] Canada had protectionist policies in place for the clothing and textile industry up until the 1980s.[8] Without cheap imported options, making clothing at home and taking care of that clothing was a cost-saving practice in Canadian households. In 1989, Canadian-made products fulfilled about 70% of the domestic demand for clothing and textiles. That same year saw a free trade agreement with the United States.[9] As import barriers fell, Canada increasingly imported clothing, accounting for 35% of the clothing market in 1992 and 62% by 2004.[10] As of 2021, 95% of the clothing bought in Canada was imported, and Canadians consumed $12 billion worth of apparel, while only having the production capacity of $2.4 billion.[11] When clothing production moved outside of Canada, and imported ready-made fashion became cheaper, buying Canadian-made goods, or making clothing at home became more and more expensive in comparison.

With clothing production moving further outside of Canada, there has been a corresponding increase in the disconnection between the clothing we wear and the knowledge

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[5] Vivian Wilcox and Eveleen Dollery, "Margaret Snyder gets a whole new wardrobe for $154!," *Chatelaine*, January, 1970, 30-31.
[6] Vivian Wilcox and Eveleen Dollery, "Margaret Snyder gets a whole new wardrobe for $154!," *Chatelaine*, January, 1970, 30-31.
[7] Diana Wyman, "Stretching or Shrinking? The Textile and Clothing Industries in Canada," Statistics Canada, International Trade Division, 2005, 2.
[8] Rianne Mahon, *The Politics of Industrial Restructuring : Canadian Textiles*, (University of Toronto Press, 1984), 96.
[9] Diana Wyman, "Stretching or Shrinking? The Textile and Clothing Industries in Canada," Statistics Canada, International Trade Division, 2005, 2.
[10] Diana Wyman, "Stretching or Shrinking? The Textile and Clothing Industries in Canada," Statistics Canada, International Trade Division, 2005, 2.
[11] "Apparel Industry Profile," Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/consumer-products/en/industry-profiles/apparel, accessed May 8, 2026.

of how it was made. In her book *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*, Susan Strasser examined how what is considered garbage by societies changes over time, explaining that "the categories of objects we use and throw out are fluid and socially defined."[12] *Waste and Want* was published in 1999, right before the explosion of fast fashion, however, it provides a useful framework to examine how clothing has continued to become more and more disposable since 1999. As Strasser noted, "people who have not sewed, or at least watched others sewing, value that labour less than those who have, and lack the skills and the scraps that enables so many women to see old clothing as worthy of remaking."[13] In short, the decline in sewing and garment construction knowledge allowed consumers to rationalize and accept ultra low-cost clothing. By contrast, understanding the time, skill, and energy that goes into making a garment contributes to consumers valuing and taking care of that garment. Fast fashion is easier to throw away, both because of the cheap price tag and the distance between the maker and the consumer. Consumers are less likely to mend clothing as they are further removed from the process of making it. Strasser perfectly explained this idea: "it is easier to discard a ready-made dress, cut and stitched in an unknown sweatshop…, than it is to throw away something you or your mother made."[14]

The Prior State of Affairs – Emphasis on Quality

The emphasis on quality that shaped clothing consumption in the mid-twentieth-century Canada did not emerge in a vacuum. It reflected long-term economic and cultural legacies of the Great Depression and WWII, which fostered consumer values centred on durability, thrift, and making do. In his survey of the history of consumption, *Empire of Things*, Frank Trentmann noted that Canadian consumers were notably slow to abandon functional yet labour-intensive

[12] Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want : A Social History of Trash*. 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999), 8.
[13] Strasser, *Waste and Wa*nt, 12.
[14] Strasser, *Waste and Want*, 12.

goods in favor of newer models. As late as the 1960s, "wringer washing machines still outsold automatics," as "Canadian women preferred durability and distrusted complicated machines with multiple cycles."[15] This continued reliance on older technologies, even when newer alternatives were available, exemplifies a broader reluctance to replace functioning goods simply for the sake of novelty. Joy Parr has also examined the slow consumerism of household appliances in Canada following WWII.[16] Such attitudes towards consumption form the essential backdrop against which we understand how quality, value, and careful purchasing were framed in both *Chatelain*e's editorial discourses, advertisements, and Ontario Home Economics curricula between the 1950s and the 1970s.

Throughout the 1950s-1970s, however, achieving quality remained a cardinal value of Home Economics curricula and of *Chatelaine's* editorial line. Quality has various meanings and definitions. Quality can mean an inherent feature, capacity or role, degree of excellence, superiority of any kind of a thing. Quality can refer to how good or bad something is in terms of its materiality and physical features, though it is most often associated with "good quality." A positive connotation comes from hearing something is "quality." This chapter demonstrates that understandings of quality conveyed through *Chatelaine* and Ontario Home Economics curricula understood "quality" as something being well-made, long-lasting, and the best price for the value. Quality was a key theme present in discourses around both making and consuming clothing. *Chatelaine* and the Home Economics curricula often cited quality as a factor and motivator of decision-making when buying or making clothes. These discourses offer a window into Canadian consumer behavior, and, I argue, contributed to shaping Canadians as decerning consumers, able to spot good quality, while also shaping Canadian consumers in their appearance and behaviour.

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[15] Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things : How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First*, (Allen Lane, 2016), 253.
[16] Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods : The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, (University of Toronto Press, 1999).

Chatelaine: Instructing and Responsabilizing Readers to be Good Consumers

Within *Chatelaine*'s fashion coverage, quality was consistently framed as compatible with—rather than opposed to—fashionability. A recurring theme in the magazine's advice was the tension between keeping up with changing styles and avoiding wasteful consumption. Articles such as "Ten New Ways to Wear What You Have,"[17] "Sew and Save: $410 Worth of Fashion for $136,"[18] and "9 Great Looks to Sew for Less than $240"[19] offered readers strategies to remain stylish while extending the lifespan of their wardrobes. Reusing garments, sewing at home, and carefully planning purchases were presented not as signs of deprivation but as means of achieving high-quality dress at a manageable cost.

This emphasis on strategic consumption coexisted with, and occasionally pushed against, the magazine's extensive fashion advertising. As Valerie Korinek has argued, *Chatelaine*'s editorial content and advertisements should be read separately, as the magazine often "in a quite subversive manner, encouraged Canadian women to think about other options for their lives" beyond uncritical consumption.[20] Korinek's analysis provides context, explaining conflicting messaging in the pages of *Chatelaine*. My examination of the editorial content in *Chatelaine* reveals how the magazine sought to define the search for quality as a deliberative consumer practice and to empower their readership with consumer agency. Rather than encouraging constant acquisition, *Chatelaine* editors repeatedly warned against overspending on clothing and luxury goods, urging readers to stay within a budget while prioritizing well-made, versatile pieces. *Chatelaine* resolved the tension it contained in its very

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[17] Mildred Spicer, "Ten New ways to wear what you have," *Chatelaine*, December 1950, 51.
[18] "Sew and Save: $410 worth of fashion for $136," *Chatelaine*, August 1965, cover page.
[19] Eveleen Dollery, "9 great looks to sew for less than $240," *Chatelaine*, August, 1970, 34-38.
[20] Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs : Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*, (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 26.

pages between the ads selling new clothes and the articles that advised against buying too much by redefining restraint, care, and reuse as qualities of good taste and intelligence.

The responsibility of maintaining quality did not end at the point of purchase. Proper garment care was consistently presented in *Chatelaine* and in Ontario Home Economics curricula as an essential component of good consumer practice. The duty of caring for clothing was emphasized in the 1974 curriculum, which stated that "the time, energy, money and knowledge invested in the selection of attractive and serviceable clothing will bring dividends only if that clothing is given the necessary care."[21] In this framework, laundering, mending, and storage were not ancillary skills but central to preserving value and extending the usefulness of clothing. Quality consumption thus required not only discernment at the store but ongoing labour in the home. *Chatelaine*'s advice and advertisements reflect and encouraged this responsibility towards the care of good-quality clothing.

Chatelaine marketed good-quality fashion and trained Canadian consumers to recognize quality in various ways, the most visible and consistent way being its "seal of approval." The magazine worked as an authoritative guide that trained readers to recognize and value "good" consumption, encouraging readers to take responsibility for making the right choices. The *Chatelaine* Institute granted the seal of approval to products it deemed as high quality and the seal featured prominently in the pages of the magazine. While the presence of the seal was a consistent feature in the magazine from 1950 to 1970, its presentation changed over the decades.[22] Still, it never failed to inform the readers about the care and methodology that went behind the testing and reviewing of products that earned the seal. In the 1950s, each issue highlighted a new product in an article titled "the Institute Approves." The feature would describe how and why the product met the high standards of the *Chatelaine* Institute, and why

[21] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Family Studies 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 6. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7).
[22] The 1975 issues I examined did not have the seal of approval.

readers should feel comfortable buying the product. Featured goods ranged from household goods, to food, and clothing. The "Institute Approves" column outlined the intense testing that products needed to pass before getting the seal, communicating to readers that the seal was not given out frivolously. One feature on a steam iron concluded that "the results of this three-way examination for ease of operation, clarity of directions and quality of construction were studied together. They convinced us that the Thor Automatic Glad Iron deserved the *Chatelaine* Institute Seal of Approval."[23] The features worked as advertisement for products, but also as a quick way for shoppers to trust that a product was good quality, without having to do any time-consuming research or testing of their own.

