Meaning, media and dwellings: the public image of the high-rise Toronto condo

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

The research examines representations of condominiums in the real estate section of the Toronto Star from 1967 through 1997, and in the Star’s Condo Living section between 1997 and 2007. I depart from conventional approaches by evaluating the articles as well as the advertisements that comprise the real estate section, based on the assumption that the context in which these texts appear is significant: a major newspaper is not a neutral vehicle, and ads and articles—consumed together, as they are in a print newspaper—will interact in creating representations of condominiums.

The Condo Living section in particular is seen to perform a number of brand-like activities, most obviously in positioning the Toronto high-rise condominium as a dwelling that is particularly well-suited to young, middle-class women. This occurs partly as a function of the frequency with which women are portrayed as condominium owners. Beyond this, however, I show how the advertisements and articles in Condo Living help remake the public image of the condominium bycountering existing stigmas attached to high-rise living. The section also helps to differentiate the condominium from other dwelling types by emphasizing elaborate amenities and making claims to urbanity through high-profile cultural and entertainment events.

Perhaps most importantly, I demonstrate how the leading present-day design aesthetic—a reworking of midcentury modernisms—came to thoroughly dominate the image and the built form of the recent-era condominium. Positioning the condominium as a design-led dwelling type had profound implications: due to the links between design and high-end fashion, health and
beauty items, the condominium immediately became a member of an aspirational product category associated with women, wealth, style and glamour. In addition to positioning the condominium as ‘naturally’ suited to young single, women, it removed the condo from direct competition with the single-family house, allowing it to be perceived as a desirable and distinct—rather than denigrated—dwelling type.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research is about dwellings, representation and meaning. Dwellings provide shelter, of course, but like any object that has been produced by humans, their significance goes far beyond the functional. Dwellings reflect the culture that produced them: the appearance, materials, configuration and situation of a dwelling give insight into a society’s social and economic organization, technology, family structure, gender roles and perceptions of space, among many other attributes. At the same time, dwellings speak eloquently about the characteristics of the people who build and occupy them by signaling social position but also by expressing identity through the degree to which they adhere to or deviate from societal norms. Dwellings are therefore highly symbolic and meaningful entities that help define and perpetuate a culture while simultaneously expressing individual identity.

While dwellings are meaningful to us individually as ‘home’, they also carry meaning at the societal level according to their type. By dwelling ‘type’, I refer to the classification of dwellings according to their physical characteristics that exists in Canadian and American urban real estate markets and includes detached, semi-detached and row or town houses along with apartments in low-rise or high-rise buildings. There are of course many variations on these themes, but these types have broad currency; invoking them will generally conjure up immediately a set of associations related to appearance and configuration, and possibly other attributes as well. The link between a particular dwelling type and the associations it quickly calls to mind is what I have chosen to call the ‘public image’ of that dwelling type.

I use the term public image for a number of reasons. First, the word ‘public’ captures the idea that I am considering in this research neither universal nor individual meanings (including those of academic and popular critics) but rather those associated with a broad, mainstream public. The use of the word ‘image’ captures the visual, iconic nature of dwellings; media representations of the single-family house from the 1950s, for example, have been so influential that present day films can redeploy these stereotypical images with full confidence that their symbolic importance
will be known to the audience (Muzzio & Halper, 2002). Finally, I use the term ‘public image’ in order to signal its origin in the concept of ‘public meaning’, which appears in the anthropology literature at least as early as Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s classic text The World of Goods (1949). It is, however, in Richins (1994) that public meaning is defined in accordance with how I use ‘public image’:

Public meanings are the subjective meanings assigned to an object by outside observers (nonowners) of the object, that is, by members of society at large. Although outside observers are likely to differ in some of the meanings they ascribe to objects, members of the general population or of social subgroups are likely to agree on some aspects of an object's meaning. These agreed-upon elements of meaning constitute the object's shared public meanings. (Richins, 1994, p. 505-6)

