

retreating from public life, baby-boom parents joined forces with government officials and professionals who called for bigger and better "successful American families."<sup>67</sup>

The rising birthrate, then, was not just a demographic phenomenon. It was the result of a fully articulated baby-boom ideology that found expression in Hollywood, in the political culture, in the prescriptive literature, and in the thoughts and aspirations of women and men at the time. Postwar Americans wholeheartedly endorsed this reproductive consensus. It fit their belief in abundance, progress, and productivity. As one man declared in 1955, "I'd like six kids. . . . It just seems like a minimum production goal."<sup>68</sup> Although many people experienced confusion and discord over sexuality, most had the same procreative ideals and followed the same procreative behavior. They used contraception, spaced their children, and created large families.

Children provided tangible results of a successful marriage and family life; they gave evidence of responsibility, patriotism, and achievement. They would tame the wayward tendencies of men and fulfill the sexual energies of women. Even when child rearing led to stress and exhaustion, parents still pointed to their offspring with a sense of accomplishment.

Like other elements of the postwar domestic ideal, however, the children in whom mothers and fathers invested so much of themselves could not possibly satisfy all their parents' expectations. Adults would wring their hands over their children's behavior, playmates, and social circles; authorities would fret about the alleged rise in juvenile delinquency; and those treasured children would become the rebellious youths of the 1960s and, eventually, grow up.<sup>69</sup> As the years wore on, the investment in child rearing would take its toll, especially on the women who found themselves stuck in an "empty nest" at a relatively young age, with little else to give purpose to their lives. But in the years of the baby boom, these parents were unaware of the potential disappointments that might result from placing such high hopes for personal fulfillment in child rearing. As they moved into the expanding suburbs and settled in with their growing families, they put their best efforts into living out the postwar version of the American dream. This was the way of life that spread a beacon to the free world; this was the family ideal worth protecting against hostile outside forces.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# THE COMMODITY GAP: CONSUMERISM AND THE MODERN HOME

As a normal part of life, thrift now is un-American.

—WILLIAM H. WHYTE, JR., 1956

No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist.  
He has too much to do.

—WILLIAM J. LEVITT, DEVELOPER OF LEVITTOWN, 1948<sup>1</sup>

THE SEXUALLY charged, child-centered family took its place as the embodiment of the postwar American dream. The most tangible symbol of that dream was the suburban home—the locale of the good life, the evidence of democratic abundance. It did not take long for this consumer-laden dream house to land squarely in the middle of cold war politics. One remarkable example demonstrates the direct link between the suburban American dream and the international dynamics of the cold war. In 1948, when Europe was still recovering from World War II, American officials worried that political instability might lead some nations to embrace communism. Leaders in the United States

were particularly worried that Italy might go communist. A critical election was approaching, and there were several "hot spots" in the country where impoverished Italians appeared to be leaning toward voting for the Communist Party. At that time, Richard Moore, an aide to California congressman Richard Nixon, was trying to figure out a way to influence the Italian election. Prior to joining Nixon's congressional staff in Washington, Moore had worked in the television industry in California. So he contacted John Guedel, creator of several early television shows, and asked for help.

Guedel came up with an idea: the "Win a Future" contest. Anyone who entered the contest had a chance to "win a future," which included a house in the newly completed suburban development of Panorama City, in the San Fernando Valley. The house would contain the finest new appliances and furnishings, and the lucky winner would also receive a new car and a job. According to Guedel, anyone could enter the contest by writing a letter stating in 100 words or less why it is better to live under capitalism than communism, enclosing ten cents, and sending it to the television station. Each week, one contestant was selected to appear on the television show *People Are Funny* and have an opportunity to solve a riddle in order to "win a future." Six hundred and forty thousand Americans entered the contest. The letters were collected and sent to Italy, along with CARE packages of food. The United States Army translated the letters and distributed them with the CARE packages to Italian voters in key areas at risk of electing communists. Apparently, the effort worked: The communists were defeated in the 1948 election in Italy. Meanwhile, contestant Vivienne George finally solved the riddle and "won a future." As it turned out, the future she won was not so bright. She and her husband, a disabled World War II veteran, only lived in the house for a few months. They were the first residents to move into Panorama City, and they were too isolated, especially considering his medical needs. The promised job never materialized, and the national notoriety left the Georges vulnerable to the demands of many people who believed that the couple were now fabulously wealthy.<sup>2</sup>

Although Vivienne George was the only one to "win a future," like many other Americans she discovered that the American dream did not fully live up to its promise. But the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and furnishings, continued to serve as a tangible symbol of the American way of life, and as a powerful weapon in the cold war propaganda arsenal. A decade after the "Win a Future" contest, Richard Nixon was no longer a congressman. He was now vice president under Dwight D. Eisenhower. In 1959, Eisenhower sent Nixon to represent the United States at the American Exhibition in Moscow,

where a "model home," similar to the one in Panorama City won by Vivienne George, was on display. Let us now return briefly to the site of the famous "kitchen debate," where Vice President Richard M. Nixon articulated the essence of American superiority by pointing to the consumer-laden suburban home. The ideal home Nixon described was one that obliterated class distinctions and accentuated gender distinctions. The "model home" he extolled was not a mansion but a modest ranch-style structure, "within the price range of the average U.S. worker," complete with modern appliances that would "make easier the life of our housewives." Although Vivienne George had to solve a riddle to win her house in the suburbs because she couldn't otherwise afford it, for Nixon, the most important feature of the suburban home was its availability to Americans of all classes.

"Let us start with some of the things in this exhibit," Nixon began. "You will see a house, a car, a television set—each the newest and most modern of its type we produce. But can only the rich in the United States afford such things? If this were the case, we would have to include in our definition of rich the millions of America's wage earners." Nixon felt certain that the possibility of homeownership would defuse the most dangerous potential of class conflict. As he explained to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, "Our steel workers, as you know, are on strike. But any steel worker could buy this house. They earn \$3 an hour. This house costs about \$100 a month to buy on a contract running twenty-five to thirty years." Khrushchev countered, "We have steel workers and we have peasants who also can afford to spend \$14,000 for a house." But for Nixon, homeownership represented even more than a comfortable way of life; it was the validation of the free enterprise system.<sup>3</sup>

Nixon's frame of reference was the family: "There are 44 million families in the United States. Twenty-five million of [them] live in houses or apartments that have as much or more floor space than the one you see in this exhibit. Thirty-one million families own their own homes and the land on which they are built. America's 44 million families own a total of 56 million cars, 50 million television sets and 143 million radio sets. And they buy an average of nine dresses and suits and 14 pairs of shoes per family per year."

Nixon then described other miracles of domestic technology. Pointing to a television screen, he said, "We can see here what is happening in other parts of the home." Khrushchev, scorning the American obsession with gadgets, chided, "This is probably always out of order. . . . Don't you have a machine that puts food into the mouth and pushes it down? Many things you've shown us are interesting but they are not needed in life. . . . They are merely gadgets." Yet both

leaders took the commodity gap seriously. The Soviet premier continued, "Newly built Russian houses have all this equipment right now. Moreover, all you have to do to get a house is to be born in the Soviet Union. So I have a right to a house. In America if you don't have a dollar, you have the right to sleep on the pavement. Yet you say that we are slaves of communism."

Khrushchev further accused Americans of building houses to last only twenty years, so builders could continually sell new ones. "We build firmly," said the Soviet leader. "We build for our children and grandchildren." But Nixon argued that after twenty years, the older home or kitchen would be obsolete. Linking consumer aspirations to scientific expertise, he explained that the American system was designed to take advantage of new inventions and new techniques. Unimpressed, Khrushchev replied, "This theory does not hold water." But for Nixon the theory did hold water, for it reflected his belief in the potential for individualism and upward mobility.

The metaphor that prevailed throughout the debate was that of a race. But it was not the arms race or the space race; it was the consumer race—centered on the home. Khrushchev estimated that it would take only seven years before the USSR would reach the American standard of living. Already in eight years, grain and milk output had nearly doubled, and television sets were up from sixty-seven thousand to a million. The terms of the cold war were set in these figures. Nixon was willing to concede Russian successes in the space race, but he argued that domestic consumer goods were the most meaningful measure of American superiority over the Soviet Union: "There are some instances where you may be ahead of us, for example in the development of the thrust of your rockets for the investigation of outer space; there may be some instances in which we are ahead of you—in color television, for instance." Not to be outdone, Khrushchev claimed, "No, we are up with you on this, too." Nixon remarked, "We welcome this kind of competition because when we engage in it, no one loses, everyone wins." Thus, the commodity gap took precedence over the missile gap.

In Nixon's vision, the suburban ideal of homeownership would tame two potentially disruptive forces: women and workers. In appliance-laden houses across the country, working-class as well as business-class breadwinners could fulfill the new American work-to-consume ethic. Homeownership would lessen class consciousness among workers, who would set their sights toward the middle-class ideal. The family home would be the place where a man could display his success through the accumulation of consumer goods. Women would reap rewards for domesticity by surrounding themselves with commodities; they

would remain content as housewives because appliances would ease their burdens. For both men and women, homeownership would reinforce aspirations for upward mobility and diminish the potential for social unrest.

Nixon was not the only one who believed that the American preoccupation with procurement would be a safeguard against the threat of class warfare and communism. Mayor Joseph Darst of St. Louis, expressing the views of liberal anticommunists, wrote to the city's board of aldermen in 1951 that if everyone had good housing, "no one in the United States would need to worry today about the threat of communism in this country. Communists love American slums. Our clearance of these slums and erection of adequate housing is one of the most effective answers we can give communism locally."<sup>4</sup>

For those who agreed that economic optimism was essential to keep the free enterprise system alive and well, there were reasons to rejoice. The postwar years witnessed a huge increase in discretionary spending power, an increase that surpassed gains in income or prices. Between 1947 and 1961, the number of families rose 28 percent, national income increased over 60 percent, and the group with discretionary income (those with money for nonnecessities) doubled. Rather than putting this money aside for a rainy day, Americans were inclined to spend it. A 1946 Gallup poll indicated that in spite of persistent pockets of poverty and fears of another depression, the desire to spend was much stronger than the desire to save. This is not to say that the concern for future security was tossed to the wind; on the contrary, security remained a high priority. Americans were only slightly more hopeful about the economic future in 1945 than they had been in 1937 at the depth of the depression. Fears of another depression were widespread, and one-third of the population was still in poverty.<sup>5</sup> But the increase in income for the middle and working classes, combined with new governmental supports, encouraged Americans to invest their money in purchases. Social Security no doubt eased their fears of poverty in old age, and veterans' mortgages facilitated expenditures for homeownership. Americans responded with guarded optimism by making purchases that would strengthen their sense of security. In the postwar years, investing in one's own home, along with the trappings that would enhance family life, seemed the best way to plan for the future.

