



**Onusko, James A. (2021). Boom Kids: Growing Up in the Calgary Suburbs, 1950-1970. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.**

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James Onusko's book "Boom Kids: Growing Up in the Calgary Suburbs, 1950-1970" unifies sources from interviewees, newspaper articles, data collected from the Vanier Institute of the Family and photos from the University of Calgary archives. Onusko interweaves these sources in a way that conveys a theoretical approach to understanding the day in the life of a minor living in Calgary, but more specifically for minors living in the Banff Trail community after the Second World War. As he paints the reader a snapshot of life back then, he emphasizes particular areas of his painting. One of the most vibrant strokes he uses in his work is gender roles within this time, not only from the children's perspective but also from the parents, especially the role of the mother. Another salient imagery he illustrates is how class blends into this painting. Within the final product, we have a colourful piece of work that is tastefully done and rich in information.

Gender roles have evolved dramatically, especially over the last few years and Onusko shares how post-war gender roles existed. As the book's main feature dedicates itself to children of this time, Onusko reveals how the parents handed out chores within the household. Onusko explains that "work inside the home fell to mothers and girls. Most boys did very little or no work in what was traditionally the feminine sphere; when parents did ask sons to do some work inside the home, they normally did not expect the same levels of good performance." (Chapter 5). An

interviewee William Wright sheds light on his experience growing up and explains to Onusko, “he and his brother did not have to do much of anything around his childhood home outside of some basic tasks and some outdoor yard work” (Chapter 3). Through many other interviews and sources, Onusko clearly defines that this was the norm and how each gender had its separate role. These roles were not only solidified in societal norms and expectations around the house but also were reinforced even during playtime.

A child's main job is to play; play is where they learn and become the building blocks for becoming an adult. Onusko explains play time was a time to develop specific gender roles and aptitudes for skill in future careers. Boys get “all types of building toys (road building equipment holds new interest) and mechanic’s or carpenter’s kits” (Chapter 4), whereas girls get toys kits “which includes dish rack, garbage can, mop, brush, wash cloths” (Chapter 4). Children of this time's gendered means of play only perpetuate expectations on chores within the household, forming this self-fulfilling prophecy on what we expect the boys to contribute inside the house. Furthering this idea of play and gender roles, Onusko continues to examine these ideas on the separation of gender by acknowledging “postwar boy cultures, which stressed competition, construction, and physical play, girlhood cultures focused on love, playing with dolls, hairdressing, and grooming” (Chapter 5). Onuskos understanding of the importance of play and how gender roles existed back then helped develop the framework of what it was like being a child.

But what about understanding gender roles as a parent post-war, specifically, how this was for the mother? As you would expect, mothers back during this time had a significant role in running the house. Onusko would reference not only the roles but the unpaid labour women were

expected to complete, even with jobs during the day. He described these women as having a “double day, which saw them perform many of the household duties once they had done paid work outside the home” (Chapter 3). One interviewee would recall that his “father was in the oil business. He was a payroll supervisor. He worked at the job for his entire life. My mother used to work at a health food store. She worked part-time, which was pretty radical back then, it seems to me” (Chapter 3). The information gathered by Onusko reflects what we know about our past when it comes to the gender roles of the mother. The unfortunate side of this is that though our society has moved forward in some traditional gender roles, we still expect countless mothers to perform unpaid labour.

Diving deeper into this book, we can also see how class shaped the world these children lived in after the Second World War. Onusko would go on to explain how the working class dominated suburbia. These areas were thus far unclaimed by anyone and were open plots of land ready for people to inhabit. As the baby boom happened post-war, there was a need for space for these new families. These areas were less expensive than being in the center of the city, making them more desirable to the working class. Onusko explains, “class was vitally important to the character of many suburbs, as the working-class suburbs that grew on the fringes of cities removed the sights and smells of poverty from the everyday experiences of wealthier citizens” (Chapter 1). These areas had little infrastructure built than the other areas of the city. One of the interviewees explained their experiences moving to the newly developed suburbs in Banff trail, “Morley Trail was not paved when we moved here, only a gravel road. Our sidewalk was in, but we had no lawn. The area behind us was undeveloped— just prairie grass” (Chapter 1). This lack of development

can help explain why it was less expensive to live in the suburbs, making it more advantageous for the working class. It is important to understand where the homes of these children were as home life is most important to sociologists and families; Onusko would go on and explains what living on the outskirts meant for resources, and luxury children had inside of the home as well as what their safety just outside of their home.

Though the working class struggled with poverty, the middle to upper classes faced trials. During this time, we encountered two significant wars, the Cold War and the Vietnam War. After the Second World War, Onusko explains how not only society intervened with the passing of information about wars to children but also the schooling system. Onusko writes not every suburban child had this experience, but some small groups, “particularly those growing up in upper-middle-class suburbs, many more suburban children were, in fact, exposed to aggressive imagery, discursive constructs, and focused activities that attempted to discipline them generally, for potential military service, and for ongoing participation in civilian defence” (Chapter 2). As sociologists define it, family and home are crucial; usually, after family, school is next as a significant part of a child's life. Onusko shows here that class will define points of not only where your home physically is but also the type of information a child will receive.

One other example Onusko uses to define and separate class, as we've learned he understands the importance of play. He writes, “While most of these activities had small fees, they were nevertheless geared toward middle-class children and adolescents and toward working-class families experiencing a modest increase in household income and available leisure time” (Chapter 4). The ability of which a child could perform the primary task expected of them in the play had

some controlling factors like class. These also reflect today's culture of the more fortunate and less fortunate in their abilities to succeed.

Overall, “Boom Kids: Growing Up in the Calgary Suburbs, 1950-1970” crafts a well-defined snapshot of a child's life during the post-Second World War. Though there are many themes, Onusko tackles through this book; I believe class and gender roles are most predominantly featured. As we look at suburbia, we have come far from gravel roads and inexpensive properties. Gender roles, as a society, have grown exponentially, testing the boundaries of what gender is. Though we have to move forward from the days, Onusko writes about we, in many ways, still struggle with these themes of unpaid work and classism. Onusko created a well-organized literature tapping into every facet of daily life and was fortunate to have people from this time and area to speak towards his work.

Something I noticed missing from this work was diversity in the interviewees. Tracking down people from that period must have been difficult, and the area had a primary culture. Could he source people of different races, religions, and socio-economic statuses and would those experiences differ from the majority?

An academic audience that would gain much from this information would be historians, sociologists, and an audience interested in women's studies. There is a plethora of primarily sourced evidence historians could use. Sociologists and others interested in women's studies could use this work to echo their work, especially regarding gender roles and class during this time.