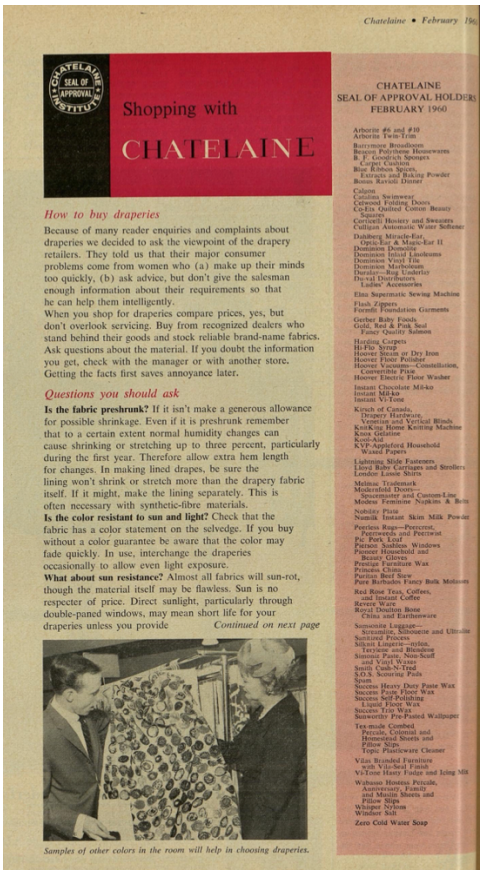


Figure 3.1: "The Institute Approves," *Chatelaine*, May 1950, 16.

In the 1960s, the marketing of *Chatelaine's* seal of approval expanded considerably. Features titled "Shopping with *Chatelaine*" offered a deep dive on one product, or a particular

[23] "The Institute Approves," *Chatelaine*, May 1950, 16.

category of products. Additionally, on the side of the feature, readers could find a full list of seal-approved products. In 1960, there were over 80 products and brands listed out in the February issue. The long list included products to facilitate making clothing such as: the "Elna Supermatic Sewing Machine," "Knit King Home Knitting Machine," and "Hoover Steam or Dry Iron."[24] Many products like the sewing machine were large investments for a household, having the *Chatelaine* seal helped readers feel confident in their purchases. Several clothing brands were on the list, including: "Corticelli Hosiery and Sweaters," "Formfit Foundation Garments," and "London Lassie Shirts." Products on the list covered all aspects of household needs, and so there were also food products such as "Pic Pork Loaf" on the list.



Shopping with CHATELAINE

How to buy draperies

Because of many reader enquiries and complaints about draperies we decided to ask the viewpoint of the drapery retailers. They told us that their major consumer problems come from women who (a) make up their minds too quickly, (b) ask advice, but don't give the salesman enough information about their requirements so that he can help them intelligently.
When you shop for draperies compare prices, yes, but don't overlook servicing. Buy from recognized dealers who stand behind their goods and stock reliable brand-name fabrics. Ask questions about the material. If you doubt the information you get, check with the manager or with another store. Getting the facts first saves annoyance later.

Questions you should ask

Is the fabric preshrunk? If it isn't make a generous allowance for possible shrinkage. Even if it is preshrunk remember that to a certain extent normal humidity changes can cause shrinking or stretching up to three percent, particularly during the first year. Therefore allow extra hem length for changes. In making lined drapes, be sure the lining won't shrink or stretch more than the drapery fabric itself. If it might, make the lining separately. This is often necessary with synthetic-fibre materials.
Is the color resistant to sun and light? Check that the fabric has a color statement on the selvedge. If you buy without a color guarantee be aware that the color may fade quickly. In use, interchange the draperies occasionally to allow even light exposure.
What about sun resistance? Almost all fabrics will sun-rot, though the material itself may be flawless. Sun is no respecter of price. Direct sunlight, particularly through double-paned windows, may mean short life for your draperies unless you provide *Continued on next page*

Samples of other colors in the room will help in choosing draperies.

CHATELAINE SEAL OF APPROVAL HOLDERS FEBRUARY 1960

Figure 3.2: "Shopping with *Chatelaine*," *Chatelaine* February 1960 84.

The February 1970 edition featured a full page all about the seal. It did not feature the full list of products, however it noted that over 250 products had been granted the seal to date. The page explained how the *Chatelaine* Institute tested different products, "in all cases testing

[24] "Shopping with *Chatelaine*," *Chatelaine* February 1960, 84.

is undertaken by specialized research laboratories. In addition, practical tests are undertaken by the *Chatelaine* Institute and many products are use-tested by women in their homes."[25] This page also emphasised that not only did the Institute test the products, but it also tested all of the marketing claims made by the product, to protect consumers against exaggerated claims. The 1970s had a recurring featured article titled "Of Consuming Interest," which always featured the *Chatelaine* seal of approval logo beside the title, with the reminder to "look for this seal. It's your guide to good shopping."[26] Even when these columns did not feature a new product with the seal, readers were reminded to look out for the seal when shopping. The *Chatelaine* seal was associated with quality and good value for consumers.



Figure 3.3: "Of Consuming Interest," *Chatelaine*, September 1970, 84.

Similarly, the goal of the "Of Consuming Interest" column was to help consumers by providing shopping tips, focusing on problems Canadians faced and advising the *Chatelaine* approved products that offered solutions. In 1970 Una Abramson penned the column, and Bonnie Cornell took over in 1975. In September 1970, Una Abramson dedicated a column to women's clothing titled: "Women's Clothing: What's Wrong."[27] The main issues outlined in the article were price, fit, and quality, and how it was an ongoing challenge to find clothing that ticked all the boxes for consumers. Abramson advised that consumers look out for brand names and shop in stores that carry a preferred line, saying that it "may be time-consuming but it pays

[25] "What does this Seal Mean?," *Chatelaine*, February 1970, 54.
[26] Una Abramson, "Of Consuming Interest," *Chatelaine*, February 1970, 14.
[27] Una Abramson, "Of Consuming Interest, Women's Clothing: What's Wrong," *Chatelaine*, September 1970, 84-86.

off in satisfaction."[28] This advice shows that finding quality pieces took time. Even when the majority of clothing was made in Canada, and overall quality was better than our current context of 2026, discerning consumers had high standards and took extra time to ensure quality in purchases. *Chatelaine* readers had sent Abrahamson their own clothing complaints, a selection of which the magazine reproduced in the column. Quality in particular comes out as a major concern. One reader lamented that "seam allowances, like fountain pens, are becoming history" while another complained that "there's not enough lining or turnup left to lengthen sleeves, and it annoys me to put false hems on a brand-new garment."[29] Both of these complaints refer to the difficulty of altering ready-made clothing. Larger seam allowances and lining would allow consumers to adjust a garment to their exact measurements and needs and also allow for the possibility of growing with the garment rather than discarding if it no longer fit. Even when shopping for ready-made clothing, the possibility to alter it yourself, if needed, was a marker of the garments' high-quality fabrication.

Discussions on the price-quality ratio featured heavily in the "Of Consuming Interest" column. Topics such as how to avoid deceptive advertising, meal planning and grocery shopping, what to look for when buying leather goods, and how to choose a contractor for home projects peppered the column.[30] The February 1975 edition had a column titled "I can get it for you cheaper," that advised readers to keep a running list of the best price they paid for everyday household items and keep it in their purse to compare when out shopping. Bonnie Cornell, who then authored the column, also suggested that for any item over $10 ($60 in 2026), consumers should "look around to determine the model or brand you want and then phone at least three outlets to check prices."[31] These shopping tips involved large time-commitments

[28] Una Abramson, "Of Consuming Interest, Women's Clothing: What's Wrong," *Chatelaine*, September 1970, 84.
[29] Una Abramson, "Of Consuming Interest, Women's Clothing: What's Wrong," *Chatelaine*, September 1970, 84.
[30] Una Abrahamson, "Of Consuming Interest," *Chatelaine*, June 1970, 16; August 1970, 12; October 1970, 26.
[31] Bonnie Cornell, "Of Consuming Interest: I can get it for you cheaper," *Chatelaine*, February, 1975, 36.

and planning ahead, keeping note of all purchases and carefully planning in order to save a few dollars on good-quality items.

Chatelaine positioned itself as providing advice to their readers to be better consumers, and de facto placed the responsibility of making good consumer choices onto readers. One 1970 "Of Consuming Interest" column responded to readers' frustrations with drycleaners messing up garments or stretching out knits. Abramson explained that certain issues like "shoddy fibre, unknown blends, plastics," are out of the drycleaner's control. Mislabeled or poor-quality garments being ruined at the drycleaner was not the drycleaner's fault, but that of the consumer who should have known better and bought better quality pieces. Abramson's column places the onus of garments ruined at the drycleaners on the consumers' shoulders. It was their responsibility to buy quality garments and take care of their clothing in a way to better facilitate drycleaning. The column advised readers to "have clothes cleaned before they are heavily soiled, don't dab at stains yourself," and to clean stained garments as quickly as possible.[32] The message of this article was that if consumers bought quality clothing and took good care of it, there would be fewer mishaps at the drycleaner. It meant, however, that advice *Chatelaine* offered were not equally attainable or sustainable for all readers depending on their financial means, and disposable time.