Instead of rampant spending for personal luxury items, Americans were likely to spend their money at home. In the five years after World War II, consumer spending increased 60 percent, but the amount spent on household furnishings and appliances rose 240 percent. In the same five years, purchases for food rose only 33 percent, and for clothing a mere 20 percent. From the depression

onward, the trend in spending was striking. Between 1935 and 1950, the money income of Americans increased 50 percent. But this increase was not divided evenly among purchasing categories. Expenditures for food and drink increased only 30 percent; for clothing, 53 percent; for personal care, 69 percent; and for education, 73 percent. These increases were modest compared to the increases in expenditures for household operation (108 percent), recreation (185 percent), and automobiles (205 percent). In the four years following the end of the war, Americans purchased 21.4 million cars, 20 million refrigerators, 5.5 million stoves, and 11.6 million televisions and moved into over 1 million new housing units each year. The same patterns extended into the 1950s, a decade in which prosperity continued to spread.<sup>6</sup>

The locale for this consumer-oriented family life was suburbia. The suburban home caught the imagination as well as the purse strings of postwar Americans. A study of the psychology of spending noted, "The impact of suburbia on consumer behavior can hardly be overstated. . . . Young people chose to marry early, to have several children in the early years of marriage, to live in . . . nice neighborhoods, and to have cars, washing machines, refrigerators, television sets, and several other appliances at the same time." Americans channeled their spending accordingly. With the exception of the very poor, those of ample as well as modest means exhibited a great deal of conformity in their consumption attitudes and behavior. Spending patterns reflected widely shared beliefs about the good life, which seemed within reach of many, even those of the lower-middle and working classes.<sup>7</sup>

Consumer patterns, then, reflected one more aspect of containment behavior as the nation's affluent majority poured their income into homes and family pursuits. The old version of the virtuous home was a much more ascetic one. Still, the values associated with domestic spending upheld traditional American concerns with pragmatism and morality, rather than opulence and luxury. Purchasing for the home helped alleviate traditional American uneasiness with consumption: the fear that spending would lead to decadence. Family-centered spending reassured Americans that affluence would strengthen the American way of life. The goods purchased by middle-class consumers, like a modern refrigerator or a house in the suburbs, were intended to foster traditional values.<sup>8</sup>

Pragmatism and family enrichment were the keys to virtuous consumerism. The commodities that people bought promised to reinforce home life and uphold traditional gender roles. After all, American women were housewives; their lives were functional, not merely ornamental. In general, male breadwinners provided the income for household goods, and their wives purchased them.

Public opinion polls taken after the war indicate that both men and women were generally opposed to employment for women and believed that a woman who ran a home had a "more interesting time" than did a woman with a full-time job. There were, however, circumstances in which employment for women was approved—especially if the income it generated fostered family life. For example, one poll showed that postwar women and men believed that if a young couple could not marry because the man was not earning enough to support them both, "the girl should take a job so they can get married right away."<sup>9</sup> By and large, however, employment for married women was discouraged. Given these prevailing attitudes, it is no wonder that Nixon continually interchanged the words *woman* and *housewife* as he extolled the American way of life at the Moscow exhibition.

Yet that equation should be examined closely, since not all married women were full-time homemakers during the 1950s. In fact, the postwar years brought more wives into the paid labor force than ever before. Americans felt a great deal of ambivalence toward women's employment—a legacy of the depression and the war. On the one hand, it was unfortunate if a wife had to hold a job; on the other hand, it was considered far worse if the family was unable to purchase what were believed to be necessities for the home.

During these years, the very definition of household needs changed to include many more consumer items. Since it was the homemaker's responsibility to purchase these items, women sought employment, ironically, to promote their role as consumers. The economic importance of women's role as consumers cannot be overstated, for it kept American industry rolling and sustained jobs for the nation's male providers. Nearly the entire increase in the gross national product in the mid-1950s was due to increased spending on consumer durables and residential construction.<sup>10</sup> Many employed wives considered their jobs secondary to their role as consumers and in tune with the ethic of togetherness and subordination that characterized their marital relationships. This was one legacy that depression-bred daughters inherited: Women sought employment to bolster the family budget but not to disrupt domestic power relationships. As long as their employment provided a secondary source of income and did not undermine the authority of the male breadwinner, it was acceptable to the family.<sup>11</sup>

The house and commodity boom also had tremendous propaganda value, for it was those affluent homes, complete with breadwinner and homemaker, that provided evidence of the superiority of the American way of life. Since much of the cold war was waged in propaganda battles, this vision of domesticity was a powerful weapon. Although they may have been unwitting soldiers, women who

marched off to the nation's shopping centers to equip their new homes joined the ranks of American cold warriors. As newscaster and noted cold warrior George Putnam said in 1947, shopping centers were "concrete expressions of the practical idealism that built America . . . plenty of free parking for all those cars that we capitalists seem to acquire. Who can help but contrast [them] with what you'd find under communism."<sup>12</sup>

Consumers no doubt had fewer global concerns in mind. They had saved their money for specific purposes. During the war, a survey of bank depositors indicated that 43 percent were eager to spend their money on "future needs," and half of those specified purchases for the home. Leading architects helped give tangible form to these desires by publishing plans for "dream houses" in leading magazines like the *Ladies Home Journal*. Construction companies also fed consumer longings by selling scrapbooks for saving ideas for future houses, with sections divided into the various rooms of the home. The Andersen Window Company, for example, which was well aware of the potential market, distributed three hundred and fifty thousand embossed scrapbooks before the end of the war. By June 1944, appliances topped the list of the most desired consumer items. When asked what they hoped to purchase in the postwar years, Americans listed washing machines first, then electric irons, refrigerators, stoves, toasters, radios, vacuum cleaners, electric fans, and hot water heaters. Advertisers claimed that these items constituted the American way of life that the soldiers were fighting for.<sup>13</sup>

The pent-up desires for homes and appliances represented something more than mere fantasies of luxurious living. The need for wartime housing was great. Dislocated war workers needed \$100 million worth of new housing, which prompted a construction boom during the war. By 1943, residential real estate buying reached levels unknown since the 1920s. But wartime building was inadequate to meet the increasing need. The housing shortage reached crisis proportions after the war. In 1945, 98 percent of American cities reported shortages of houses, and more than 90 percent reported shortages of apartments. By 1947, 6 million families were doubling up with relatives or friends. The housing industry gained tremendous momentum after the war in the face of these immediate needs, and it took advantage of the conversion of production technology for peacetime use.<sup>14</sup> Supply and demand came together to foster an explosion in residential housing after the war. But the expansion did not take place equally in all types of housing; nor were the new dwellings available to all Americans. Largely as a result of governmental policies, massive suburban developments of single-family houses took precedence over apartments and inner-city dwellings.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill of Rights) created a Veterans Administration (VA) program of guaranteed mortgage insurance, expanding the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) program dating back to 1934. The new programs, which provided federal insurance for loans to white veterans, encouraged private investors to enter the housing mortgage market. In addition, the tax benefits for homeowners became substantial in the 1940s. The government also financed large suburban tracts, such as those built by William Levitt. With all these incentives for building and purchasing suburban residences, it soon became cheaper to buy than to rent. Provided they were white, veterans could buy homes in Levittown, with a thirty-year mortgage and no down payment, by spending only \$56 per month. At the same time, the average apartment rental in many cities was \$93. These overpriced, often substandard apartments were left to Americans of color, who were excluded from the suburbs. When asked why black families were not allowed to purchase homes in Levittown, William Levitt claimed that he was in the business of building houses, not solving social problems. As a result of such racist attitudes and the policies they generated, social problems that did not exist at the time emerged in the years to come.<sup>15</sup>

Postwar governmental policies fostered the construction of the vast majority of new housing in the suburbs. Housing starts went from 114,000 in 1944 to an all-time high of 1,692,000 in 1950. The cold war made a profound contribution to suburban sprawl. In 1951, the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* devoted an issue to "defense through decentralization" that argued in favor of depopulating the urban core to avoid a concentration of residences or industries in a potential target area for a nuclear attack. Joining this effort was the American Road Builders Association, a lobbying group second only to the munitions industry. As a result of these pressures, Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act in 1956, which provided \$100 billion to cover 90 percent of the cost for forty-one thousand miles of national highways. When President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the bill into law, he stated one of the major reasons for the new highway system: "[In] case of atomic attack on our key cities, the road net must permit quick evacuation of target areas."<sup>16</sup>

Many people believed that the suburbs also provided protection against labor unrest, which might lead to class warfare and its presumed inevitable result, communism. The report of a 1948 meeting of a San Francisco businessmen's association, chaired by the ex-president of the National Association of Home Builders, argued for the dispersion of industry outside central cities: "Conditions under which employees live, as well as work, vitally influence

management-labor relations. Generally, large aggregations of labor in one big [central-city] plant are more subject to outside disrupting influences, and have less happy relations with management, than in smaller [suburban] plants."<sup>17</sup>

The suburban growth that resulted from these policies was neither universal nor inevitable; in Europe, centralization rather than decentralization predominated. In the United States, the FHA and VA mortgage policies, the highway system, the financing of sewers, the government subsidies for suburban developments such as Levittown, and the placing of public housing in the center of urban ghettos facilitated the dispersal of the white middle class into the suburbs and contributed to the decay of the inner cities. Furthermore, blacks were excluded from the suburbs by *de facto* segregation and the FHA's redlining policies that denied mortgages to black families, more than by poverty. Although there were a small number of black as well as racially integrated suburbs, the vast majority of suburban neighborhoods were restricted to whites.<sup>18</sup>

In 1946, as a result of all these supports for homeownership, for the first time a majority of the nation's white families lived in homes they owned. Over the next fifteen years, 12 million more families became homeowners. By the 1950s, most of those who purchased homes did so to buy a better house or move into a better neighborhood. Loans available to homeowners favored purchase over repair, which further spurred the movement of the white population into newly constructed suburban developments. Between 1950 and 1970, the suburban population doubled, from 36 million to 74 million; 83 percent of the nation's growth during those years took place in the suburbs.<sup>19</sup>

Although the suburbs were clearly designated for whites only, they offered a picture of domestic comfort available to those with modest incomes. These homes represented the American way of life, democratic and affordable, that Nixon would extoll in Moscow. Confirming Nixon's assertion of the American desire for change and newness, upgrading was a widespread motive for spending. The nation's consumers continually replaced, improved, or expanded their homes, appliances, and cars, long before those items had worn out. Federal policies, combined with increased affluence, made it possible for white Americans of moderate means to indulge their desires for newness and mobility.<sup>20</sup> In these ways, the cold war goal of defusing class conflict succeeded in the suburbs, where families of white-collar and blue-collar workers lived side by side.