Richins notes that we know little about the process by which public meanings form—although one could argue that the entire project of the social sciences is bound up in the idea of public meaning—but that public meanings are ‘influenced by a variety of factors, which include advertising, portrayals of consumer goods in media such as movies and television shows, and the association of specific goods with highly visible and distinct social subgroups’ (ibid., p. 517). More recent work on meaning cites a longer list of agents that can act to transfer meaning to products, including ‘writers and journalists, design agents in the fashion system, social critics, trend-setting opinion leaders, rebellious members of fringe social groups, and general historical events’ (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008, p. 786). These understandings—and mine—reflect an understanding of material objects as inherently having meaning beyond their physical existence, and that this meaning derives from the cultural and social practices of a given society at a particular time. Or, as McCracken (1986) put it in his foundational work, ‘Cultural meaning is drawn from a culturally constituted world and transferred to a consumer good. Then the meaning is drawn from the object to an individual consumer’ (p. 71).

In this research, I explore the evolution of the public image of the high-rise condominium from the late 1960s through the present, concentrating on the ways that the articles and advertisements in the Toronto Star’s Condo Living section participated in a thoroughgoing reworking of this public image that involved linking the condominium with design, fashion, and a female target market. The particular shape the public image of the high-rise condo has taken is unprecedented, but the concept of the media taking part in a process of meaning-making regarding a specific dwelling type is not. I speak of the detached, single-family house, which in postwar Canada and
the United States, came to iconify a remarkably rich set of cultural values and expectations. Promoted by different levels of government, the private sector but most visibly in the news and entertainment media, representations from these different sources worked in concert to conflate notions of family, achievement, and democracy with the suburban single-family house. One result of conflation is naturalization. In this case, the single-family house quickly emerged as the ‘natural’ and expected dwelling to which people would aspire as part of the nuclear family-based lifecycle narrative that was similarly naturalized in the early postwar years. While individual tastes and ‘dreams’ vary, the single-family house and the suburban ideal have become ‘an enormously popular, enduringly successful consensus about how middle-class North Americans might best organize their households and about the style of living to which hardworking families might aspire’ (Sies 2001, p. 329).

It would be difficult to overstate the depth of meaning that has been attached to the single-family house and its socially constructed lifestyle:

‘However modest each suburban house might be, suburbia represents a collective assertion of class wealth and privilege as impressive as any medieval castle. Most importantly, suburbia embodies a new ideal of family life, an ideal so emotionally charged that it made the home more sacred to the bourgeoisie than any place of worship’ (Fishman 1987, p. 4).

The power this image of the single-family house is illustrated by decades of suburban development across Canada and the United States. Given this popularity, it is not surprising, therefore, that other dwelling types have been defined largely according to their shortcomings when compared to the single-family house and its fundamental, idealized attributes. A ‘semi-detached’ house is understood to be inherently less desirable than a detached house, for example; least desirable, by extension, is the rented apartment in a core-area, multi-family dwelling. Defined this way—by what they are not—other dwelling types face an unwinnable battle for mainstream acceptance. In the entire postwar era, only a handful of dwelling types have accrued positive associations and none has achieved either widespread or enduring acceptance. The bachelor pad of the 1960s, for example, was positioned as a response to the suburban house and a rejection of its ideals (Fraterrigo 2008; 2009). Like the co-op apartment of the 1970s and the luxury condo of the 1980s, the bachelor pad was ultimately a high-profile but niche market
dwelling whose limited popularity was short-lived. There may, however, be an exception to this situation: the ‘post-recession’\(^1\) condominium apartment, whose popularity in Toronto has increased continually since the mid-1990s to the point that by 2007, condominiums for the first time represented a larger share of new residential sales in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) than did low-rise housing (Wong, 2007).

The recent-era high-rise condominium and its public image exhibit widespread, mainstream appeal as well as durability over a fifteen year period that can be seen as the condo equivalent of the ‘golden era’ of postwar suburban development from 1945 to 1960. There are other parallels as well. The post-recession condo, as will be seen, has been marketed to a segment of the population that previously did not participate to any substantial extent in home-ownership. This was true as well in the early post-war era, when millions of working-class people, for various reasons, became able to purchase a house and as a consequence were ‘inducted into the ranks of middle-class home ownership’ (Spigel, 1997, p. 220). Each type of dwelling relied on innovative configurations and floor plans while making appeals to design modernism. Both the condominium and the single-family house had associations with location, lifestyle and family configuration. Most importantly for this research, each group of new homeowners and their dwellings was the focus of considerable media attention, much of it didactic and normative. In the 1950s it was most famously television series such as *Leave it to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Father Knows Best* along with magazines such as *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Chatelaine*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Condo dwellers could turn to magazines such as *Wallpaper*\(^*\) and *Dwell*, along with a much more widely distributed and tightly focused periodical: the *Toronto Star’s* “Condo Living” section. Because of these parallels, to explore the evolution of the public image of the high-rise condominium, I have adopted the general approach of the many existing studies that explore the link between media, meaning and the postwar suburban house. Below, I outline the various aspects of the public image of the suburban house and how the media participated in propagating them. Where those studies, however, have tended to privilege television and film, I will be concentrating on print