Sewing occupied a key place in *Chatelaine*'s consumer discourse as a means of asserting control over quality in an unsatisfactory ready-made clothing market. While home sewing was sometimes framed as a way to save money, the magazine frequently emphasized that making garments at home allowed consumers to ensure standards of construction, fit, and durability that were often lacking in store-bought clothing. Even when sewing was not

[32] Una Abramson, "Of Consuming Interest, Don't Shoot: Dry Cleaners are Doing their Best," *Chatelaine*, February 1970, 14.

significantly cheaper, it offered assurance of quality—provided the maker possessed the necessary skills.

This emphasis on quality over cost aligns with Cheryl Buckley's findings on British working-class women's home sewing in the early to mid-twentieth century. Buckley notes that sewing at home was often motivated less by thrift than by dissatisfaction with "the apparent shoddiness of much shop-bought clothing," which consumers scrutinized by turning garments inside out to inspect seam construction before purchasing.[33] A similar sensibility appears in the pages of *Chatelaine*, particularly in the "Of Consuming Interest" column on women's clothing, where readers complained about narrow seam allowances, poor construction, and ill-fitting garments.[34]

Within this context, sewing skills functioned as a form of consumer expertise. They enabled women to bypass low-quality ready-made garments altogether or to alter purchased clothing in order to improve fit and extend wear. Home sewing thus complemented *Chatelaine*'s broader project of cultivating discerning consumers who could recognize and respond to material quality—not only through shopping choices, but through their ability to intervene materially in their own wardrobes.

Even content that did not entirely depend on *Chatelaine's* editorial team—like advertisements, for instance—played a key role in marketing quality as a key motivator for making good consumer choices. A full-page advertisement for Singer sewing machines in a 1965 edition of *Chatelaine* asked readers if they had ever purchased something low-cost, and ended up regretting that choice. The ad continued stating that Singer machines were worth the extra upfront cost, because: "a singer sewing machine may cost a little more – but you'll get so

[33] Cheryl Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home," in Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing : Gender, Consumption, and Home Dressmaking*, (Berg, 1999), 60.
[34] Una Abramson, "Of Consuming Interest, Women's Clothing: What's Wrong," *Chatelaine*, September 1970, 84-86.

many exclusive features to make sewing a joy… and priceless quality, for extra years of pleasure!" [35]



Figure 3.4: "Singer Sewing Machine," *Chatelaine*, August 1965, 11.

The advertisement pushed the idea of "priceless quality" as a selling feature for sewists to invest in one machine that could theoretically last for many years. The ad thus explicitly states that investing in the sewing machine to make clothes was a guarantee of cheaper good quality clothes. The ad goes on to outline how this investment was worth it and available to various consumers at various price points, including "at teenagers' budget prices, young homemakers' prices, [and] wedding gift prices."[36] The various price points allowed for Singer quality to be accessible for all kinds of consumers. The ad featured a contemporary matching set in a floral pattern, explaining that you could easily "make 'new look' outfits like the one we show here,

[35] "Singer Sewing Machine," *Chatelaine*, August 1965, 11.
[36] "Singer Sewing Machine," *Chatelaine*, August 1965, 11.

for $24.29… Compared to well over $75.00 ready-made! Your singer sewing machine soon pays for itself!”[37] Showing that the savings of making clothing rather than buying all new could pay for the machine overtime was another appeal to consumers who were conscious about spending money wisely. The message of the ad was that an expensive Singer machine would be worth it in the long term, as it would last a long time and women would save money overtime by making good quality clothing instead of buying them, perhaps of lesser quality. In summary, in its editorial pages, via its coveted seal of approval, and even through its advertisements, *Chatelaine* conveyed the importance of quality in all purchases.

Appearing as a Quality Person & Citizen

Attaining quality in consuming extended beyond the ability to select good-quality products at good value. It also meant attaining quality in appearances, behaviours, activism and citizenship. The Ontario Home Economics curriculum emphasized quality through all the consumer education sections, through budgeting and assessing quality of ready-made garments, students were taught to prioritize quality in all of their purchases. Quality in personal appearance and behaviour was also present in the Home Economics curriculum. In 1951 and 1964, there were “personal appearance” sections that pushed some middleclass, white (not explicitly stated, but implicitly so), notions of femininity that students were taught to emulate and aspire to. The personal appearance section from the 1951 curriculum included a list of qualities that contributed to personal attractiveness: “character traits, manners at home and in public, poise, and friendliness.”[38] Essentials for an attractive appearance included “good carriage, correct habits of personal hygiene, and grooming,” along with “appropriate clothing

[37] “Singer Sewing Machine,” *Chatelaine*, August 1965, 11. ($24.29 = 242.75 in 2026 and $75 = 749.55 in 2026)
[38] Outline of Courses for Experimental Use Intermediate Division, 1951, F4435-7-0-4, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 285. (Hereafter cited as Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4).

for the individual, occasion, and weather."[39] Rigid beauty and grooming standards were promoted through school curriculum, not only though popular media like magazines. These beauty standards were presented as ways for students to appear as quality people. The personal appearance sections of the Home Economics curricula can be further understood in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's classic work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979). Bourdieu explained the link between social status and consumption, and how aesthetics could convey morality and class.[40]

The 1964 curriculum outlined that an effective Home Economics course could "mean the difference between an organized and artistic way of living or a chaotic and unattractive existence within the home."[41] I interpret the words "chaotic" and "unattractive" as meaning anything outside of the white middle-class ideal, promoting conformity in both behaviour and appearance. A learning outcome from 1964 was for students "to understand the importance of a good appearance in personal relationships."[42] Fitting in with norms was the goal of this section, rather than promoting something like self-esteem. The 1974 curriculum revision did not have a personal appearance section, reflecting an attempt to adapt the subject for all students, including boys. The gendered underpinnings of Home Economics will be examined in the next chapter.

Similar ideas of personal appearance were pushed through the pages of *Chatelaine* in fashion and beauty advice. Historian Patrizia Gentile argues that advice about how to be "beautiful, charming, and respectable," were key factors in promoting "settler femininity" in

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[39] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 285.
[40] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice, (Harvard University Press, 1985).
[41] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Home Economics 1964, F4435-7-0-6, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 3. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6).
[42] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 43.

Canada.[43] In her book, *Queen of the Maple Leaf*, she contends that beauty pageants in Canada were one a way these ideals were broadcast to the Canadian public.[44] I add that the Ontario Home Economics curricula and advice from *Chatelaine* both reinforced white-settler ideals of femininity in similar ways as the beauty pageants Gentile examined.

Ways for *Chatelaine's* readers to show quality in their appearance also appeared in the magazine's advice columns that linked personal appearance to character. Articles would often advise readers to buy the best quality within their budgets, and remind them about the importance of dressing in conveying their character. A 1955 *Chatelaine* article presented advice for women entering the workforce, and the high standards expected of them when dressing for the workplace. The fashion editor Rosemary Boxer reinforces the same advice presented in the "personal appearance" sections of the Ontario Home Economics curriculum, emphasizing how dressing well was correlated to appearing professional. She cautioned that "until now, it hasn't mattered if your sweater sagged and your shoes were scuffed… leave all the fine, free carelessness of your high-school days back in the classroom." [45] Boxer advised that women choose "plain, unfussy dresses in quiet, dark colours or subdued prints…" nothing too loud that would draw attention. The article ends with Boxer telling young women to "never fool yourself that no one will notice if your shoes need repairing, that your sweater has shed a button, or that your little white collar is a shade on the grey side. They will!" [46] This advice illustrates the high standards and severe judgment that could be present for women in the workforce. A 1960 article titled "Dos and Don'ts of Dressing for the Job," advised readers that when dressing for the office, they should ensure that they had the best quality leather handbag that they could

[43] Patrizia Gentile, *Queen of the Maple Leaf : Beauty Contests and Settler Femininity*, (University of British Columbia Press, 2021), 18
Queen of the Maple Leaf, 18.
[44] Gentile, *Queen of the Maple Leaf,* 5.
[45] Rosemary Boxer, "Best looks forward on your first job," *Chatelaine*, May 1955, 22.
[46] Rosemary Boxer, "Best looks forward on your first job," *Chatelaine*, May 1955, 22.

afford.[47] The article was not advertising a specific bag, and did not go into detail about what made a leather bag "good quality," but it left room for the reader to interpret the advice and buy the best bag to fit their situation, including at different price points. Other tips included ensuring hemlines were neither too short nor too long and to never wear a sheer blouse, "ornate necklaces, rhinestones, or dangle earrings."[48] Illustrating the ways that small accessories or fabric choices could covey unprofessionalism and poor-judgement, that reflected on the personal character of the wearer.

In Ontario Home Economics curricula, preparing students to be citizens was a cardinal value and learning goal. The 1951 curriculum noted the Home Economics courses "contribute to the pupils' understanding of citizenship."[49] Teaching female students how to participate in Canadian society, through gendered ideals of femininity and learning to be a homemaker was part of the curriculum. Students were learning to sew for personal use, family, and "other, e.g. the Red Cross."[50] Using sewing skills for charity work was one way that good citizenship was exhibited by students. One of the aims from the 1964 curriculum was to "help the pupils to understand the contribution of the family to the social and economic structure of society."[51] This contribution was communicated particularly through the role of wife and mother, linking homemaking practices with good quality Canadian families. The 1974 curriculum had less of a direct link to citizenship, however it was still implicitly a goal of the course. A general aim for students from 1974 was "the development of a system of values and a sense of identity."[52] Good values were not communicated directly through personal appearance in this version, but still linked through students' understanding of family, household responsibility, clothing, and food.