Federal programs did more than simply blur class lines and spur a trend toward homeownership in the expanding suburbs. Policies that reflected and encouraged the American domestic ideology fostered and reinforced a particular kind of family life. In effect, these federal programs provided subsidies and

incentives for couples to marry and have several children. Houses were designed to accommodate families with small children. Builders and architects assumed that men would be away at work during the day and houses would be occupied by full-time homemaker-mothers. In the first Levittown, a standardized suburban development built by William Levitt, 17,400 houses accommodated 82,000 residents. The structures were mass-produced and inexpensive, with a flexible interior design that was easily expandable if the family increased in size. Kitchens were near the front entrance, so mothers could keep an eye on their children as they cooked. Living rooms featured picture windows facing the backyard, also to facilitate the supervision of children. Appliances were included in the purchase price. The one-story design gave the home an informal look and was practical for families with young children, since there were no stairs, which could be dangerous. As young parents of the baby boom moved into these homes, it is no wonder that the first Levittown quickly earned the nicknames "Fertility Valley" and "The Rabbit Hutch."<sup>21</sup>

By stimulating these particular kinds of suburban housing developments and providing subsidies to homeowners, the federal government effectively underwrote the baby boom, along with the lifestyle and community arrangements that fostered traditional gender roles in the home. The government, along with the National Association of Home Builders, provided plans in the 1950s for smaller, inexpensive ranch-style homes that would allow for openness, adequate room for appliances and other consumer goods, and the easy supervision of children. Appliances were intended not to enable housewives to have more free time to pursue their own interests, but to help them achieve higher standards of cleanliness and efficiency, while allowing more time for child care. The suburban home was planned as a self-contained universe. Technological advances made housework efficient and professional; lawn mowers and cake mixes guaranteed a perfect result. In addition, homes were designed for enjoyment, fun, and togetherness. Family members would not need to go out for recreation or amusements, since they had swing sets, playrooms, and backyards with barbecues at home.<sup>22</sup>

Leisure pursuits encouraged a further infatuation with commodities. One of the most powerful of all postwar entertainments—the television set—sat squarely in people's living rooms. By the 1950s, televisions were selling at a rate of over 5 million a year. Television also fostered the classless ideal. Commercials extended the reach of advertising into people's homes, as did the abundant lifestyles portrayed on the screen. As historian George Lipsitz noted, situation comedies in the postwar years, especially those aimed at ethnic or working-class audiences, eased the transition from a depression-bred psychology of scarcity to

an acceptance of spending. In shows like *I Remember Mama* or *The Homemakers*, dramas of daily life often revolved around the purchase of consumer goods for the home. Characters in these programs urged each other to buy on installment, "live above our means—the American way," and spend rather than save. Commodities would solve the problem of the discontented housewife, foster pride in the provider whose job offered few intrinsic rewards, and allow children to "fit in" with their peers. Consumerism provided a means for assimilation into the American way of life: classless, homogeneous, and family-centered.<sup>23</sup>

The desire for the single-family home as a refuge against a chaotic world was not a postwar creation. Indeed, it dates back to housing reformers of the nineteenth century who first articulated the suburban family ideal. But it achieved new vigor in the postwar years, largely because the ideal was now within reach of most middle-class and many working-class Americans. In its modern manifestation, the suburban ranch-style home was to blend in with nature. As historian Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., observed, "The ranch house . . . was . . . seen as creating a unity with nature, but it was a unity that pictured nature as a tamed and open environment. . . . The 1950s design standards conceived of the natural world in a simplified and controlled way that eliminated anything that was wild or irregular."<sup>24</sup> (See Figure 15.)

The contained, natural style, enhanced by modern technology and design, offered a sense of security as well as privatized abundance. The natural look was more personal and even sensual than the formalized structures of public life and business. And although most ranch-style tract homes were relatively small, standardized one-story structures, the flexible interior space allowed for individuality—something increasingly lacking in the highly organized and bureaucratic world of work.<sup>25</sup>

Who purchased these homes, and did they satisfy their owners' needs and desires? According to surveys at the time, about half those who purchased houses in 1949 and 1950 were white World War II veterans in their mid-thirties with young children. The second half were about ten years older; their housing needs or financial resources had changed, prompting them to buy larger homes in the suburbs. Both groups were parents of the baby-boom generation. The second group included Americans of the age and circumstances of the respondents to the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS). The residents of Levittown, however, were more likely to belong to the first group: younger, less affluent, and largely working class. In his study of Levittown, Herbert Gans found that most of the residents claimed to be satisfied with their living arrangements.<sup>26</sup>



FIGURE 15 Ranch-style suburban home, built circa 1950. The style exudes a sheltered look of protection and privacy, surrounded by a tamed and controlled natural world. (Courtesy of Judy Tyler.)

Nevertheless, there were frustrations. Like expectations for exciting sexuality or fulfilling child rearing, the suburban ideal often promised more than it delivered. Many homeowners wished for more space but had to make do with smaller houses because of financial constraints. If spaciousness was an elusive goal for many suburbanites, so was the life of the happy housewife. Women in Levittown often complained about feeling trapped and isolated, facing endless chores of housekeeping and tending to children. For them, suburban life was not a life of fun and leisure but of exhausting work and isolation. In addition, since houses and neighborhoods were created with young children in mind, adolescents often chafed against the small rooms, lack of privacy, constant supervision, and absence of stores, restaurants, and other public gathering places where they could socialize in their neighborhoods. And although parents frequently mentioned the benefits of togetherness and the ability to spend more time with their families, the time-consuming commute for the men, and for the 25 percent of suburban women who were employed, actually reduced the amount of time available for families to share. Nevertheless, most homeowners expressed contentment with their residences, largely because they were significantly more spacious and comfortable than their previous dwellings, even if they did not

measure up to one's "dream house."<sup>27</sup> Once again, postwar Americans lowered their expectations and expressed satisfaction with their suburban lot.

Although these suburban tracts have borne the brunt of scorn for their lack of individuality and mass-produced sameness, they did offer a modicum of comfort and convenience to growing families of modest means. Most of the contract-built houses, like those in Levittown, had central heating, indoor plumbing, telephones, automatic stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines—conveniences that most middle-class Americans would not like to sacrifice. Yet these isolated enclaves also weakened extended-family ties, promoted homogeneity in neighborhoods, intensified racial segregation, encouraged conformity, and fostered a style of life based on traditional gender roles in the home.<sup>28</sup>

With the exception of avant-garde intellectuals and a small number of politically active feminists, few Americans articulated viable alternatives to the suburban lifestyle. Those who complained that life did not fit the ideal, like overworked housewives in Levittown, generally tried to alleviate their miseries with more money or goods. The ideal itself was rarely called into question, at least not publicly. Nevertheless, it was difficult to achieve, even for those who could afford it. These were by and large affluent middle-class Americans, well educated and ambitious, who believed in the American dream and belonged to the postwar consensus. The men worked in a highly organized and bureaucratized economy, struggling to earn enough to afford the trappings of the good life. Fully one-fourth of their wives entered the paid labor force, often in part-time jobs when the children were at school, to help pay for the appliances and furnishings they desired. Whether or not they were employed, the women focused their energies on the home, and together both husbands and wives sought personal fulfillment in their families, surrounded by children and consumer goods. They entered marriage with a utopian vision that included happiness as well as security. Did the "good life" in consumer-laden houses fulfill their expectations? The responses of the couples in the KLS provide some answers.

These men and women were among the comfortable group of white middle-class Americans able to take advantage of the fruits of prosperity. Eighty-five percent had a family income of over \$5,000 a year, although only thirteen percent earned over \$15,000. Most had never been heavily in debt; 98 percent had never received any kind of public assistance and only 30 percent had received aid from relatives or friends. Their purchasing habits reflected a national pattern: Personal extravagance was rare, but consumption for family enrichment was a high priority. They exhibited a desire for consumer goods combined with a concern for future financial security. About 70 percent of the sample spent between \$1,000 and \$3,000 in housing expenses per year; 63 percent had one

car and 33 percent had two cars. Slightly more than half had purchased their cars new.<sup>29</sup>

Reflecting the values of the time, which linked status to consumer purchases as well as to occupational level, Kelly rated the "prestige value" of the cars each family owned. He determined that 45 percent fell into the "low prestige" category; 30 percent, the middle; and 22 percent, the high. Only 3 percent owned cars in the "super-high prestige" range, such as a Cadillac. Most said they had one or two thousand dollars to spend per year above basic needs and rarely, if ever, purchased anything on the installment plan. These, then, were well-to-do but conservative people, not extravagant consumers.<sup>30</sup>

Like the rest of the middle class, the KLS respondents sought an expansive, affluent life within the security of their suburban homes. They spent their money in ways that would achieve that goal. The most important spending priority for 60 percent of the respondents was future financial security; for 23 percent, it was "increasing day-to-day living for family members"; and for 15 percent, it was "providing special opportunities for children." Clearly, security and family-oriented pursuits, not personal luxuries, were their major concerns.<sup>31</sup>

These women and men reveal how deeply domestic aspirations were rooted in the postwar success ethic. The increasing emphasis on familial rewards as validation for work found expression in the popular literature as well. Elizabeth Long's study of best-selling novels in the decade after World War II reveals a dramatic shift. In 1945, popular novels celebrated a vision of entrepreneurial success. But by 1955, themes had shifted toward more personal rewards. Heroes now made choices between work and leisure, family and the public world. They were more likely to accommodate themselves to the job and accept a secure place in the organizational hierarchy. According to Long, in these later novels the individual depends on others for happiness, and on the organization merely for a job. She called this theme the "corporate suburban" model, in contrast to the entrepreneurial model that prevailed a decade earlier. A typical mid-fifties best seller was Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, in which the protagonist is the new type of corporate hero who accommodates himself to bureaucratic constraints and wants to get ahead without sacrificing his family. Success is defined not by being at the top, but by having a secure, balanced life. In all these novels, successful career women are portrayed as "selfish"; female ambition is associated with sexual promiscuity. Suffering is the final lot for most such women in these stories.<sup>32</sup>

Husbands in the KLS sample reflected the values expressed in these novels. The family, rather than the workplace, was the arena in which men demonstrated their achievement. Work appeared relatively meaningless without the

family to give purpose to men's efforts. When the men responded to an open-ended question asking what marriage had brought them that they could not have gained if they had remained single, many referred to the motivation it provided them to work hard and succeed. One husband wrote that his marriage gave him "the incentive to succeed and save for the future of my family." Others mentioned "greater incentive to succeed in business career," "feeling of accomplishment," "a family to work for," and "greater financial security." Echoing Nixon's remarks, many of these husbands wanted to make life better for their wives. In return, they expected to be appreciated. One husband complained that the "chief weakness of our marriage seems to be her failure to feel any . . . accomplishment from mutual efforts—particularly the family increases in net worth—house and car, furniture, insurance and bank accounts."<sup>33</sup>

What is interesting about all these responses, particularly their frequency of occurrence, is that these husbands claimed that they would have had neither the motivation nor the success without marriage. Clearly, the provider role itself—and an economically dependent wife's recognition and appreciation of it—often offered a greater source of satisfaction than the actual work a man performed. Men were likely to place this aspect of their role in the center of their feelings of marital satisfaction. Ten husbands mentioned a better financial position as a benefit of marriage, another thirteen listed security and stability, and eleven others included social position; forty-three said marriage gave them a sense of purpose and responsibility. Together, these responses made up the third largest category of answers to the question of what marriage gave them that they would not have had without it, following closely after love and children.

The potential tragedy in this situation was that in spite of widespread prosperity, the provider role was a heavy burden, and not all men could be successful at it. Nor was the status of family breadwinner always adequate compensation for an otherwise monotonous or dissatisfying job. Just as material goods could contribute to marital harmony or even compensate for unhappiness to some extent, the failure to achieve or appreciate the fruits of prosperity could cause tension. One case illustrates how this could happen. Charlotte Oster complained that her aspirations for the good life were continually thwarted by her husband Brad's failure to achieve what she thought was an appropriate standard of living. "Having been forced to buy, after three wartime evictions, in a section which was not quite up to the social standards we were used to, we found it hard to accept the choice of friends of our oldest daughter. . . . It has been very hard to keep her within the boundaries of what we consider the proper social standards."