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\(^1\) Refers to the years after the end of the economic recession that existed from roughly 1988 and 1993.
representations and advertisements. For that reason, I also rely on the literature that analyses print media, outlined in detail in Chapter Two.

1.2 Condo Living

This research traces the evolution of the meaning system attached to the Toronto condominium apartment as reflected in the pages of the Condo Living section. Condo Living was published weekly between 1997 and 2007 as part of the Saturday edition of the Toronto Star and was dedicated exclusively to condominiums. As well as being the central location for condominium advertisements in the newspaper, Condo Living published articles related to every aspect of acquiring, maintaining, decorating, and selling a condominium as well as hundreds of related articles about urban planning, condominium architecture past and present and legal interpretations of Ontario’s Condominium Act, to name only a few categories.

Condo Living is a rich source of data, most obviously for the advertisements it contains. Since no study exists that examines condominium advertisements in a systematic manner, in this research I analyzed and coded every display advertisement that appeared in Condo Living. Beyond that, I performed the same task for the vast majority of condominium advertisements published in the Toronto Star between 1967 and the initial appearance of Condo Living in 1997. The most striking theme that emerges from the examination of advertisements is the sharp break in themes and target markets that occurs in the mid-1990s. Before this period, projects were promoted in a variety of ways to several target markets; afterward, advertisements tended strongly to employ cues related to design and fashion in targeting single young women. Neither of these aspects has a precedent: in the past, advertisements have portrayed homeownership as a ‘natural’ role for nuclear families, empty-nester couples, and single men (e.g. the bachelor pad of the 1960s) but never young women. Straying even farther from precedent, dwellings have never before been marketed like present-day condominium units are, using precisely the same techniques and imagery that are used to sell cosmetics and designer clothing. Both of these constitute an unexpected and profound reworking of meaning as it relates to dwellings that is particularly notable in a country like Canada whose residential landscape has been literally and symbolically dominated by the detached, single-family house during the sixty years of continuous suburbanization that has taken place since the end of World War II.
While the advertisements are the most salient representations of the high-rise condominium, it is the articles published in Condo Living that illuminate the complexity of the discourse surrounding this dwelling type. As was the case with condominium advertisements, no one has systematically analyzed textual representations of the recent-era condominium in news media. For this reason, I opted to code and analyze the entire corpus of articles—just over five thousand—published over the ten-year run of Condo Living. The articles are unexpectedly diverse in their subject matter, perhaps a result of the Star’s decision to rely almost exclusively on articles written by newspaper staffers rather populate the section with purchased wire service articles. Ranging from promotional pieces about new condominium projects to legal advice for condominium boards, from owner testimonials to architectural critique and design history, the articles in Condo Living are informational, promotional and didactic by turns. What is most surprising about these articles, however, is their coherence in presenting the condominium apartment as a dwelling type particularly well-suited to women and one that is characterized by its many links to the world of design, style and fashion. Condo Living published scores of testimonials, for example, in which authors shared their experiences related to purchasing or living in a condominium; the vast majority of these were written by women. The links with design, on the other hand, are forged in hundreds of condo-specific design articles dealing with the architecture, configuration and decoration of condominiums, but also through a diverse range of articles discussing, among many other subjects, international design shows, iconic products of Canadian design, and the influence of the Art Deco movement on film. The continual publication of such articles positioned the link between design—and by extension, the related realms of fashion, style and celebrity—and the condominium as natural, something to be taken for granted. The explicit and implicit themes of the articles in Condo Living therefore dovetail perfectly with the messages that are most apparent in advertisements for recent-era condominiums. This sort of reinforcement has the potential to be influential in meaning making, emanating as it does from an ostensibly objective and authoritative source.