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[47] Vivian Wilcox, "Dos and Don'ts of Dressing for the Job," *Chatelaine*, September, 1960, 38.
[48] Vivian Wilcox, "Dos and Don'ts of Dressing for the Job," *Chatelaine*, September, 1960, 38.
[49] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 270.
[50] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 277.
[51] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 4.
[52] Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, 1.

Conclusion

Personally, some of my most-worn items are from my grandmothers and my mom. The quality of these garments surpasses what you can easily find at the mall in 2026. Many of them were made in Canada, or handmade by my grandmothers. I joke that my parent's basement is my favourite thrift store (I feel both lucky and sometimes overwhelmed that they keep so many things). It is a testament to the quality of the clothing, much of which was purchased from the 1950s to 1970s, that they have stood the test of time and that I can still wear and enjoy the pieces.

Doris Anderson was an early critic of overconsumption, a theme that was present in several of her *Chatelaine* editorials. In her 1996 memoir she presented this had this assessment of the 1960s:

> in many ways the 60s repelled my depression weathered soul. It was an age of excess—a bit like the 80s—and the true beginning of consumerism. We were told there would be no end to prosperity, if only people bought more– a conventional piece of mythology still being promoted today. We were urged to toss out perfectly good objects that were slightly out of date.[53]

In the 30 years from 1996 when Anderson was writing and today, the pace of overconsuming in Canada has only increased. It is interesting to look back on discourse from the 1950s-1970s and find that much of it advised against overconsuming. *Chatelaine* positioned readers as discerning consumers, taught them what to look for, and asked them to internalize clear moral expectations about quality, restraint, and care. Quality in consuming was an overarching theme present through *Chatelaine* and the Ontario Home Economics curriculum. Making quality things and finding the best deals all take time. Much of the advice was predicated on having enough time to find deals, shop around, or make things yourself. As more and more women entered the workforce in Canada, time for all of this declined. This coincided with the decline

[53] Doris Anderson, *Rebel Daughter: An Autobiography,* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1996), 211.

of Home Economics and sewing education, all of which contributed to the average Canadian consumer's acceptance of fast fashion.

Chapter 4

"The Perfect Homemaker": Working Women, Feminism, & Home Economics

In the mid-twentieth century, the field of Home Economics became an arena for debates about the changing societal role for women and girls. It overlapped with Canada women's movements (or second wave feminism), which is typically situated between 1960-1985.[1] This intertwined conversation about women's role in society played out in part on the pages of *Chatelaine*. Doris Anderson had this to say about the "perfect homemaker" in a 1965 editorial:

> We all know her—she's beautiful, faultlessly groomed, an impeccable housekeeper, a fabulous cook, an ever-patient mother, ever-loving wife, a cheerful worker for good causes, glamourous and sexy (in the right situation), and in the 1965 model she even has an interesting job, which she manages in her spare time, effortlessly, of course. She has only one flaw—she doesn't exist. Into the garbage can with her, cheerful smile, unchipped nail polish and all.[2]

Here, Anderson touches on the mounting social expectations that post-WWII women faced: manage a household, keep up appearances, all while having have a job. From the 1950s to the 1970s in Canada these expectations created a tension pulling in two directions. Homemakers increasingly felt pressure to work, and women who worked felt shamed for not managing all the household responsibilities themselves.

Early Home Economics developed in the legacy of the mid-nineteenth century ideology of separate spheres for men and women, with the domestic sphere being for women. This conception of gender roles was prevalent despite the reality that women have always worked outside of the home.[3] Home Economics reached its peak in the 1950s, at a time of suburbanization and idealization of the stay-at-home mom. The 1950s to 1970s were decades flooded by discourses about working women, that were anchored in the changing reality of the

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[1] Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality : One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism,* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2021); Sharon A Cook, Lorna R McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, *Framing Our Past : Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century,* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).
[2] Doris Anderson, "Mystiques we can do without in 1965," *Chatelaine*, January, 1965, 1.
[3] Janet Vey Guildford and Suzanne Morton, *Separate Spheres : Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes,* (Fredericton, N.B: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 121.

time. The labour force participation rate for women in Canada (married and unmarried) grew from 24% in 1953 to 42% in 1970, and was up to 50% in 1975.[4] The number of married women working outside of the home increased from 4% in 1941 to 22% in 1961 and 30% in 1970.[5]

The rapidly increasing percentage of women in the Canadian workforce was one factor that prompted the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW) in 1967. The commission and its 1970 report became a turning point in the history of the women's movement in Canada.[6] The educational recommendations from the RCSW report can be seen through the 1974 rebrand of Home Economics in Ontario schools to "Family Studies," which attempted to appeal to both boys and girls. This chapter dives into the gendered discourse around Home Economics and women working in Canada. Tracing the impact of second wave feminism on Home Economics education in Canada, I argue that the educational reforms following the RCSW resulted in an uneven effort that left home economics/Family Studies behind, contributing to a decrease in sewing education and, therefore, home sewing.

The Ontario Curriculum & Gender

The goal of home economics, as stated in the 1951 curriculum, was to impart basic principles so that "girls and boys are better able to solve their problems of personal and family living."[7] Both boys and girls were included in the overall goal of the program. However, throughout the curriculum, the students are always assumed to be girls, with the exception of one small subsection named "Home Economics for boys." In a paragraph about getting students in grade 7 and 8 interested in Home Eonomics, the curriculum stated that, "the girls in these

[4] "The surge of women in the workforce," Statistics Canada, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015009-eng.htm, accessed January 15, 2026.
[5] Joan Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence." *The Canadian Historical Review* (North York) 92, no. 1 (2011), 139.
[6] Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," 139.
[7] Outline of Courses for Experimental Use Intermediate Division, 1951, F4435-7-0-4, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 266. (Hereafter cited as Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4).

grades have a strong family tie but are developing an increasing feeling of independence."[8] The homemaking section also exclusively mentioned girls, stating that the activities taught should be "based on the girl's responsibilities at home and at school…"[9] These responsibilities were based on gendered assumptions that girls would already be helping out with domestic tasks at home, and had a particular need to learn these skills for their future as homemakers. The small subsection about boys was also full of 1950s gendered norms that would appear stereotypical to our modern eyes, noting that boys and girls would have different interests. It outlined what useful things boys could learn from Home Economics, including: "the selection, preparation, and serving of simple food, the selection and care of clothing, personal finances, and personal relationships with other people."[10] To acquire these seemingly basic skills, boys had a very limited time allotment in the curriculum. The curriculum suggested either one special unit, or a brief exchange between time spent in industrial arts and in Home Economics. Although the skills listed in the curriculum for the special unit for boys are useful, Home Economics was relegated to something superfluous or optional, a special unit to be covered if time allowed, not as a necessary educational unit.

The 1964 curriculum was just as prescriptive with gender roles as the 1951 version, with the introduction stating that "the nucleus of the family is the wife and mother. The value of the study of Home Economics for future wives and mothers cannot be overestimated."[11] This version of the curriculum did not have one mention of Home Economics for boys. Even the premise from 1951 that boys might benefit from a short Home Economics unit, gaining some knowledge of preparing simple meals and managing personal finances and relationships had been removed. The learning aims from the wardrobe planning section included learning

[8] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 274.
[9] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 275.
[10] Outline of Courses 1951, F4435-7-0-4, 272.
[11] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Home Economics 1964, F4435-7-0-6, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 3. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6).

how to choose the best kind of dress for each occasion, and understanding the money available for the "girl's share of family clothing budget."[12] There was no mention of boys' clothing or share of the budget.

In 1974, Home Economics in Ontario was renamed "Family Studies." The new curriculum introduction stated that "the change in name is intended to convey the evolvement of Home Economics as it has responded to changing modes of fulfilling family functions and to changing roles of family members."[13] The change was explained as result of outgrowing the name "Home Economics," as a natural evolution of the discipline to meet the needs of students in an everchanging society. To outline the key changes in the curriculum from 1964 to 1974, a pamphlet was created. The intended audience for the pamphlet may have been Home Economics teachers, high school administrators, or Ontario Department of Education bureaucrats. However, it presented the main changes clearly with a rationale for each major update as well as for the name change. Overall, the rebranding of Home Economics placed a larger emphasis on the family. Notwithstanding the 1964 curriculum already having the goal "to help the pupils to understand the contribution of the family to the social and economic structure of society," the pamphlet argued that this aim was only achieved incidentally. The new Family Studies curriculum would achieve this aim "through direct teaching about family and child as the central focus of each course."[14] The new curriculum used the universal "he" when speaking about students and course outlines, a departure from the previous versions which almost exclusively referred to students in Home Economics with the pronoun "she."

The reigning assumption in the 1950s and 1960s was that students and teachers of Home Economics were girls and women. I do not have statistics on the exact gender divide in

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[12] Curriculum Guidelines 1964, F4435-7-0-6, 41.
[13] Curriculum Guidelines Intermediate Division Family Studies 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 1. (Hereafter cited as Curriculum Guidelines 1974-1975, F4435-7-0-7).
[14] Home Economics in Ontario Schools has a new name, 1976, F4435-7-0-22, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario, 4.