Charlotte's dissatisfaction was not lost on Brad, who was acutely aware of his inability to provide adequately for a wholesome family environment. Charlotte noted that he "is often upset because he thinks he hasn't provided for us as well as he would like to, and considers himself rather a failure." Nevertheless, she said that marriage brought her "four wonderful children, a home of our own, and always something better to look forward to and strive for." In the last section of the survey, in which respondents were asked to add anything that had not already been covered, Charlotte wrote the saga of her and Brad's marriage:

We were married during the depression years on a shoestring; my husband lost his job soon after, and went into business for himself, also with no capital. Though he was excellent in his field (photography), he didn't have the drive necessary to sell himself, and we had very meager living for several years, till he got a factory job during the war. Though he did well, he liked having his own independence, and after quitting at several factory jobs because he didn't like the unfairness or domination, he started another business with a partner, in aerial photography. Then a series of unfortunate setbacks began . . . eviction . . . hurricane damage to his place . . . injuries. . . . Now my husband is back working for another aerial concern, but he dislikes the work, feels he is too old to start at the bottom in another line, and therefore is inwardly upset a good deal of the time. . . . I have always felt that he shouldn't cater to his feeling of having to be independent, and that he should take any kind of a good job with a steady pay . . . which would give us all a much stronger feeling of security.

Charlotte's words demonstrate the centrality of the provider role and the difficulties it could create when it conflicted with a man's effort to achieve independence and personal fulfillment through work. The Osters' marriage lasted until 1961, when the couple divorced.<sup>34</sup>

Although some husbands in the sample were content to be "organization men" as long as they could bring home the fruits of material success, others shared with Brad Oster a need for autonomy at work. But like him, they were likely to find that this need placed in jeopardy their ability to be good providers and, in turn, created marital friction. In a similar case, Maureen Gilford complained, "My husband is a tireless worker but insists on working in his *own business* and has made so many changes, it has been a constant struggle for 18 1/2 years with just one short period of success. I don't feel my standards are the cause of his hard work. So he is always tired and has little time for enjoyment. I feel badly about this, preferring that he get a modest *but steady salary* and work for

someone else. It has made me pinch pennies for years. Also, I have to work *hard* to increase our income and have little time for my own use. Too much housework, *too much work* altogether."

Maureen longed for more leisure, more planned activities together, and more regular hours for her husband: "He is always tired and overworked." She said he had some emotional disturbances from worry about business and too many job changes: "I wish he had *more time* for the children and for himself." George Gilford wrote little in his report. He said marriage brought him "a good way of life." He sacrificed "nothing material" and rated his marriage as generally satisfying, although he, too, worried about providing for his family's needs, particularly a college education for both his children. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of the provider role would not necessarily satisfy George's need for meaningful work.<sup>35</sup>

The men in these cases faced the double anguish of failure to earn an adequate living in work they enjoyed and failure to be successful providers. For others, the breadwinner role, if performed successfully, might offer compensation for dissatisfaction at work. For women, marriage offered the possibility of material comforts and social standing—something a single woman earning a meager wage was not likely to achieve. Women also might gain some measure of autonomy in their domestic responsibilities—something that neither they nor their husbands were likely to find easily in the paid labor force. In addition, as wives of productive breadwinners, women might be able to gain the trappings of success unavailable to them in the work and public arenas. Suburban houses, after all, were not built with single working women in mind.

Some women focused their personal ambitions vicariously on their husband's careers. One husband noted that this focus contributed to his own drive. "Being somewhat lazy to begin with," he wrote, "the family and my wife's ambition have made me more eager to succeed businesswise and financially." Other wives were explicit about the centrality of material possessions to their marital and family satisfaction. One equated marriage with keeping up with the Joneses while at the same time expressing individuality: "We feel that our possessions are as good as if not better than our neighbors as they are different, antique as to modern, and we hold that thought to us dearly."<sup>36</sup>

Another woman, Lucille Windam, elaborated on this theme more fully, offering a shopping list of name-brand consumer items as evidence of a successful marriage. Yet her testimony also provides a glimpse of the difficulties that might arise even if—or perhaps because—one lived fully in accord with the domestic consumer ethic. She wrote:

One fortunate thing which is important in our marriage is our fortunate change in income bracket. When we were married my husband earned \$30 a week. We rented a five room flat, . . . had a baby, etc. Now we have five children and an income of over \$25,000 a year. We own our 8 room house—also a nice house on a lake. We have a sailboat, a Cris Craft, several small boats. We own our own riding horse which we keep at home. Our oldest child goes to a prep school. We have a Hammond organ in our home. . . . Our two sons at home own expensive instruments. We have and carry a lot of life insurance. Unless some disaster hits us, we see our way clear to educate all our children thru prep school and college.

It is important to note the kind of consumerism Lucille mentioned: All the goods were geared toward home, family leisure, education, and recreation. She did not mention diamonds, mink coats, or other personal luxuries. Yet here again is the potential hazard of domestic consumerism becoming the center of personal identity, for this woman's pride in her shopping-list definition of marital success was tempered by the complaint she added, almost as an afterthought: "My reaction to all this is that my husband doesn't seem content to save. He continually seeks something new to own; he doesn't keep his interest in any one thing very long." Her final remark is most telling, since it reflects the connection between success, consumerism, and domestic power relations: "He has terrific drive and aggressiveness, and I feel he tries to own all of us in the family too much." It is clear from Lucille's bitter words that the domestic consumer ethic, even at its most opulent, might be rife with tension. For her, family-oriented consumerism was the measure of successful married life and provided some compensation for her obvious disappointment in her relationship with her husband. For her husband, ambition and drive for power were expressed through his acquisition of goods and his total domination at home. Together they created an imperfect domestic relationship; nevertheless, that relationship clearly offered them both enough reasons for staying married.

Consumerism and children were the rewards that made the marriage worthwhile for Lucille Windam. In dedicating herself to the task of raising her children, she gained a sense of achievement that she believed she would not have found elsewhere. Her husband's ample income made her homemaking career possible. Even though she felt he was "overbearing, expects too much of me, and is inconsiderate of me," she appreciated his "ability to do almost anything he tries, his popularity, and his generosity to me financially." That financial generosity meant that she could devote herself to her children and provide them with all the finest things that money could buy: "I've worked hard at making my marriage

work—for my own and for my children's sake. . . . Certainly—materially—I never could attain the things I have now. Of course, the children are a great satisfaction. My job seems to swamp me sometimes but I am really very fond of my family and I do try to treat each as a special individual so each personality is important and each child can have every advantage we can possibly give. I can't imagine my life without children. I have no special talents so as a career person I'm sure I would not be a great success. As a mother and homemaker, I feel I am quite successful." Although she blamed her lack of "talent," rather than the lack of viable opportunities, she turned her creative efforts toward homemaking with the dedication and high standards of a professional.

Yet this domestic success was gained at a price: "Because of the size of our family, we have very little personal fun—I mean no clubs or activities. I used to be very active in PTA, church (taught Sunday school), and garden club, but my last two children now 4 and 2 years old changed all this. I just stay home with them and taxi my oldest boys around. Our oldest boy, almost 15, is away at prep school, but in our rural community I have to drive someone somewhere every day. I expect to get back into community life when my younger children are in school all day. I feel quite stale as though I don't use my mind enough." Still, she claimed to be satisfied with her marriage, in spite of a "stale" mind and an "overbearing, inconsiderate" husband. The children, apparently, made it all worthwhile; the affluence made it all possible.

Ronald Windam also claimed to be satisfied with their life together. He took pride in his role as provider. He wrote that marriage had brought him "stability, a family which I very much admire and enjoy doing my best to provide for." As for sacrifices, he wrote, "There is nothing other than Utopia, and a little give and take in sexual relationship. Other than that, there has been no sacrifice." Like so many of their peers, Ronald and Lucille Windam resigned themselves to their dis-appointments and looked on the bright side. Although their affluent suburban lifestyle fell short of their dreams, they were determined to make the best of it.<sup>37</sup>

Consumerism in the postwar years went far beyond the mere purchase of goods and services. It included important cultural values, demonstrated success and social mobility, and defined lifestyles. It also provided the most vivid symbol of the American way of life: the affluent suburban home. There can be no doubt that the gender roles associated with domestic consumerism—homemaker and breadwinner—were central to the identity of many women and men at the time. It is also evident, however, that along with the ideology of sexual containment, postwar domestic consumerism required conformity to strict gender assumptions that were fraught with potential tensions and frustrations. Suburban homes

filled with material possessions could not always compensate for the dissatisfactions inherent in the domestic arrangements consumerism was intended to enhance and reinforce. In fact, those very domestic arrangements, although idealized and coveted at the time, were the source of countless miseries. As one looks through the "window of vulnerability" in the cold war era, one sees families inside their suburban homes struggling to achieve the postwar dream of abundance and security. Many men and women made heroic efforts to live according to the ideal of domestic containment. Some were able to carve out meaningful and rewarding lives within its limits. For others, the rewards remained elusive.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# HANGING TOGETHER: FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

[Marriage has given me] my place in life. I feel I am doing exactly as I am fitted—with an occasional spurt of independence growing less all the time. I am settling down to a way of things. I am happy or content much more of the time than I am not.

—CAROL SEARS, 1955

When I'm crabby, she can handle me very nicely and soon has me smiling. . . . She looks to me for the answers of most responsible questions [sic].

—ROBERT SEARS, 1955<sup>1</sup>

CAROL SEARS described her independence as if it were a chronic disease or allergy that flared up now and then to bother her. But most of the time, she was able to keep it under control, even if she could not cure it. Independence was an uncomfortable condition for women like Carol Sears. It did not fit well with domestic containment. Independence might have led to a rebellion against the domestic role, or an active rejection of the status quo. But in the cold war era, such challenges to the prevailing ideology were highly risky ventures. Defying the

consensus could lead to a loss of economic security, social reputation, or community support. Adaptation was clearly safer than resistance. Those who chafed against domestic containment, like Carol Sears, buried their discontent and sought therapeutic, rather than political, solutions to their problems.

For women and men like Carol and Robert Sears, a successful family life was a major personal goal. They expected to build a home that would provide them with security and fulfillment and shield them from the harsh realities of public life in the cold war era. Those realities included not only the existence of atomic bombs, but the massive impersonal organizations in which most men worked, institutional roadblocks to women with career ambitions, and hostility toward anyone whose private life did not conform to the heterosexual family pattern. But family life was more than simply "a shelter and haven from the stresses of the world," as one postwar wife put it.<sup>2</sup> In its idealized form, the home would contain sexual enjoyment, material comfort, well-adjusted children, and evidence of personal success for husbands and wives who performed well their clearly defined roles.

These weighty desires were a great deal to ask from the nuclear family, since private life was ultimately insufficient to solve social problems. But after investing so much in the family, how did these women and men respond when the domestic life they had built did not meet their original hopes? Compromise, accommodation, and lowered expectations were solutions for many disappointed people who still clung to the ideal of domestic containment. These women and men often focused on the rewards of marriage and minimized the sacrifices. As they struggled to achieve a successful family life, many redefined the meaning of "success" along the way.