At the same time, the thematic coherence between the articles and the advertisements in Condo Living transform it from a conventional real estate section—that is, a contrived vehicle to generate advertising revenue—into something that conceptually resembles the dwelling magazines that have for decades documented design trends and provided social, economic and domestic guidance for aspiring and existing homeowners. Like Good Housekeeping, Better
Homes and Gardens, Redbook and many others, Condo Living was published over a span of many years and had the potential to reach a substantial number of readers: the Toronto Star is the largest circulation newspaper in Canada. Unlike those magazines, however, Condo Living had no direct competitors. The same advertisements published in Condo Living appeared elsewhere, of course, and other newspaper published articles about condominiums but there was no other publication dedicated exclusively to condominiums, let alone one that was as widely available or published for as long as Condo Living was. It is for these reasons that in this research I explore not only the advertisements and articles that appeared in Condo Living, but also the potential implications for meaning making that arise from the distinctly periodical-like nature of the section, which include its context within a major newspaper, its choice and framing of subject matter, and its presentation as an authoritative, hard news section through the use of graphic design and layout techniques.

The goal of this exercise is to illustrate the unexpectedly complex and diverse set of associations, expectations, and values that has coalesced around the high-rise condominium apartment over the past fifteen years. This positions the condo as the only dwelling type in the postwar era to have developed a meaningful and durable set of largely positive associations. Whereas other dwelling types, such as the ‘semi-detached’ house, for example, are defined by how far they fall short of the detached ideal, the condominium is represented as a viable and unique alternative that rejects the ‘Canadian Dream’ through its links with design and urbanity, and its exclusion of the nuclear family in favour of young women and couples. This research concentrates on representation rather than reception, but the rise of Toronto to become the largest condominium market in North America (Wong 1997) would suggest that consumers have responded favourably to the way the recent-era condo has been represented. It is my hope that by documenting the formation and evolution of meaning that arose with media representations of the high-rise condominium apartment in Toronto this research will provide an empirical foundation for further research into a dwelling type that has been nearly ignored despite its increasing salience on the urban landscape.
1.3 Dwelling and Meaning

In this research, I treat dwellings as cultural objects, as artifacts that necessarily reflect the culture that produced them. One implication of this perspective is the notion that any man-made object (and many that are not) bears a certain symbolic freight—i.e. “meaning”—as a function of our socialization and predispositions, and our direct and indirect experience of that object. This is most obvious in the case of unique objects—family photographs, for example—and their meaning for an individual observer: the photograph has meaning far beyond its material existence. A counterpart in geographic research would be studies of the concept of “home.” My concern here is at the opposite extreme. I examine widely shared meanings rather than individual or idiosyncratic, and with meaning attached to an entire class of objects rather than individual objects.

In geographic and other urban research, this conception is employed in studies that explore representations of dwellings such as the New Zealand holiday cottage or “bach” (Collins, 2008), or its (central) Canadian counterpart, the cottage: ‘The image of small, rustic cottage nestled beside a forest-fringed lake has come to form an important part of the Canadian geographic imagination’ writes Greg Halseth (1998, p. 3), providing an excellent example of a ‘public image’. However, the dwelling type that has been the subject of the greatest amount of work is undoubtedly the single-family house. Apart from the general consensus that the single-family house and its suburban associations were “always as much an idea as a reality” (Beuka, 2004, p. 4, emphasis in original), this body of research turns time and again to media representations in explaining the rise of suburbia. In doing so, it acknowledges that “[h]ow individuals perceive cities and suburbs is mediated by prevalent cultural ideas and images. Cities and suburbs, in other words, are partly ‘landscapes of the mind’ or ‘cognitive landscapes’ and only partly specific social and physical environments” (Sies 2001, p. 319).

In the following sections, I focus on meaning and the single-family house, for two reasons. The first is to position the present research in alignment with the extensive body of media-centric analyses from many disciplines that explore the nature of meaning attached to this dwelling type. The second reason is to highlight the many parallels in circumstances and processes between the rise of both the postwar, single-family house and the post-recession, high-rise condominium, the
goal of which is to support the claim that the recent-era condo has acquired a set of associations that position it as a distinct dwelling type rather than a lesser version of the single-family house.