Ontario Home Economics classes among pupils. I found that there were no male names (although this can be subjective) in Lydia Snow's class papers or fashion show scripts from the 1960s and 1970s,[15] and the 1970 Report on the Status of Women in Canada found that Shop and Home Economics classes in Canada were typically segregated by gender.[16] In 1960, professional home economist, Lillian Allen, described the development of Home Economics as "a unique educational program for those concerned with the home and family, and adapted to the particular interests and responsibilities of women."[17] Just as the students were assumed to be girls, so were the teachers. Women educators in Canada, before the women's movement, were largely confined to teaching Home Economics and English, "subjects that officials deemed a public service because of their nurturing propensity."[18] All in all, the inclusion of boys in Home Economics was timid at best, and the coursework was mainly conceived and taught by women for girls.

Working Women & Home Economics

Societal changes often prompted debates about the role of Home Economics and the increase of women working outside of the home certainly had that effect. Home Economics as a discipline always shifted in order to respond to the needs of the Canadian home. In the 1890s, Adelaide Hoodles perceived the time girls spent in school rather than at home as a threat to the home and an impediment to their learning of all the ways to take care of a home. Notable Canadian home economist, Edith Rowles, explained that Mrs. Hoodles' resolution in the face

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[15] Papers: Lydia Snow—Fashion Show Tecumseh, Burlington, 1974, F4435-7-0-151, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario.
[16] Canada, Privy Council Office, Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1970), http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pco-bcp/commissions-ef/ bird1970-eng/bird1970-eng.htm, 173. (Hereafter Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970).
[17] Lillian B. Allen "School of Home Economics—University of Manitoba," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, 1960, volume 10, no.2, 3.
[18] Kristina R, Llewellyn, "Teaching June Cleaver, Being Hazel Chong: An Oral History of Gender, Race, and National "Character," in *Feminist History in Canada : New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation*. (UBC Press, 2013), 187.

of that perceived danger brought about, in 1894, the formal teaching of homemaking in Canadian public schools.[19] Writing in 1962, Rowles argued that the contemporary threat to the home was even more serious now than it had been in 1894, stating that "society today is putting pressure on married women to earn a salary. What does that do to homes?"[20] Rowles refers here to the perceived pressure on women to work outside of the home. Rowles took quite a binary view of women's role in Canadian society, stating that "the woman's role is that of homemaker; the man's role in our society is still that of breadwinner… The question which each married couple must raise, and must settle for their own family, is whether the wife can help earn the living and also do her job as homemaker."[21] Rowles conceded that some women would work outside of the home, but believed that a woman's first priority should be taking care of the household. It is interesting that Rowles—who held a PhD in Education and taught at the University of Saskatchewan for forty years, retiring as the Dean of Home Economics[22]—clearly had a thriving career outside of the home, yet was still so set in the gender roles of the time and the breadwinner/homemaker binary.

Rowles believed deeply in the value of Home Economics education and worried that Home Economics courses would become obsolete unless they were adapted to the reality of living in the 1960s. She predicted that "unless action is taken soon, high school Home Economics will be offered only to one stream of girls, the ones with the lower intelligence quotients and not at all to boys. We cannot be satisfied with this when we realize what Home Economics has to offer."[23] Some of her ideas to adapt Home Economics education were in tension with her conception of the breadwinner/homemaker binary. She expressed ideas that

[19] Edith Rowles, "Home Economics—A Basic Discipline," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, 1962, volume 12, no.2, 43.
[20] Rowles, "Home Economics—A Basic Discipline," 44.
[21] Rowles, "Home Economics—A Basic Discipline," 44.
[22] "Simpson, Edith Child Rowles (1905- 97)," University of Regina, https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/simpson_edith_child_rowles_1905-_97.html, accessed April 27, 2026.
[23] Rowles, "Home Economics—A Basic Discipline," 44-45.

align with feminist ideals of equitable gender dynamic in the home. Yet, she also maintained that the homemaker was female and was responsible for taking care of the home at the end of day. She advocated that teachers present a positive attitude towards married women working, but she also was of the opinion that married women should take part time roles or jobs that could easily be balanced with being at home, not necessarily a full career. She also, in a somewhat contradictory way, advocated for high school Home Economics becoming compulsory for both boys and girls, teaching that responsibilities in the home should be shared between all family members.[24] Home Economics was centred around educating women, but notably, educating them within the context of gendered norms that confined women to the house and the family unit.

Still, looking back at the role it played in the twentieth century, Home Economics had the potential to—and sometimes did—serve as a vehicle to promote the involvement of women outside of the home and their broader impact on Canadian society. The Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA), founded in 1939, presents an interesting case of a professional organization that allowed its members—all of whom were women—to intervene in society and politics under the guise of domesticity through Home Economics. Some members strongly identified as housewives, while others used the CHEA to advocate for the importance of Home Economics as a profession in promoting and advocating for the betterment of society.[25] The CHEA successfully shaped policy in Canada, including nutrition guidelines, standardizing textile and care labels, and lobbying for consumer education in Canadian schools.[26] During WWII, the CHEA developed standardized knitting patterns, advised on food service for the military, and assisted in salvage work.[27] CHEA achieved these outcomes,

[24] Rowles, "Home Economics—A Basic Discipline, 45.
[25] Norma Bannerman, Shirley Rebus, and Arlene Smith. *We Are Tomorrow's Past : History of the Canadian Home Economics Association.* Canadian Home Economics Association, 1989.
[26] Bannerman, Rebus, and Smith. *We Are Tomorrow's Past*, 36.
[27] Bannerman, Rebus, and Smith. *We Are Tomorrow's Past*, 36.

working outside of their homes, but still within the context of the home and its associated domesticity, therefore they did not necessarily face the same criticism as other working women in Canada.

Working Women & *Chatelaine*

Chatelaine, the magazine for the Canadian woman, presented articles and advice that appealed to working women and stay-at-home mothers alike. Doris Anderson, *Chatelaine*'s editor, was a longtime advocate for working women in Canada, using her editorials to present feminist ideas and illuminate issues women faced in the workplace. In a 1960 article, she declared herself a feminist who was "for all women becoming more effective *people* in the world at large". [28] Nevertheless, she was careful to note several times that this editorial did not mean she was against all men. In the context of early second-wave feminism, Anderson was careful with her language as to avoid appearing radical. In an editorial from 1970, Anderson further criticized the many "legal and procedural put-downs" women faced in Canadian society, like needing their husband in attendance to open charge-accounts at department stores, despite having had personal accounts before marriage.[29] In her memoir, Anderson recalled meeting readers and seeing untapped potential, "most were bright homemakers, many with a university education. Some might have gone into law, medicine, engineering, advanced physics, or philosophy. Instead, they poured all their energies into being perfect wives and mothers."[30]

Despite Anderson being such a supporter of working women, the magazine also presented differing viewpoints. The argument against married women working can be seen in a *Chatelaine* op-ed from 1960 by Anita Birt. The article began with the subheading: "being a homemaker isn't enough, the experts keep lecturing us—we've got to return to the office to be

[28] Doris Anderson, "A timid defense of feminists." *Chatelaine,* March 1960, 1.
[29] Doris Anderson, "How business sees us: witless wives," *Chatelaine*, March 1970, 1.
[30] Doris Anderson, *Rebel Daughter : An Autobiography, Key Porter Books, 1996*, 151.

really alive. Nonsense! I tried it—and take it from me, you can work so hard at being alive that you wish you were dead!"[31] Birt takes a resolute tone throughout the article, presenting her experience with working as universal. She explains that she felt pressured to go to work by people saying she would feel more alive and less dissatisfied in life if she had her own job outside of the home. With her children being nine and twelve, Birt decided it was time to test out going to work. She found an office job relatively close to home and used her abilities as a typist and skilled shorthand taker. Birt explained that when looking for a job "my husband did not try to hinder me… anyway, he didn't think anyone would hire me."[32] Birt may have made this comment jokingly, but it also speaks to the traditional gender dynamics present in their relationship: her husband was unsupportive or uninterested in her career ambitions.

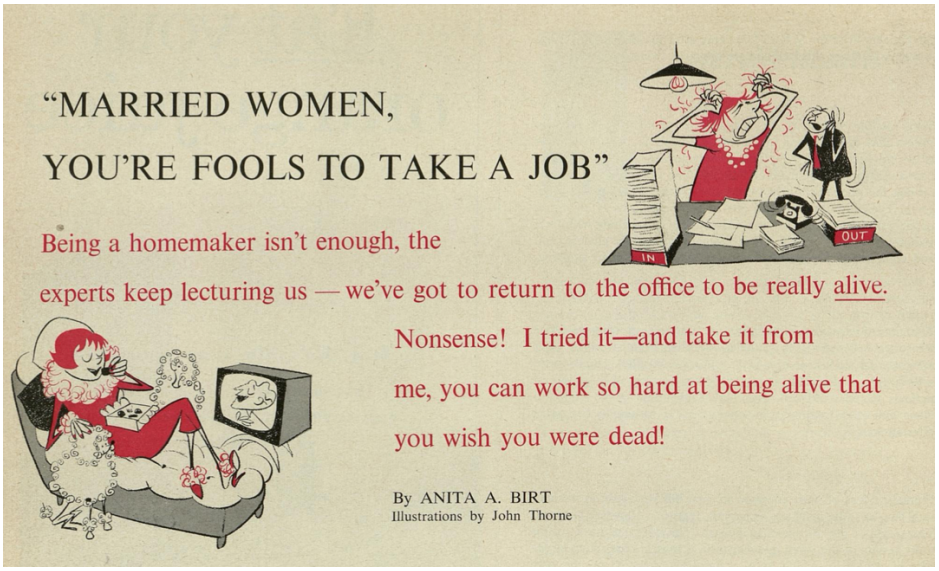


Figure 4.1: Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 12.