For Carol Sears, domestic harmony was achieved through accommodation. Her marital happiness depended on her ability to handle her husband "very nicely" and to keep him smiling. That effort required sacrificing "some of my friends and [not] seeing my relatives as often as I liked. Not that my husband minded my seeing them as long as he was not included. I felt he was bored or embarrassed being with them. . . . I find I now depend on him entirely for fun, excitement and diversion. He prefers young people, I really feel best with people my own age and older. But I have grown away or shy away from people and never invite them in for an evening as he will be bored with them or just not like them." Carol gave her marriage high ratings, only "once and a while" regretted it, and had "not seriously" considered divorce. Robert Sears wrote that he gave up "nothing of any importance" and gained "a sense of fulfillment and happiness" from his marriage.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, Robert and Carol Sears both considered their marriage to be a success. She found her "place in life"; he found "fulfillment and happiness." In the lives of couples like the Sears, we can see what it really meant to live according to the prevailing family norm. Nothing inhibited these relatively affluent white middle-class couples from achieving their domestic goals. They had enough resources and faced no racial or religious discrimination, and no major catastrophe disrupted their lives. If the good life rested in the postwar family ideal, it was theirs for the asking. But they had to be willing to pay the price.

Because the home was an arena of work for women and leisure for men, it fulfilled different needs for husbands and wives. The 1950s version of the "superwoman" was the wife and mother who could fulfill a wide range of occupational roles—early-childhood educator, counselor, cook, nurse, housekeeper, manager, and chauffeur—all within the home. She was likely to seek diversion from her demanding job through volunteer or community work or even through employment outside the home. These activities supplemented her central work as a homemaker and opened up new areas in which she could gain other kinds of satisfactions and rewards.

For men like Robert Sears, the home was the realm of freedom where they could forget the troubles at work that made them "crabby." Although the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS) did not include open-ended questions about occupational satisfaction, it did ask respondents to describe the nature of any emotional difficulties they experienced. Husbands mentioned difficulties on the job: too much pressure, tense relationships with employers or employees, efforts to achieve promotions or raises, boredom or ennui, and financial difficulties. Unlike their wives, few included problems with spouses or children. For men, work was often a source of stress, while the home was a source of relative solace. For women, the situation was often the reverse: Employment or community work alleviated some of the pressures of full-time homemaking.

Pressures and disappointments notwithstanding, postwar Americans expected to find life's satisfactions at home. They were determined to get married and stay married. As the marriage rate went up, the divorce rate went down. Sociologist Andrew Cherlin noted that postwar married couples were the only ones "in the last hundred years to show a substantial, sustained shortfall in their lifetime levels of divorce."<sup>4</sup> One might expect that the higher the hopes, the greater the possibility for disappointment and divorce. Yet these Americans brought their high hopes into marriage and stayed married to a remarkably high degree. It cannot be assumed that fewer divorces necessarily meant fewer unhappy marriages. Part of the explanation for the viability of these marriages

undoubtedly lies in the power of the prevailing norm. Men and women alike believed in marriage; a majority thought that single individuals were "either sick or immoral, too selfish or too neurotic."<sup>5</sup> Many couples stayed together through sheer determination.

Upwardly mobile couples often gave up close ties to extended families that might have provided support networks. For some, husbands' jobs or changing economic circumstances prompted a geographic move; for others, alienation from relatives led to an increased reliance on the nuclear family. Kinship ties were often strained if they infringed on the autonomy of the nuclear family, as was the case for Carol Sears, who ended up depending entirely on her husband for "fun, excitement and diversion." Many young marrieds intentionally severed ties with their relatives; some entered marriage to free themselves from their parents. Patricia Rollins expressed it this way: "I liked my husband when we married, but I had no great depth of feeling. I liked him much better than anyone else I'd met. I probably would not have married as soon if mother and I were more companionable." Mary Halsted had the same experience: "My husband was persistent in wanting to marry me. My mother was strongly against it. I was in the midst of friction at home and his persistence won me over. I liked him when I married him. I'm sure he knew that." Even if the relationship was not quite ideal, marriage gave her "a new type of freedom—from my family and their type of obligations."<sup>6</sup>

The isolation of the nuclear family sometimes helped keep couples together. As Kay Johnson explained before her marriage, she anticipated problems because of "the possibility that he might not be as successful as he wants to be." Later, she complained about her husband's "feelings of insecurity" and "need to prove he is tougher than the next fellow." Yet she realized that "breaking away from our parents has kept us together at moments when we were mad enough to part company. We have always had to consider that no one else would shoulder our problems. We had to face them alone and we didn't have outside opinions to make us more confused."<sup>7</sup>

Women who relinquished ties to relatives or gave up job possibilities were more likely than men to intensify their commitment to marriage because they had given up other sources of income and emotional support. Surely, this is one reason why so many women who abandoned occupational aspirations considered homemaking a new career. If men had to put on a "gray flannel suit" to join the "lonely crowd" at work, that was part of their job. For a housewife, on the job at home, adapting to the needs of her husband and focusing her creative energies on the family also came with the territory. The job definition of a

homemaker included complex psychological as well as physical tasks. Few women were fully prepared to take on these tasks, especially if they assumed—as many did—that old-fashioned ways were not appropriate for the modern family. Having turned away from inherited wisdom, those who felt ill equipped to perform the necessary tasks often turned to experts for help.

The KLS respondents were remarkably open to professional help. They eagerly read and consulted with psychiatrists, pediatricians, and experts in numerous other fields. The enormous popularity of the Kinsey reports and Dr. Spock's child care books indicated the near deification of postwar professionals. So pervasive was the therapeutic approach to life that respondents quoted, cited, and discussed experts in their anonymous questionnaires. This reliance on professionals is further evidence of people's reluctance to trust their own instincts or to attempt political solutions to institutional problems. Expertise offered a distinctly apolitical means of solving problems. The "well adjusted" adult or child adapted to normative expectations.

While black people in the South challenged the prevailing racial order by direct political action, most white Americans accepted the status quo and tried to change themselves to fit into it. Rather than challenging the circumstances that made life stressful or difficult, the therapeutic model called on individuals to cope with and adapt to existing realities. In that way, experts reinforced the political consensus by pointing to individual weaknesses, rather than to structural or institutional flaws, as the sources of problems.

Men and women in the KLS sample used psychology and the advice of professionals in significantly different ways. For men, psychology offered an *explanation* for their distress; they claimed that "anxieties" or "inferiority complexes" generally resulted from problems at work. Rather than calling for social change, they looked to the home as the prescription for relief, where a man could find comfort, solace, and a release from stress. Women, however, identified stress at home, or resentment against one's spouse or domestic situation, as pathological. Psychology provided a way to articulate the problem and find a solution. If women experienced stress, they should seek professional assistance to help them adapt. In other words, although psychology provided an explanation for men's woes and the home offered a cure, the home was often the source of women's stress and psychology offered the cure.

These uses of psychology are apparent in the case of Nora and Chester Grey. Chester was satisfied with their marriage and rated it high. He claimed that he sacrificed only "money and financial independence," but gained "a happy home, complete with a loving wife and four children." Before his wedding, he saw no

reason why the marriage would not be a success. But Nora had some concerns. Her own dependency needs were evident when she wrote that she chose him because "he gives me a feeling of being protected from life and someone to depend on." She also noted, "My feelings are too easily hurt," a statement that could be interpreted to mean that he frequently hurt her feelings, but the phrasing she used indicated that she considered oversensitivity her problem. Nora's next remark, however, suggests that her fiancé had some responsibility for her hurt feelings: "He sometimes gives me the idea that statements which I make have no merit and what he says is right." Part of the problem was that she tended to agree with his assessment of her abilities: "He denies this feeling and it may be due to my feeling of having inferior intelligence."

Years later, Nora reflected on the sacrifices she made for her marriage: "I always hoped to be just what I am—a wife and a mother. I gave up my office work which I enjoyed because of the contacts with other people. I have little time to see people during the day and at night I am tired enough usually to be content reading or watching T.V. I have desired to learn square dancing and to play cards occasionally with my husband, but he does not agree and I have become resigned. If I cared enough, I could do them alone but would enjoy activities more if we 'played' together." Nora's is a tale of adaptation: psychological adjustment to Chester's dominance, the sacrifice of her job, and acquiescence to his lack of interest in shared leisure pursuits. Yet Nora Grey also reaped what she felt were adequate rewards for her efforts: "A nice home I can run the way I want to. A husband to be a lifetime companion and 'protector.' A fine group of children who keep life from being monotonous. The self-confidence that comes from the knowledge that my husband loves me more than anyone else in the world."

Those benefits must have been worth a lot to her, for at the end of the questionnaire where she could add "anything else" she wished to say, Nora wrote a story of extreme hardship and intense bitterness:

Much of our trouble has centered around my husband's unwillingness to do work around the house, which he says is my sole responsibility. . . . By nature, I can't stand things in disrepair, so I have become a jack-of-all-trades. This was not too bad until I had the third baby within five years. My husband slept in a different room so as not to be disturbed by her night crying which she did for 5 months. I became so exhausted that I got very little sleep, even when she did, and I had to be up early with the other two little ones.

With the children's care, housework, repairs, leaf raking, snow shoveling, some lawn mowing and making all our clothing (so we could save every penny

we could toward a house) I became physically and nervously exhausted. My husband refused to get up with the children or let me stay in bed even one morning. . . . He said, "You're not human and don't need sleep." . . . With the present baby he is extremely different and has slept in her room and cared for her nights whenever I needed rest. At the time I had the three small ones, he was entirely unappreciative of all I did and said, "If it takes you more than 2 hours a day to do your work, it's only the result of poor planning." He had this attitude during all our married life until the last two or three years and made me very unhappy, nervous and irritable. I lost my desire for sexual relations with him and had to feign it, but now that he has developed more understanding of my needs and an appreciation of my efforts, my interest is just beginning to return.

With all this misery, Nora wanted a psychiatrist to help her cope with her situation and make her feel better. But even her desire for professional assistance was out of reach:

I believe I had a nervous breakdown but I knew psychiatric help would be expensive and my husband said, "Your trouble is all in your head and you don't have to feel this way if you don't want to." With the children older, my work lessened and I returned to normal. Also he is gradually assuming more responsibility about repairs. I don't much mind doing what he fails to because I enjoy that kind of work and have more time for it. . . . For the above reasons we never had another baby until a year ago when I felt I could handle it. Now I feel that at 40 we are too old to take the responsibility of more.

Chester's responses to the questionnaire contained none of the evidence of the domestic strain and distress Nora described, but they revealed that his job was a major source of misery for him. In the question concerning emotional health, he noted, "Extreme depression, anxiety and insomnia caused by job. Solved by changing job." Nora, however, was unable to change her job. At the end of her questionnaire, she minimized her suffering and articulated her commitment to her marriage. Reflecting on the survey itself, she wrote, "I feel participation may have helped because it makes me realize that it is quite normal that married life is not all a 'bed of roses.' You list many troubles which we have never had and the little we have had are mostly over." In a remarkable series of superlative responses, Nora rated her marriage highly successful, "never" considered divorce, would "definitely" marry the same person again, "never" regretted her marriage, and considered it "decidedly more happy than the average."<sup>8</sup>

From the evidence, it would seem that Nora Grey was a martyr and Chester Grey was a monster. But it would be wrong to assume that Nora was simply the victim of a cruel husband. Nora clearly thought it was important to maintain a conspiracy of silence. Chester had severe troubles at work; he could not have known how much Nora suffered at home, and she may well have not wanted him to know. When things broke, she fixed them. When the baby cried, she got up. When she lost her sexual feeling for Chester, she "feigned it." Obviously, such deliberate deception was intended to keep him from knowing how she felt. For someone who "always hoped to be just what I am—a wife and mother," making demands or confronting her husband with her unhappiness carried high risks. So she hid her rage, until Chester finally began to help out. Maybe his new job relieved the pressure on him and enabled him to be more involved at home.