1.3.1 The social context of the American (and Canadian) Dream

Although all dwellings are cultural objects that carry and reproduce meaning, no dwelling bears the symbolic weight that the single-family house does. For prospective homeowners in the early postwar years, the single-family house was equated with the “American Dream” or its Canadian counterpart. This Dream included not simply a house, but also a set of expectations regarding its location and configuration, and the nuclear family-based lifestyle that would accompany it. This system of meaning, or public image, was highly appealing in part due to the social context in which it appeared. The housing situation, for example, primed the populations of both countries to embrace what seemed to be an indisputably better alternative to existing conditions. Due to the economic hardship of the Depression—when residential construction effectively ceased and maintenance was not a priority—along with the material shortages and the privileging of military production during World War II, housing conditions were overcrowded and bleak: “The nation faces peace with a 1945 population and a 1931 supply of houses” (Junius Wood, in Beauregard 2003, p. 112). Compared to existing living conditions, the single-family house had multiple appeals: it was new, clean, equipped with the latest appliances, and importantly, offered space inside and out; promotional films of the era frequently use the term ‘elbow room’ in describing what the suburban single-family house had to offer.

From a distance of more than half a century, it can be difficult to remember that even the smallest of postwar houses provided a host of quantifiable improvements compared to people’s previous residential settings. After years of over-crowding, doubling up and living in poorly maintained apartments, people were understandably enchanted with the idea of living in a residence—with only one’s immediate family—that was new and by extension, clean and functional. In these attributes alone, the single-family house represented a vast improvement in quality of life for a typical working class family. The aesthetic concerns that have vexed so many critics of suburban development would have instantly been dismissed as trivial when the alternative was to remain in a small, urban apartment.

Discontent with living conditions during the Depression and war years was not concentrated solely on dwellings. There existed strong anti-urban sentiment with origins in the Industrial City,
which was “more a symbol of problems and of evil than of hope, love, or generosity” and was associated with noise, pollution, danger, and immoral behavior (Jackson, 1985, p. 69-70). The depth of anti-urban sentiment is illustrated by the 1939 documentary “The City”, which enumerates the problems of urban living (pollution, slum housing, streets as playgrounds for children, noise, danger, time lost commuting) before advocating a new configuration: self-sufficient, low-density living located so far from the city that that the distance is represented by a shot of a flying airplane. The message of the film—whose narration was written by Lewis Mumford—is clear: the city has nothing to recommend it, cannot be made habitable, and should be abandoned. The film suggested that society was at a crossroads, and had the opportunity to take a new and better direction: suburban (or more precisely, exurban) living. This may have been an extreme position as well as an unworkable one, but it hints at the level of anti-urban sentiment present by the end of the Depression, and again puts the postwar embrace of the single-family house in perspective: “Suburbia, pure and unfettered and bathed by sunlight and fresh air, offered the exciting prospect that disorder, prostitution, and mayhem could be kept at a distance, far away in the festering metropolis” (ibid., p. 70).

Apart from the ways the single-family house addressed the desire for better quality housing and aligned with anti-urban sentiment, it was undoubtedly appealing simply due to its newness and the consumption-based lifestyle it participated in. The power of these circumstances is directly related to material conditions during the Depression and war years, when substitution, rationing and deprivation were the norm. Items that were new were rare, and even when they existed, purchasing them was difficult in an era of widespread unemployment and minimal social programs. As a result, for any commodity, simply being “new” was highly desirable in a way that is difficult for us to imagine. The privileging of newness is also present in the idea of “plenty”, a marked contrast to Depression-era scarcity, as well as the similarly related ideas of consumer choice and planned obsolescence: the practice of making annual superficial changes to a product in order to create demand for (crucially) “new” products. As with dwelling characteristics and location, then, there were pre-existing circumstances that pre-disposed Americans and Canadians to enthusiastically embrace the new, consumption-based style of living promised by the suburban single-family house.