She came to the conclusion that working wives were mad.[33] Based on her experience, Birt advised women thinking of going to work to ask themselves several questions, including: "can you work twelve hours or more a day, seven days a week?"; "do you hate reading, watching television, or just doing nothing?" and; "are you and your children in perfect

[31] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 12.
[32] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 12.
[33] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 12.

health?"[34] If the answer was no to any of the questions, she recommended that you stay home. Birt explained that it was impossible to finish all the chores on weekends, and so she ended up staying up late and getting up early. During her nine months working, she did not finish a single book, when she used to read one per week. She described prepping dinner in the morning, as there was not enough time after work, vividly recalling that "at seven-thirty in the morning, the smell of meat and onions browning is enough to set the strongest stomach to quivering uneasily."[35] Near the end of her time in the workforce, Birt was hoping to catch a flu so that she could have time to sleep.

Birt was in an interesting position, caught in between societal pressures for modern women to work and her own beliefs, beliefs she herself characterized as "Victorian and definitely unmodern."[36] Her main complaints concerned burnout, yet she decided against hiring help for household or childcare tasks, as the cost would have absorbed too much of her wage to be worth it. And so, she tried to manage it all herself. Birt also highlighted that she was not expecting any help from her husband, and that in fact she would have despised that. Birt stated that, "it has become a deplorable custom of our North American society for husbands to don aprons and take on domestic chores. If your husband is one such, you might con him into taking on some extra jobs to ease your load. My husband is not of this ilk."[37] The revulsion Birt expresses towards men helping out in the domestic sphere shows how deeply ingrained gender roles were in Birt's life. She had internalized the message of "women can do it all," yet, she found it unsustainable without relinquishing her normative responsibilities in the domestic sphere, something she was unwilling to do. She would rather quit her job outside the home, which she did after nine months.

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[34] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 41.
[35] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 42.
[36] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 41.
[37] Anita Birt, "Married Women, You're Fools to Take a Job," *Chatelaine*, January 1960, 41.

Other *Chatelaine* articles did offer more nuanced views of the challenges of balancing professional work with household management and childcare. In 1965, Une Abrahamson wrote "The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping," which tackles many of the same issues Birt raised regarding work and household management. In this article, Abrahamson offered tips to avoid burning out other than quitting your job. Abrahamson interviewed several working mothers and compiled advice. One said that she tried to finish as many chores as possible in the morning when she had the energy, and always gave herself "a deadline and drops everything and relaxes after a certain hour…."[38] Abrahamson advised making use of husbands to share responsibilities, stating that "areas in which husbands can be helpful vary with the man but many will willingly tackle outdoor work and keep the garden tidy, the windows clean, the garbage disposed. Some may even pitch in to get the children to bed at night, or help with dishes."[39] This advice shows a clear gender divide between household tasks. Yard work, garbage, dishes, occasional parenting were the tasks most palatable for men, and yet these tasks were still more than many women could expect from their husbands. Abrahamson went on to recommend that women hire help if their husband is unavailable, saying that it "is far better than becoming a weary grouch or letting yourself feel like a martyr."[40] This advice was less applicable to the average family, who like Birt, may not have had the extra money to hire help. With this advice, more affluent women would have an easier time of managing a career. A recurring theme in *Chatelaine* was that it was, in fact, impossible for all women to do it all. The advice was either to have a husband and children who helped out, to hire help, or to stay home.

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[38] Una Abrahamson, "The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 24.
[39] Una Abrahamson, "The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 25.
[40] Una Abrahamson, "The Mother Who Works Needs a Streamlined System for Housekeeping," *Chatelaine*, January 1965, 24-25.

1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada

Working while also managing the societal expectations of running a household was a lot for Canadian women to balance. This tension many women were feeling factored into the blossoming of second wave feminism in Canada. The increased pressure from wage-earning women, facing unequal pay and other discrimination in the workplace, contributed to the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW) in 1967.[41] The commission had a mandate to "inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the federal government to ensure equal opportunities for women in all aspects of the Canadian society."[42] *Chatelaine* published a lengthy questionnaire asking its readers to respond with what they wanted to see from the commission. Over 11,000 women responded. Doris Anderson recalled that "I wasn't a bit surprised—after all the proselytizing we had done over the years—at their requests: subsidized childcare, birth control clinics, more liberal abortion and divorce laws, equal pay and more opportunity at work. We tabulated the results and I presented a formal brief to the commission."[43] In total, the commission collected 468 briefs, over 2000 letters, and conducted over 40 research studies.[44] It is noteworthy that *Chatelaine* received more personal responses than the commission received letters, showing the wide-reaching influence of *Chatelaine* with Canadian women. Joan Sangster has noted that the letters sent directly to the commission were viewed as the least reliable source of information, with members of the commission preferring briefs with hard statistics and pragmatic recommendations.[45] Perhaps *Chatelaine*, by compiling so many personal responses into an official brief, was able to convey the lived experience of

[41] Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence,"139.
[42] Women and Gender Equality Canada, "Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada," https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/commemorations-celebrations/royal-commission-status-women-canada.html, accessed May 1, 2026.
[43] Anderson, *Rebel Daughter*, 158.
[44] Kimberly Spears, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada 1967-1970: Liberal Feminism and Its Radical Implications," in Sharon A Cook, Lorna R McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, *Framing Our Past : Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, 253.
[45] Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence,"136.

Canadian women in a way that was more likely to be heard by the commission than individual letters. In 1970, the commission tabled its report that included 167 recommendations for the Canadian government.[46]

The liberal feminist principles, of wanting to make changes within the existing political, economic, and social systems, were key features of the RCSW process and report. Kimberly Spears argues that the RCSW "supported a liberal feminist or piecemeal approach to equality, not a structural change to all institutions in society, as the means to generate substantive equality between men and women."[47] Spears further points out that these principles led to contradictions in the commission's recommendations, which stated that "no distinction shall be made between men and women in developing rights and freedoms," but also "that special treatment has to be given to women because of their child bearing capacity."[48] The implementation of the recommendations was incremental, which Spears notes was politically safe for the Liberal government of the time.[49] The United Nations declared 1975 "International Women's Year". In a 1975 editorial, Doris Anderson responded skeptically to such an announcement, wondering if Canadian women would truly benefit from this designated year, noting that only about a third of the RCSW recommendations had been implemented thus far, "and they were the easy ones."[50] Many of the recommendations were never actioned, including number 66 which recommended that "household workers be covered by minimum wage laws, workmen's compensation and other labour legislation applicable to other paid workers."[51]

The RCSW report had several educational recommendations to make public schools more equitable for boys and girls. The report recognized the impact of society's gendered

[46] Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970, 418.
[47] Spears, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada 1967-1970…," 253.
[48] Spears, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada 1967-1970…," 254.
[49] Spears, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada 1967-1970…," 255.
[50] Doris Anderson, "International Women's Year: Will Canadian Women get their $5 Millions' Worth?" *Chatelaine*, February 1975, 4.
[51] Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970, 404.

expectations on children, stating that "boys are expected to be interested in sports, girls in cooking and babies and so dishes and a doll carriage are given to the little girl and a baseball glove to the little boy. Inevitably a nurse's outfit is given to the girl and a doctor's case to the boy."[52] One recommendation to fight gender stereotyping was for textbooks to "portray women, as well as men, in diversified roles and occupations."[53] The report also recommended that schools "encourage women to consider all occupations, including those which have been traditionally restricted to men."[54] The report wanted girls to see all careers as viable options, rather than just traditionally feminine roles. There was, however, not counsel to encourage boys into traditionally feminine careers. The report also recognized that Home Economics and shop classes were, as a rule, segregated by gender. To advance gender equality, the report stated that "family life education should teach boys how to care for children, to cook and sew, and should encourage girls to acquire manual skills."[55] A review of Ontario public school curricula from the 1960s to 2010s, found that changes prompted by the RCSW report were slow. Despite the Ontario Ministry of Education implementing sex equity policies in the 1970s, well into the 1980s, textbooks "continued to make only token references to women."[56] Women remain excluded out of lucrative STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields in university well into the 2010s, a lack of progress attributed "to the fact that women's histories and stories rarely seem to be the focus of study in schools."[57]

Family Studies & Boys

[52] Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970, 173.
[53] Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970, 404.
[54] Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970, 405.
[55] Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970, 173.
[56] Rose Fine-Meyer, and Kristina Llewellyn. "Women Rarely Worthy of Study: A History of Curriculum Reform in Ontario Education." *Historical Studies in Education* 30, no. 1 (2018), 57.
[57] Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn, "Women Rarely Worthy of Study…," 55.