The questionnaires do not reveal why Chester changed. Whatever the reason, he cannot entirely be blamed for the situation. After all, Nora claimed that the rewards were worth the sacrifices: "A nice home I can run the way I want to," which clearly offered some autonomy; "a husband to be a lifetime companion and 'protector,'" providing security; "a fine group of children who keep life from being monotonous"; and pride in having a husband who "loves me more than anyone else in the world." For those rewards, Nora was willing to adapt to her circumstances, hide her true feelings from her husband, and tolerate a great deal of misery.

Psychological adaptation played an even greater role in the marriage of Clara and Harold Jones than it did for the Greys. Overall, Clara Jones, like Nora Grey, was satisfied with her marriage, and for many of the same reasons. She wrote that she gained "three intelligent and interesting children, close companionship based on mutual interests with my husband," and "a home which is a shelter and haven from the stresses of the world."

But Clara Jones also had her share of difficulties. "My husband's long working hours—even on Saturdays and Sundays—laid a great burden on me when the children were younger, and the low salary a minister receives prevented any paid help. Now that they are getting into outside activities, the pressure and tempo of life are quite hectic, which we try to surmount by more sleep or cutting down on our activities and by urging them to be selective of the possible choices of activity." These were real difficulties rooted in her daily routine, but she believed that her trouble was psychological. Using psychiatric terminology, she explained, "My overanxiety has made some problems seem bigger than they were. . . . anxiety and guilt from overly severe and strict treatment in childhood, according to the psychiatrist who is now helping me." Clara may well have had

a difficult childhood, but she had real problems in the present as well. From the beginning, she resisted the subordination her husband expected of her. She recognized this tendency, even before her marriage, but she translated it into her problem: "Sometimes I notice I want to dominate and direct him, which is not good."

Both Clara and Harold Jones turned to psychiatric aid for Clara's difficulties, assuming that the only way to ease her burdens was for her to change her attitude. It never occurred to Harold, Clara, or the psychiatrist, for that matter, that Harold might also change. Harold wrote, "Apparently a lack of emotional responsiveness and warmth in my personality irritated my wife in our early years together, as did the very humble circumstances of our home and job. This was complicated by her guilt feelings, anxiety and frustration about sex, homemaking, and child-rearing." Here, using an abundance of psychological jargon, he recognized that his own coldness contributed to his wife's distress. But his solution was not for him to warm up, but for his wife to get help so she could better accept him the way he was. "It took a crisis in which she suffered important psychosomatic reactions," he commented, "to bring us to the place where she was ready to accept psychiatric help." For his part, he expressed satisfaction with the marriage, saying he sacrificed "nothing really" and gained "children" and "a degree of intimacy beyond expectation."<sup>9</sup>

The popularization of psychology gave women and men a vocabulary with which to tame and manage their frustrations. Many of life's traumas could be categorized in psychological terms and, to some extent, then explained away. Jane Willis was another wife who dismissed her difficulties using the psychological terminology of the day: "I regard my emotional disturbances as quite ordinary—concern over a particularly difficult phase one of the children is passing through." She rated her marriage in all the superlative categories. Life might have been different if she had chosen an alternative path, but she made a rational decision based on realistic choices: "Possibly I might have been a successful 'career woman.' I had only worked a short time after college before marriage and gave up this job upon marriage because of geographical distance from my husband's place of work. A position with a future in the same city as my husband's work was offered me shortly after marriage. My husband preferred that I not work and I offered no objection to his position. We planned to start our family a year hence and did not feel it would be fair to take a job with a 'future' if I could have to quit in a year."

Jane Willis's willingness to give up her career no doubt involved more than her husband's wishes. She knew that beginning a career and a family at the same

time would have been fraught with difficulty: "Also there was no financial reason for me to work; my husband had a good job and we could live comfortably without being extravagant." In the long run, Jane was not sorry: "I have never regretted 'giving up' this doubtful 'successful career.'" In return for her sacrifice, marriage brought her "a wonderfully balanced life—the emotional equilibrium that comes from loving and being loved, the challenge and satisfactions of bringing up four children, and a little time to spare for the outside stimulation of participating in the governmental problems of our community." Jane Willis was not willing to make the choice between children and a career—a choice women of her generation were often forced to make. So she carved out an alternative career based on "the challenge and satisfactions of bringing up four children" and, like many homemakers of her generation, found fulfilling ways to contribute to the community through volunteer work.

Donald Willis also rated his marriage in all the superlative categories, but he articulated more complaints. He began with his problems at work: "For the past two or three years, I have had difficulty relaxing because of the constant pressure and frustration at work." In addition, "I gave up all of my spare time and money for my family." In return for these sacrifices, he expected his wife to be at home for him and complained that she was "too easily involved in community affairs." He concluded, "Our marriage could be even happier were it not for the physical and mental strain of (a) my work and home activities and (b) my wife's community work and home activities. We are both always near exhaustion."<sup>10</sup>

Overall, these marriages met at least some of the needs of their participants, considering there were few alternative routes to a fulfilling life at that time. For women in particular, material considerations made it nearly impossible to abandon their marriages. Marriage was their meal ticket; it was also the best way for them to gain social respect, status, and a sense of belonging. With so much at stake, it is no wonder that these women hid their discontent, rarely made demands on their husbands, and defined their marriages as successful.

More than 80 percent of both the husbands and the wives in the sample rated their marriages as "above average," and nearly two out of three rated them "extraordinarily happy" or "decidedly happier than average." Yet, in spite of these high ratings, the women especially experienced a great deal of discontent. In general, the men expressed more contentment with their marriages than did their wives. They were more likely to complain about difficulties at work and appreciate the comforts of home. Indeed, their wives took pride in making those homes pleasant so the men would feel that their sacrifices at work were worthwhile. In this effort, they made significant sacrifices of their own.

Women were twice as likely as men to report that they were dissatisfied or regretted their marriage. Nearly half the women, but only a third of the men, said they had considered divorce. In response to the question "If you had your life to live over, would you marry the same person?" about half the men and women said "definitely." Yet nearly twice as many women as men said they would definitely *not* marry the same person. These findings are consistent with other studies that have demonstrated that in general, men are more happily married than women. Researchers who interviewed thousands of Americans in the mid-fifties concluded, "Women were always more negative about marriage than men were."<sup>11</sup>

There are several reasons for this discrepancy in satisfaction. For housewives, the home was the workplace; for men, it was the arena for leisure and freedom away from the job. A comparison of the "job satisfaction" of men and women reveals some interesting findings. Although men resented the alienation and subordination of their jobs, these postdepression security-minded breadwinners were reluctant to quit a steady job to risk finding an even more oppressive one or, worse yet, no job at all. Male blue-collar workers surveyed at the time complained about work and said that if they could start over, they would not take the same job. But when asked if they were satisfied, most claimed that they were. They would make the best of their imperfect employment and look for freedom and community elsewhere—in leisure pursuits, through the popular culture, and especially at home.<sup>12</sup>

When the middle-class homemakers in the KLS were asked about *their* job satisfaction (that is, their satisfaction with marriage), most said they were satisfied. But asked whether they would marry the same person if they had it to do over again, many said they might not. Like the blue-collar men surveyed, they were determined to make the best of the situation and reluctant to risk abandoning what they had for the slim possibility of finding something better. Unlike the women, however, they were unable to find an antidote in the home to their dissatisfactions in the workplace, since the home was all they had. Although many volunteered their time in communities or took jobs when their children were in school, their homemaking responsibilities did not diminish accordingly, and their primary responsibilities remained focused on their family's needs. This situation led to a number of disparities between men's and women's evaluations of their marriage.

The case of Joe and Margaret Bensen shows how widely divergent two partners' perceptions of the same "successful" marriage might be. Joe rated the mar-

riage in all the superlative categories and had no complaints. His wife met all the expectations he noted when they were originally engaged: her wit, optimism, skill in the "culinary arts," and her potential to be "a good manager in the home." As he explained after more than a decade of marriage, "The more I see and know about other men and their wives and their attitudes toward each other, the better I like my marriage." All he gave up was "the empty, aimless, lonely life of a bachelor. I cannot think of anything I really wanted to do or have that has been sacrificed because of marriage." He gained "the love, care, and attention of a wonderful woman. The love, affection, and respect of 4 great children who will be a credit and comfort to me if I live to be an old man."

Joe Bensen claimed that his family would be a "credit" to him; his delight in their "attention" and "respect" indicates that they, almost like personal possessions, would serve his needs and reflect his success. Explaining the reason for his happy marriage, he wrote that his wife rarely crossed his will or resisted his demands:

We have domestic tranquility because we don't argue; we almost always have same ideas, attitudes and feelings. My wife can get me to do most anything because of the nice way she goes about it. She makes a genuine effort to please me in many little ways, so it is only fair for me to try to please her in a few big things. Neither of us is selfish, stubborn, domineering or dishonest with the other. These are traits often found in one spouse or the other under the cloak of "strong character." Some people seem to think it is a sign of weakness or a wound in their pride to give in or try to go along with their spouses' reasonable demands without a fight.

The key to the Bensens' apparent domestic tranquillity was the lack of conflict in their marriage. Joe Bensen evaluated the marriage in terms of the personal services and attention his wife lavished on him. He described her skill in meeting his personal needs and her gentle power of persuasion. The process of filling out the questionnaire increased his self-awareness: It "stimulated thought about my true role as a husband and focused attention on some of the more important aspects. In other words it helped me 'take stock' of myself like a mirror. It is so easy to take too much for granted." Nevertheless, as his wife's testimony indicates, what he saw in the mirror was what he wanted to see and what she allowed him to see.

Margaret Bensen's responses to the questionnaire seem to describe a different marriage. Like her husband, Margaret claimed to be quite satisfied with their

relationship. But her comments were hardly as enthusiastic as his. She began, "My husband is a real saint and, compared to other husbands, a perfect mate. I respect him and really love him, but I'm the insecure kind of a female who needs a close male companion to make life worthwhile." After this preface, in which she blamed her "insecurity" for her dissatisfaction, she continued:

My husband expends his energies on carpentry hobbies or such and never seems to need me more than to have a hot meal ready and to have his clothes in good repair. . . . He likes to have me within calling distance, but never seems to need the closeness I require. . . . There have been several other men thrown into my life who have been so attractive that I've found them hard to resist. My husband never seemed to object to my interest in others, although I don't believe he knows to what extent I've become involved. I don't like the situation but I can't get out of the whirlpool.

Had my husband been slightly more demonstrative once in a while, said "I love you" and kissed me at times other than just when he wanted sexual intercourse, I believe our marriage would have been ideal for me.

Margaret continued by accepting the responsibility for her husband's aloofness. "I don't blame him. I never feel any discrepancy in our marriage is too much his fault. Maybe I wasn't what he desired." Yet, according to the responses on his questionnaire, she was exactly what he desired. He wanted support and attention, and she provided it. She did not let him know that he was not meeting her needs and that she was attracted to other men as a result. Her comments indicate that their marriage was fraught with tensions: "I've just had a sterilization operation, so now I'll not be reluctant to take care of his physical needs at any time and that should bring us closer. Since I had a 'surprise' baby 2 years ago, I've been frightened of becoming pregnant again and have not been too cooperative at times, although his physical needs are few."

Margaret also resented the way in which Joe claimed her and the family as a "credit" to him: "[He] tries to play 'the big wheel,' impressing people with his unusual children, his home, and his town activities. I always cringe because people get bored and annoyed with his bragging when actually we have little about which to brag. It bothers me to see that he has to build himself up in that way." Yet she contributed to his self-deception by providing the support and encouragement he seemed so desperately to need from her: "I'm always building him up in any way I can, so I hope it isn't my fault."

Both Joe and Margaret Bensen defined marital success largely in terms of their possessions. For Joe, his wife and children counted among the possessions he displayed as marks of his achievement. For Margaret, the home and its furnishings were an important measure of success, and she expressed some discontent over their inability to match the standard of living of their peers: "Our contemporaries seem to have more of the material things and live better but then we're just starting a new business and we have 4 children in an expensive community, so I don't feel we're in too bad a condition, although I yearn for a more adequate house and not to have money worries." There were also tensions over the children, but Margaret again backed away from placing too much blame on Joe: "My husband has never taken the responsibility of the children and has waited for my direction. . . . It would have been more ideal if he had taken over occasionally."

Despite all her complaints—her discontent with his boasting, their money problems, her unfulfilled consumer desires, their sexual tensions, and her disappointment over his lack of affection and help with the children—Margaret claimed to be satisfied with the marriage. In the end, her assessment of the marriage was actually not that different from his: "We have had a good marriage, 4 wonderful children, and complete peace, which is essential to me. . . . I think I'm very lucky to have such a fine husband and probably don't deserve him in many ways." Margaret rated her marriage highly, said that it brought her "children, a normal home life, happiness and companionship," and claimed that she "can't think of anything important" that she sacrificed.<sup>13</sup>

Many subtle clues reveal Margaret Bensen's ambivalence about her marriage, as well as the enormous stake she had not only in *making* it successful but in *seeing* it as successful. Although she complained about her husband's failings, she insisted that she was happily married to "a real saint" and "a perfect mate." She was inclined to blame herself for any disappointments she felt. Submerging her anger at him for his lack of demonstrative affection, she labeled herself "insecure." She even faulted herself for providing him with praise and support that encouraged his boasting. By taking a measure of blame herself, she could point to her own character flaws, rather than to disappointments with her spouse or their marriage, as the source of her discontent.

Another case exhibited similarly discordant assessments. Peter Wells was quite satisfied with his marriage. His only complaints were his wife's leniency with the children and her "feeling that I should do more about the house." His wife Norma had quite a bit more to say about their relationship, even before

their marriage: "We are both very independent and possibly I may not always be willing to bow to his wishes and ideas." Later, she described her marriage as "rather matter-of-fact." She complained that Peter was "too dictatorial" with their two adopted children and "disliked having his routine disturbed by the children. . . . Most of their activities were left up to me—both at home and outside. I felt he should take more time with them. Dinner was a constant source of annoyance. He wanted silence so he could listen to the news. Of late, these relations have improved since the children are older and he is taking more interest in their activities and doing more things with them."

Norma claimed that her marriage, although imperfect, provided "a stable, comfortable life. . . . I could always depend on my husband and, though I wouldn't say it has been exciting, our marriage has been pretty steady and generally pleasant. It has kept me economically comfortable and secure—given me a home and family to care for and generally pleasant surroundings. I have enjoyed being a part of the faculty (wife) at various universities and the social status has been pleasant." It is clear that the status, security, and affluence she enjoyed would not, in her estimation, have been available to her as a single or divorced woman.

Almost as an afterthought, Norma added a statement at the end of her questionnaire that expressed deep resentment against the subordinate role her husband expected from her:

One particular source of friction: My husband is a firm believer in "woman's place is in the home"—so it is, to a degree—but I have always felt the need for outside activities and interest in community affairs because I felt mentally stagnated by not taking part in outside programs and because I feel morally obligated to take part, in view of my education and some capabilities. He takes no interest in my interests and belittles most women's groups—and women in general (males are definitely superior beings). Whatever I have done has had to be at no inconvenience to him—and often with a scornful attitude on his part. It's not good to have to get your buildup outside your house.

I get the impression that what he wants is just a good housekeeper to keep everything comfortable at home and peaceful. And he doesn't want to be disturbed by conversation. [Although we are] within speaking distance 50 or 60 hours a week, usually there is a book, newspaper or radio between us. Actually we think a lot alike on many subjects but we're really not very companionable about it—at least we don't discuss things much between ourselves.

The other thing that makes our marriage less than ideal is my husband's lack of enthusiasm. He's a pessimist and I'm an optimist, and oh, how I've longed for

a little "joie de vivre" on his part. So many things that to most people are fun are just too much trouble for him. He'd rather sit. His highest expression of enthusiasm is "uh huh, very nice,"—and that's that.

Norma Wells's final remarks demonstrate that in spite of her submerged feminist impulses and deep discontent, she had a great personal investment in the marriage and was committed to making the best of it. She wrote, "I have enjoyed considering the questions in this study. It gives me a line on what is good in our marriage and has given me ideas for possible improvements. It's also given me a chance to write down my pet peeves. Inadequate as it seems in some respects, it will last us 'till death us do part' and we'll live on an even keel."<sup>14</sup>

Susan Berk was another wife with an unswerving commitment to a less-than-ideal marriage. Susan's husband, Jeremy, was very satisfied with his marriage. He wrote that he gained "the companionship . . . of a wonderful girl" and sacrificed "nothing really important. Would merely have had money to spend for automobiles and the like." In the questionnaire he filled out before their wedding, Jeremy noted that "there have been times when she has been most undecided—the recurrence of such a 'mood' may bring trouble." Yet he did not mention any similar concern after they were married. Susan revealed the depth and persistence of that "mood." Like her husband, she noted before their marriage "temperamental difference, my own moodiness and instability," but she also mentioned as a potential problem "the lack of understanding of this in my fiancé."

Years later, although Susan claimed to be generally satisfied with the marriage, she wrote that she gave up a "career in the fine arts." She also said she would not marry the same person if she had to do it over again. As she explained at the end of her questionnaire:

I realize that there are many inconsistencies and apparent contradictions in my answers to many of the questions in this section. This is due to the fact that I have been deeply in love with another man since the third year of my marriage. . . . I love [my husband] devotedly and deeply, but as a sort of combination of child and friend. My love affair I regard as having added to the happiness of my marriage, rather than decreasing it, as it has made me such a happy person. The other man and I see each other no more than once a year, that is, since we lived in the same place for a year at the beginning. However we're completely congenial, and just to know he's there makes me happy.

Divorce was out of the question. She concluded by stating, without explaining, her commitment to her marriage: "Although I'd marry him [the other man] if I

were not married, I'll never leave my husband, as I'm sure my re-marriage couldn't be happy under such circumstances."<sup>15</sup>

All the women in the cases just described felt a deep ambivalence toward their husbands. They all resented their husbands' unquestioned authority in the home, wished for more attention to their own needs, and chafed against the subordination that was expected of them. Yet they also protested that they loved their husbands, were satisfied with their marriages, and blamed themselves frequently for their discontent. Joan Milford was another such wife. She wrote, "I think we'd both like our lives to be a little fuller, . . . mentally, physically, civilly, socially, but we don't have the strength. We'd like more money, so we wouldn't have to do so much ourselves. I do all my own work and have all the ideas about almost everything from home decorating to picking out my husband's ties and socks each day—at his request!"

After her sudden shift from the plural *we* to the singular *I*, her complaints became more pointed and directed at her husband: "I work awfully hard. It's especially hard with a big house and a 5 year old and a 16 month old. My husband generally is a very selfish person. He really gives me a pain in the neck at times, but at that point, somehow he senses my feelings and shoos me out and takes over and I just melt like putty in his hands." Joan alternated between sharp criticism and expressions of affection. Yet the tone of despair prevailed. She noted that her husband sometimes realized how hard she worked and helped her out, but that if it was inconvenient to him, he would not: "He lets me down all the time in everything, but I've gotten hardened now. He's a real party boy and loves a good time, but I get the brunt of the work. However, he's quite a success in his work and is uncomplaining and we are the envy of many of our friends." In this last remark, she pointed to her husband's success, financial security, and the *appearance* of a happy and stable marriage as important bonuses that compensated for other, less pleasing, aspects of their relationship. She concluded with self-reproach and ambivalence: "I always end up in the wrong, being the heel and martyr, but I love him in spite of it so what can I do!"<sup>16</sup>

Men were much more reticent in describing their feelings. One reason, no doubt, was that the KLS asked few questions about the primary sources of their discontent: work. Another reason was the stoicism and lack of emotional display expected of "manly" men. Often the enormity of men's problems was visible only through their wives' comments. Linda Hilburn was one wife who pointed to her husband's difficulties as the primary source of her own. Although she was "generally satisfied" with her marriage and felt that she sacrificed "nothing," her statements indicate that both she and her husband experienced a great deal of

discontent and frustration. Referring to her spouse through their coded number, she wrote, "Mr. 90 needs me full time, but that's not possible for the kids need me too. He realizes that but I am torn often between them, since he is away so much." She went on to say, "Mr. 90 has, at times, little control over his temper. He also has an inferiority complex, based primarily on his size (5'4"), and these two states of mind have not been improved by his health (two serious coronaries and one attack of angina since 1947). At times, the result is close to panic at not being able (in his opinion) to give the kids all he would like (private schooling, etc.). His health has made additional insurance impossible." With what must have been a stressful work life involving a great deal of travel and his severe emotional and physical difficulties, it is no wonder that Linda concluded, "The kids and I are far happier with our lot than is Mr. 90."

Clearly, Linda Hilburn recognized the pressures her husband felt as he tried to be a good provider, with his temper, "inferiority complex," and poor health. But the impact of his needs on her life was profound: "It is very important to Mr. 90 that he be 'head' of the house and that he control the finances; because it means so much to him, it's all right with me. With his heart condition, I should be more familiar with our family finances, but to me, his health is dependent on his feeling important, so I try to live 'one day at a time.' It's not always easy. . . . Underlying any misunderstandings is his temper. He realized that but not until too late. His last attack (angina) was definitely the result of temper over something not connected with our marriage (in fact something nonexistent); he said so when in the hospital five days."

Linda adapted to this tense situation by trying to protect her husband, stifling her resentments, and focusing on the children: "I often keep problems to myself if I think he will 'blow his top' or 'feel inferior.' Since Mr. 90 travels and is usually away 2-3 nites a week, I can do this!" Apparently, she did it very well. She rated her marriage as "decidedly more happy than the average," claiming that it brought her "a home, companionship, children and, if they are happy and well adjusted—able to care for themselves and their families—complete satisfaction. The children keep us so busy now, we have little time for much else."

Linda's "complete satisfaction" depended on how the children turned out in the end. For her, the satisfaction of a job well done, rather than day-to-day contentment, was the ultimate measure of marital success. In the end, she came back to a common theme: "I still say no one can explain 'Love' and one who hasn't loved hasn't lived! We have and will for a long time, I hope, in spite of differences."