Following the 1970 RCSW report, a significant effort was made to encourage girls to enroll in more academic subjects in school—science, math, etc.— to push for more equal career opportunities. At the same time, there was a less effective effort to introduce boys to the more traditionally feminine coded study of Home Economics. The 1974 rebrand of Home Economics to Family Studies shows an attempt to make the course for every student. It was not a success. Evidence of the effort to get boys interested in Family Studies can be seen through a conference held in Toronto in 1981 for Family Studies educators, titled: "Family Studies and the Male Student." Despite good intentions, the material presented at this conference shows just how ingrained the divide in gender norms and fields of activities and interests were in the field of Family Studies/Home Economics.

Instead of presenting all the benefits of Family Studies education, the conference was centered around appealing to stereotypes around boys and male students. Amongst the strategies offered to elicit male engagement with Family Studies, we find: harnessing male competitiveness with "sewing competitions," making male-oriented projects like "sports equipment or butcher aprons," and using guest speakers (male teachers) to cover "grooming, clothing selection/costs."[58] The underlying assumption with this last advice was that boys would listen to a male teacher more than their Family Studies teacher, who was likely a woman. Some advice seemed to infantilize the male student. In an attempt to emphasize the mechanical side of sewing, the workshop advised teachers to issue boys "operator's permits when minimal skills with the sewing machine are developed."[59] The workshop pushed the idea that linking the sewing machine to other heavy machinery might help boys see sewing as worthy of their time. The workshop material included examples of motivational posters to put up around schools in the hopes of encouraging boys to enroll in Family Studies. One example featured a

[58] Workshop: Family Studies and the Male Student 1981, F4435-7-0-225, Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario (no page numbers, hereafter Family Studies and the Make Student, 1981, F4435-7-0-225).
[59] Family Studies and the Male Student, 1981, F4435-7-0-225.

shiloette of a boy and a girl, with the tagline "Free to be… You + Me. Enroll in Home Economics!"[60] Another longer example was a two-page parody of the YMCA song:

> Young Man, if you give us a chance
> I said, Young Man, we will sew up your pants
> And we'll teach you, how to run the machine
> So you can keep your jeans clean…
>
> Young Man, Won't you give it a whirl
> I said, Young Man, spend some time with the girls
> I said, You might make yourself a new man
> You can do it right with our plan[61]

This poster, trying to be lighthearted, was playing into harmful stereotypes, assuming that male students would only want to enroll in Family Studies for a chance at spending time with the girls, with the subtext of a maybe getting date. The advice presented at this conference seems silly when looking back from the perspective of 2026. It is jarring to see the rigid gender stereotypes placed on students. The pervasiveness of strictly gendered norms helps show why it was not a simple matter to make Family Studies appeal to all students.

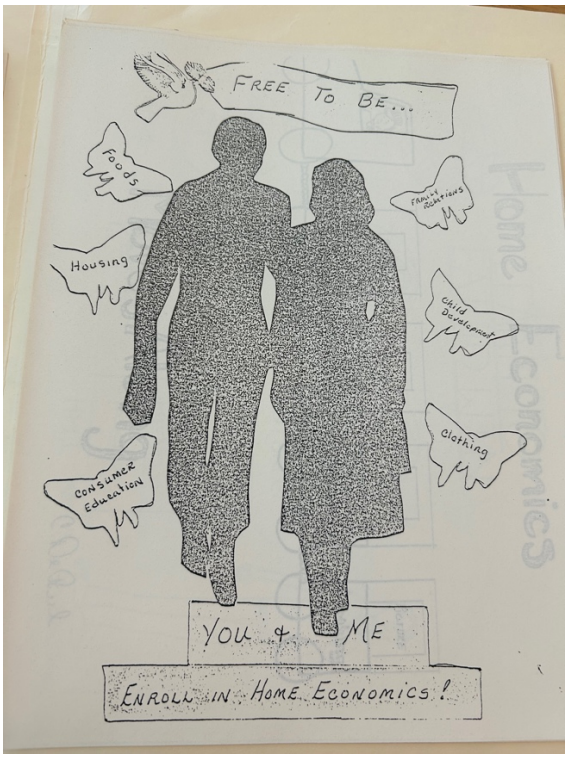


Figure 4.2: Poster from Family Studies and the Male Student, 1981, F4435-7-0-225.

[60] Family Studies and the Male Student, 1981, F4435-7-0-225.
[61] Family Studies and the Male Student, 1981, F4435-7-0-225.

The workshop material and content were grounded in the premise that boys would not be interested in Family Studies as it was, but needed coaxing to see its value. The workshop materials presented at the conference stated that Family Studies educators had a tremendous opportunity to have both boys and girls in the class, and needed to "do nothing to damage, but rather promote, the image of both Home Economics as a viable course for all students and the masculine image of young men enrolled."[62] The workshop listed out the characteristics of the male student as "very independent, self-confident, aggressive, adventurous, very ambitious," and having the major skills of "analytic ability, divergent thinking, numeral ability, scientific ability."[63] Male students were expected to be aggressive, highly analytical, and skilled in science and math. Although the workshop does not explicitly mention the characteristics or skills of female students, the underlying assumption is that they were dissimilar to the boys, and did not have these same skills to the same degree. This narrow approach to understanding the abilities of students based on gender seems antithetical to advancing gender equality. The preoccupation of appealing to male students based on stereotypical interests was not effective in demonstrating the value of Family Studies courses for all students. By suggesting that teachers must tailor their classes based on gender, despite having a mix of genders enrolled, defeats the purpose of a class for everyone.

Weakening of Home Economics

The Canadian Home Economics Association was still advocating for Home Economics and Family Studies to be given respect as a field of study in the 1980s. The CHEA had this to say in their book to commemorate fifty years as an organization:

> As we moved into the 80s, there was growing concern about the trend to downplay the importance of Home Economics in the schools. Consequently, in

[62] Patsy Spurrier Hallman "Family Studies and the Male Student," 1981, F4435-7-0-225 Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario (no page numbers).
[63] Patsy Spurrier Hallman "Family Studies and the Male Student," 1981, F4435-7-0-225 Ontario Family Studies / Home Economic Educators Association fonds, Archives of Ontario (no page numbers).

> 1984 a committee based in British Columbia and Ontario prepared a policy statement and position paper confirming CHEA's support for Home Economics/Family Studies as an essential course in the basic education of Canadian students. Although society has changed considerably over the past 50 years, the unique contribution of Home Economics education is as important now as it was then.[64]

Unfortunately, the importance of Home Economics education continued to decrease in both high school and post-secondary education in Canada. Over the 1980s and 1990s, Canadian universities restructured and moved away from Home Economics departments, sending family specialists "into sociology, food studies into dietetics/food systems and textiles into theatre costuming or fashion."[65] In 2000, Ruth Berry, a Professor in Family Studies at the University of Manitoba, argued that the lack of respect given to Home Economics departments by university administrators was partially linked to a fundamental misunderstanding of the discipline, an understanding that wanted to separate the applied and social sciences. The holistic foundation of Home Economics, as an interdisciplinary field of study combining applied and social sciences, was dismantled in favour of a dichotomy between scientific approaches. Berry wrote that consistent underfunding, restructuring, and renaming had diminished the ability of Home Economics programs to compete with other fields of study.[66] Uncertainty and constant changes discouraged students from starting a Home Economics program that might not last until their graduation. The lack of respect given to Home Economic Faculties correlates with the lack of respect given to women and female dominated fields.

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[64] Bannerman,Rebus, and Smith. *We Are Tomorrow's Past*, 42.
[65] Kerry Renwick and Melissa Bauer Edstrom, "Finding Home Economics When It Has Never Been Lost: A Journey of Discovery for Pre-Service Teachers," *International Journal of Home Economics*, *15* no.1, (2022), 172.
[66] Ruth E. Berry, "University Programs in Home Economics: Past, Present and Future," *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, volume 50, no. 4, 2000, 163.

Second Wave & Feminine Pursuits

In the 1970s, there was some tension in the Canadian Home Economics Association between those who wanted to open the fielf of Home Economics up to a broader membership of educational backgrounds in order to better understand the needs of the Canadian family, and those who sought to preserve the identity of "Home Economics," an identity that was losing popularity. [67] Home Economics as a discipline also faced pressure from the emergence of second wave feminist ideals. Marjorie East referenced this tension in her keynote speech from the 1975 Canadian Home Economics Association convention. She stated that "Home Economics is about women in their domestic role and that makes us a perfect target for those who believe domesticity is a bad thing—especially when associated with women."[68] The denigration of feminine interests and the association of Home Economics as "feminine," contributed to the subject's lack of esteem, despite having useful and important skills to teach.

Second wave feminism rejected traditionally feminine interests, defined as "weak."[69] Sociologist Kathryn Church examined her own rejection of sewing through an exhibition about her mother's home sewing. She explained that the project was not just about honouring her mother, but also to show a "painful story about an ambivalent daughter who, while growing up, was so distressed by her mother's servitude and domestic roles that she dedicated herself to living something different."[70] The exhibit showcased many of her mother's dresses celebrating skills "in the 'domestic arts' while raising questions about its social and economic invisibility."[71]

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[67] Bannerman,Rebus, and Smith. *We Are Tomorrow's Past*, 26.
[68] Marjorie East, "The Home Economist and the Changing Role of Women," *The Canadian Home Economics* Journal, volume 25, no.4, 1975, 6.
[69] Donica Belisle, "Sexual Spectacles: Saleswomen in Canadian Department Store Magazines between 1920 and 1950." In *Feminist History in Canada*, ed. Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek.135–58. Canada: UBC Press, 2013, 135.
[70] Kathryn Church, "Fabrications: Clothing, Generations, and Stitching Together the History We Live, in Cook, Sharon A, Lorna R McLean, and Kate O'Rourke. *Framing Our Past : Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, 372.
[71] Kathryn Church, "Fabrications: Clothing, Generations…" 375.