Ralph Hilburn recognized that a nervous breakdown led to his heart attack. But compared to his wife's responses, his questionnaire was not self-reflective.

Noting that all he gave up when he married was "other girls," he said he gained "position, home, children and general well-being." He did not discuss his work and made no complaints about his home life, except to say that his wife "lacks interest in dress around the house" and "weeps easily."<sup>17</sup>

The cases described in this chapter form a pattern: Women expressed more dissatisfaction than their husbands but were more willing to make sacrifices for the sake of their relationships and eager to define their marriages as workable and successful, even if imperfect. The men gave up things they considered trivial, such as "other girls," more "money to spend," or "so-called personal freedom." In return, they gained "love and devotion," "position," and a family that would be a "credit" to them. Had the survey asked more questions about work, it might have sparked more expressions of discontent from the men, who no doubt experienced more of their stresses and strains in the workplace. In addition, the women clearly thought it was part of their job to keep men happy at home because their material well-being depended on it. Thus, they were as reluctant to risk "annoying the boss" at home as their husbands were on the job.

Women had to make different kinds of choices than did men. They gave up careers in medicine and the fine arts and activities they enjoyed, such as music and sports. In almost every case, they complained about the burdens of their household tasks, particularly their husbands' lack of help with the children. They also complained of their husbands' selfishness, demands on them, and need to be the boss. Yet, in all these cases, the wives not only put up with these problems but claimed to be satisfied with their marriages. Why? What did they gain? Here women's responses were even more concrete than their husbands'. For these women, life was "economically comfortable and secure"; marriage provided "complete peace," a "stable, comfortable life," "status," and "stability, children, a nice home," which made them the "envy" of many of their friends.

To achieve this secure, stable, and materially comfortable life, women had to adapt. The adaptation took two forms: adapting to their husbands' needs and adapting their own goals and aspirations to fit the marriages they had created. Both husbands and wives recognized that marriage required more adjustments for women than for men. When asked specifically how much they had to change their "early ideas, habits, and expectations" in regard to relations with relatives, choice of friends, recreation and social activities, and running the household, women indicated much more adjustment than did men, and the men agreed. After making so many adjustments, women may have felt some measure of accomplishment or, at the least, a sense of personal investment in the relationship.<sup>18</sup>

What were the alternatives for women who had given up outside-the-home career possibilities and worked to build a family life that would provide them with children, security, and comfort? Most seemed to agree that a less-than-ideal marriage was much better than no marriage at all, and that marriage itself offered benefits that compensated for the shortcomings of their husbands. For women who planned to be career homemakers, a personal investment in marriage helped them achieve their goals. For example, when asked if "being married" helped them attain their goals, more than three-fourths of the men and women responded affirmatively. Women were more likely to have already achieved their goals, since for many, marriage and motherhood were their goals. Their husbands, most at mid-career, were still aspiring to rise in their jobs. Yet they recognized the important role marriage played in their efforts. When asked if their *partner* helped or hindered the attainment of their goal, however, men were more likely than women to say that their partners helped. Nearly twice as many women as men said that their spouses actually hindered them.<sup>19</sup>

Ratings of emotional health also reflected these differences. Women were less likely than men to rate their emotional health as "excellent"; 11 percent said they had "a great deal" of emotional disturbance, compared to only 3 percent of the men.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, marriage remained a high priority in their lives. Although many more women than men regretted their marriage and considered divorce, they were not likely to give up on marriage altogether. When the full sample is considered, including those who were divorced, twelve men said they would "not marry at all" if they had their life to live over, compared to only two women.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, marriage remained an important goal for women, even if their particular spouses turned out to be disappointments.

So powerful were the imperatives to achieve a successful family that even when marital happiness was obviously lacking, some individuals were not even willing to admit the fact to themselves, much less to venture into the realm of social deviance through such a drastic measure as divorce. These were years when countless articles in the popular press warned of the evils of divorce. Those whose marriages ended in divorce were deemed "selfish," "irresponsible," and "immature." One psychiatrist equated divorce with psychological maladjustment. He described it as a "neurotic solution adopted chiefly by neurotic persons" resulting from "the neurosis which brought the couple together in the first place." Describing a "typical" divorcée, he continued, "She is unhappy, struggling, neurotic, misunderstood and maligned by herself and her environment. Even her frequent promiscuity is a neurotic symptom."<sup>22</sup> With such prevalent assumptions, few would want to be tarnished by the taint of divorce. Worst of

all, many experts argued that divorce placed children at risk of emotional trauma and maladjustment. A psychology professor at Hunter College, writing in *Parents Magazine*, explained "Why Boys and Girls Go Wrong or Right." He noted that the "delinquent" child comes from a family where "the parents don't get along and that his home has been or will be broken by separation, desertion or divorce." These parents were also condemned for their inability to fulfill their roles as breadwinners and homemakers: "His mother neglects herself, her apartment and Johnny. . . . His father is likely to be shiftless and often on relief."<sup>23</sup> Along with social ostracism and character defamation, divorce might mean financial disaster for women. These were risks many women were determined to avoid.

The determination to stay together at all costs is one of the most striking characteristics of the men and women in the KLS. The idea of a "working marriage" was one that often included constant day-to-day misery for one or both partners. The case of Maria and Norman Kimball, which opened Chapter 5, demonstrates this attitude at its most extreme. The Kimballs had troubles from the beginning: Norman never fully trusted Maria after their premarital intercourse. The relationship went from bad to worse, as he justified his extramarital affairs by convincing himself, inaccurately, that his wife was doing the same. But they had other problems as well.

Before their marriage, Maria articulated some of the difficulties facing postdepression young adults: "I have been raised in a background of extreme financial instability—charge accounts, long overdue bills, social ostentation—and can't live that way. He offers a prospect of honesty and financial management that I need. We are amazingly congenial, and I am in love with him although I have been skeptical of such a thing for years (since my broken engagement). I have complete faith in the continuation of that romantic relationship." Nevertheless, she was aware of some potential problems: "I am out of school, self-supporting and successful on my job (social service work with delinquent minors); he has one and a half years of college and then his prospect is very hazy. It is doubtful if I can get a good job nearer, and separated married life is practically out of the question." Ultimately, she gave up her job, but financial pressures continued to plague them, particularly her husband, who struggled to provide for them adequately. Although his responses revealed none of his distress, Maria described him as "somewhat withdrawn; he makes no close friends. Has periodic depression and restlessness. Constant anxiety around financial security."

By the mid-1950s, Maria had lost her "complete faith in the continuation of that romantic relationship." When asked what she sacrificed because of her mar-

riage, she replied, "The hope of being loved—the security of living with someone I was sure was fond of me. Nothing else, really, unless one could loosely blame my marriage for the loss of my close relationship with my father, which did not stand up under his jealousy of my husband." When Maria listed her rewards, however, she articulated the compensations she gained from the marriage: "The selfish satisfaction of physical nearness to someone whose nearness alone provides a thrill and a pleasure, two lovely children, an economic position stable enough so I can work at an ill-paid job I enjoy and have leisure time for friends I care about."

Like others in the survey, Maria Kimball worked at an "ill-paid job" she enjoyed once the children were in school. For her, work was an arena of freedom, as the home was for many of the men. But it was her marriage to a successful provider that enabled her to hold this job without facing financial hardship. She continued by pointing to the benefits of having a marriage that *appeared* to be successful: "The purely female pleasure of having a husband whose behavior is never an embarrassment, who never lets one down in public, never vents malicious humor, and whose ideas and attitudes rarely jar one's own beliefs. In outside contacts, we work like a well-oiled team. It may be wryly amusing at times, but there's some satisfaction in having acquaintances envy one's apparent compatibility."

Maria went on to enumerate her conflicts with her husband:

My rigidity frustrates him. Basically a salesman, he will continue to batter at my tastes and prejudices and suffers from a sense of personal failure when they do not change. He assembles reasons for a decision and parades them like an army, sincerely believing in his logical and rational mode of thought. To me this is so much rationalization and is unconvincing and wearisome. I think intuitively, and naturally he concludes I do not *think* at all. Maybe he's right, but when forced to give reasons for my preferences, I get a moral kickback because to me any reasons I dream up to support my positions are imaginative lying.

Although Maria resisted her husband's efforts to bend her opinions to conform to his own, it is clear she had begun to distrust her own strong feelings. Yet she continued, "I like to do things his way to please him, but I am incapable of taking the last necessary step of having his way become my way. For my satisfaction, I need him to feel pleasure in getting his way. He can't because the sense of obligation ruins it for him. So we're working it out by avoiding discussion. If we make no plans together, we have no arguments."

Using explicit cold war terminology, she continued:

Each retreats from any sphere of influence in which the other develops an interest. For instance, I now work outside the home and hire a houseworker. This has eliminated the expression of divergent opinion over how the house is run. He leaves the children to me. I don't suppose either of us is too satisfied with this noncooperative impasse, but it works. In fact, it works very well. So long as we maintain a state of breakdown in communication, we get along fine. Crazy, isn't it? Yet these last few years I've come to believe that however irrational a human relationship may be, if it *works*, it's valid.

At the end of the questionnaire, Maria reflected on their difficulties:

It seems to me that the key to what marital discord has dogged us lies simply in the basic inability of each of us to accept the other's limitations. To me, warmhearted and expressive, my husband's stiff reticence is a sort of New Englander pose through which he cuts himself off from pleasing relationships, and I cannot grasp that an only child's lack of training in sharing could be a trait that could not be unlearned. He gives me no approval or affection and very rare support. Sex, which is completely without affection, gives me no lasting satisfaction, and it is the only kind I get. Our marriage works very well, yet I am frequently dreadfully lonely.

For Maria Kimball, the security and outward workings of the "well-oiled team" compensated for her intense personal sadness.

Norman Kimball was not so explicit in his responses, but he, too, was less than satisfied with the union. Although he liked his wife's "sexual ability, sense of humor, and intelligence," he disliked her "possessiveness and disregard for success and economics." He felt that her problem was "self-pity and failure to accept unpleasant reality." Once again, he believed that his wife's lack of acceptance, rather than the "unpleasant reality," was the source of the problem. This couple managed with their "working marriage" intact for more than three decades. Finally, when their children were grown, the sixties had come and gone, and divorce had become more acceptable, the Kimballs divorced in the 1970s.<sup>24</sup>

These cases represent the essence of domestic containment. The home contained not only sex, consumer goods, children, and intimacy, but enormous discontent, especially for women. For many, there was no place else for

this discontent to go, so it remained contained in the home. Women learned to adjust and adapt, working hard at their job of building successful families that would bring them a sense of accomplishment. They poured themselves into it and were unlikely to abandon it. Men, too, worked hard for their marriage. They put up with stress at work and struggled to earn enough income to provide "the good life." For these white middle-class couples, viable alternatives to domestic containment were out of reach. The cold war consensus and the pervasive atmosphere of anticommunism made personal experimentation, as well as political resistance, risky endeavors with dim prospects for significant positive results. So they made the choices they believed they had to make. Most thought that the gains were worth the sacrifices. With depression and war behind them, and with political and economic institutions fostering the upward mobility of men, the domesticity of women, and suburban homeownership, they were homeward bound. But as the years went by, they also found themselves bound to the home. This ambiguous legacy of domestic containment was not lost on their children. When the baby-boom children came of age, they would have different priorities and make different choices.