Through oral history interviews with British women about home dressmaking, Fiona Hackney found that many cases of women's aversion to sewing were "often linked to their perception of their mothers' lives and their wish to live differently themselves."[72] She concluded her article noting that the reality for an increasing number of modern women in the second half of the twentieth century, "was that they had neither the time, patience nor, in some cases, energy to make clothes when they had more important, if not always more pleasurable, things to do."[73] These same attitudes can be applied to Canadian women, who were increasingly in the workforce without excess free time.

Conclusion

Sewing takes time, as does finding the best deals when shopping. All of the advice about sewing to save money and buying the best quality products for the best price from previous chapters was predicated on Canadian women having enough time to follow it. As women entered the workforce, they had less and less time to dedicate to these sorts of practices. The pervasive outlook that devalued sewing and other traditionally feminine crafts during the second-wave feminist movement is one potential reason why Family Studies was not successful in attracting the interest of all students. Not only would boys be disinterested in the course based on the negative gendered associations, but girls with career ambitions may not have seen the value in sewing or consumer education. The increase of women in the Canadian workforce and the continued devaluation of traditionally female skills all contributed to sewing becoming less common in the average household. The perceived pressure for women to work, the fight for equal opportunities, and the need to value the unpaid domestic labour that so many women did at home reveal the many competing priorities for women during the second wave.

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[72] Fiona Hackney, "Making Modern Woman, Stitch by Stitch: Dressmaking and Women's Magazines in Britain 1919-39," in Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing : Gender, Consumption, and Home Dressmaking*. Berg, 1999, 89.
[73] Fiona Hackney, "Making Modern Woman, Stitch by Stitch…" 89.

Home Economics/Family Studies were left behind during this moment. This is not to say that girls choosing to pursue education and work outside of the framework of the "homemaker" was bad—it was not. The nuance here is rather to ask why boys were not given the same push to reevaluate their educational wants and needs, to view sewing and consumer education as worthy and valuable. The negative associations of Family Studies as "feminine" were too pervasive to overcome long held gendered stereotypes, contributing to fewer people knowing how to sew today.

Conclusion

There was no sudden shift from handmade to ready-made clothing consumption in Canada. This thesis shows a more complicated story. Sewing persisted in Canadian homes well into the twentieth-century, long after some have argued it was just a hobby. Sewing was still a major part of Home Economics education in Ontario, though there was a noticeable decline in its prominence from the 1950s to the 1970s. Sewing was present in the pages of *Chatelaine*, and not only through the advertisements of sewing patterns. The magazine consistently presented sewing as a money-saving practice, a way for thrifty consumers to participate in fashion trends without over-spending. Sewing was a way for Canadians to consume fashion wisely.

Just as there was no abrupt shift from handmade to ready-made, there was no sudden transition from production to consumption in Canadian homes. Although the belief in this transition helped to launch Home Economics as a discipline, spearheaded by Canadian women who were concerned with living and consuming in the modern industrial world. Sewing persisted as a part of Home Economics even when ready-made alternatives were available to consumers. Despite the popular misconception, sewing and cooking were not the only subjects in early Home Economics classrooms. Consumer education was a foundational part of Home Economics education, however the emphasis on consumer education increased as sewing education decreased in Ontario from the 1950s-1970s.

The tension between consumer advice that advocated for thrift and restraint, and the rising consumer debt in Canada during this period reflects the difference between those writing the advice and new generations emerging as consumers. As the lived experience of the Great Depression and WWII receded into the past, fewer Canadian held onto the consumer habits from those times of privation. Home Economics curricula and advice from *Chatelaine* reveal how quality was valued in all things, including clothing—handmade and

ready-made. Discourses around quality shaped Canadians into discerning consumers, able to spot good quality, while also shaping Canadians consumers in their appearance and behaviour.

The rise of women working outside of the home also contributed to a decrease in time for home sewing. No matter how much quality or value is gained from handmaking garments, the time sewing takes factors into the equation, and those with less time are less likely to spend it on activities like sewing. The enduring gendered associations with the subject matter of Home Economics also contributed to a decline in sewing and consumer education. The women's movement in Canada made great strides towards creating a more equal society, but was not concerned with gender equality in Home Economics education. As a result, Home Economics/Family Studies education was not given the necessary care or attention to encourage all students to see its value beyond the gendered stereotypes associated with the field.

This thesis presented several compounding factors that contributed to a noticeable shift away from sewing and towards consuming ready-made clothing in Canada. As Home Economics education moved away from sewing and towards more consumer education, and in the context of the women's movement rejecting traditionally feminine crafts, sewing education and knowledge decreased in Canada from 1950-1975. This thesis contributed to and expanded on existing historiography about Canadian consumer history, Home Economics, and the history of Canada's women's movement. This project explored the ways in which Home Economics education and advice from *Chatelaine* contributed to shaping Canadian consumer attitudes towards, as well as the impact of the 1970 report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada on Home Economics education.

Opportunities for Further Research

Sewing and consumer education proved an interesting lens to study attitudes around consumption, materiality, and gender. The process of researching and writing this project also revealed more questions and areas to explore, suggesting at least three avenues for further research.

First, one way to expand this project would be to examine how other provincial Home Economics curricula changed during this time period. The Ontario curricula provided one look into curriculum changes, but did not speak for all of Canada. Comparing Ontario to other provinces, to see similarities or glaring differences would provide a useful national look into Home Economics education.

Second, the Canadian Home Economics Association presents an opportunity for future research. The Association kept meticulous records, including meeting minutes, annual reports, and records of all of the activity and advocacy done through its committees. These records are all available at Library and Archives Canada, and could inspire more projects about the role of Home Economics in Canadian Society, and particularly the impact of a professional organization led by Canadian women in the twentieth century. During my research, I could not find any other academic inquiry into the history of the Canadian Home Economics Association.

Finally, *Chatelaine* is also a rich source for further research. In focusing on fashion advice and advertisements, I barely scratched the surface of the contents of the magazine. A full analysis of Doris Anderson's editorials could provide a new perspective on an important figure in Canadian feminist history. The recipes and food advertisements could be a fruitful source for an exploration of Canadian food history. Monthly menus from the magazine demonstrate a look into typical meals for the Canadian family over different eras. The advertisements of food in *Chatelaine* could help trace changes in Canadian tastes and social

norms. For example, there were many advertisements in the 1950s for Swift's baby food marketed as "Meat for Babies" that caught my attention when reviewing the magazine, as an example of some distinctive old eating habits.[1] Valerie Korinek's book focused on *Chatelaine* in the 1950s and 1960s, still, there is little written about other eras and impacts of the magazine. This thesis contributes analysis on the 1970s, however, I only examined issues from 1970 and 1975, leaving most of the editions from the 1970s to the present largely unexplored.

Reflections on the Current Moment

The province of Ontario last updated its secondary school curriculum in 2018. Family Studies occupies a much smaller space than in the previous version of the curricula I examined for this project. Family Studies is found within the Social Sciences section. It no longer occupies its own main section of the curriculum, as it did when it was "Home Economics," or even in the 1974 version of the curriculum.[2] The Family Studies section is broken down into separate courses following themes, like food and nutrition or family relationships, rather than one course with everything. Students may choose Family Studies classes as electives and the options around clothing are slim. There is no mention of "sewing" in the curriculum outline at all. Only two electives seem closely related to sewing, a grade 10 course named "clothing" and a grade 11 course named "understanding fashion."[3] However, in the course descriptions, there is no mention about learning how to sew. Although Home Economics is no longer offered in the sense of a holistic approach to modern living, the lessons around basic sewing skills and how to be a thoughtful consumer could be useful for

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[1] Swift Meat, "My! How babies do thrive on meat!" *Chatelaine,* January 1950, 48.
[2] "The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12," Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018, https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum#secondary.
[3] "The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12," 118.

all students in Canada. The curricula from the 1950s-1970s reveal these gaps in the current curriculum.

Fast fashion, constantly changing trends, and an endless supply of poorly and unethically made clothing are contributing to a variety of social ills—including the environmental crisis of climate change and the immiseration of underpaid garment workers. Through looking back at sewing and consumer education, this thesis shows how old advice may provide some much-needed solutions to the modern problems of overconsumption and waste. The themes of thoughtful and slow consumption of clothing are coming back in some ways. Yet, without Home Economics education, concerned consumers must seek out their own sewing and consumer education. The 2020 publication of Kate Sekules' *MEND! A Refashioning Manual and Manifesto* provides an example of how contemporary consumers can learn to mend clothing. It also demonstrates contemporary interest in making and repairing clothing as a way to live sustainably. Current sustainability movements could benefit from the historical perspective of past consumer habits and best practices revealed through this project.

The advice from *Chatelaine* and Home Economics curricula from 1950-1975 is still relevant today. Learning how to consume slowly and thoughtfully are important lessons for Canadian consumers in 2026. Properly caring for garments, mending when possible, and buying less are all ways for Canadians to consume well.

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