What these circumstances suggest is that the emergence of an American and Canadian Dream focused on the suburban, single-family house faced few obstacles in the early postwar years; in
fact, the working class and lower-middle class populations in both countries were pre-disposed to respond positively to the individual, family and societal benefits being proffered. This predisposition surely played a role in people’s willingness to accept—or at least not question to any great degree—the nearly utopian quality of the Dream, as evidenced by the unrelievedly sunny worldview that characterizes the first round of mainstream media representations of suburban living in television shows like *Father Knows Best, Leave it to Beaver, and Ozzie and Harriet*. These shows, along with other forms of media such as the “shelter” magazines of the era, movies both sponsored and studio, and the state (via news coverage) contributed to a system of meaning surrounding the single-family, suburban house that was, and remains, quite complex. It involved the physical characteristics of the dwelling, including its architectural style, configuration, situation and location; these constitute the primary components of the public image of the single-family house. At a deeper level, the single-family house was also widely associated with a number of ideological expectations revolving around family, gender, and citizenship.

In the following sections I discuss these elements in some detail both to illustrate most salient dwelling-related public image but also to highlight the many parallels between the postwar house and post-recession condominium. Some of these parallels are contextual: both dwelling types, for example, have as their primary market a segment of the population new to home ownership. Some are material: both dwelling types were positioned as having links to design and high modernism. Some of the parallels are social: both dwelling types are linked to particular lifestyles. And finally, some of the parallels are related to process: both dwelling types were the subject of media attention, much of which was normative and at times didactic.

1.3.2 Media and the public image of the single-family house

In this section I will discuss the symbolic associations that the single-family house accumulated during the early postwar years. These associations relate to both material and ideological characteristics that were highly salient in contemporary media representations. Of the former, the most prominent include ‘ranch’-style architecture, an open-plan floor plan, picture windows, and a large yard in a suburban location. The latter include the concept of the ‘dream house’, the privileging of the nuclear family and reworked gender role expectations.
The goal is to sketch out a mainstream image of dwellings belonging to the category ‘single-family house’, as it existed in the marketplace. What I am examining is the image of the single-family house presented to postwar audiences in multiple forms of popular media, and not for example, academic or popular critiques. My rationale is that commodities accumulate multiple levels of meaning, with the uppermost and most important being a relatively simple set of affective associations: “boxy but safe; reliable”, associated with Volvo cars, is an example of this level of meaning. This section, and in fact this entire project rely on this notion that commodities have simple, shorthand images that characterize their (possibly contrived) essence. Marketing and promotion can help build these images, but they are not the exclusive agents. The argument made here, which has been made many times before, is that media such as television, film, magazines and various forms of news also contribute to commodity images despite the lack of a purposive intent to do so, and despite any collusive behaviour to achieve this goal. It almost goes without saying, for example, that the producers of 1950s suburban situation comedies did not conspire to promote the single-family house and nuclear family. Yet, because media imagery is meaningful (in general, for the population as a statistical whole), this is the effect they had. In other words, while promoting their own ends, the producers of these shows and other media objects at the same time involuntarily and unknowingly helped build meaning around a particular dwelling type and its associated lifestyle. It is possible, therefore, for a group of ostensibly competing agents or actors (e.g. television shows and networks) to create meaning about an entity in the absence of collusion for this purpose, and even in the absence of awareness that they are individually or as a group performing this function.

The creation of meaning is not a necessary outcome of media representations of any entity or commodity. If conflicting messages exist, then no clear meaning may emerge. Even if messages are coherent, no meaning may emerge if the circulation of representations is relatively limited spatially (i.e. the number of sources is small) or temporally (i.e. the message endures for only a short time). In the case of the single-family house, representations across different media were coherent—based on the trope of the family dream house—and they were widespread and durable. It is important, therefore, to recognize the context in which representations appear, and their cumulative effect. It is highly relevant, for example, that so many television shows, magazines and movies in the 1950s celebrated the single-family house and the nuclear family. Multiple appearances of the same message in different media are extremely influential in
meaning making, suggesting as they do that a societal consensus exists (which may not actually be the case, of course).

This argument is fundamentally an extension of the idea that any advertisement has the latent role of naturalizing consumption in general as a way to improve one’s life. Every Volvo advertisement, for example, not only naturalizes consumption in general but also an automobile-oriented lifestyle. The same is of course true of every automobile advertisement: while produced in a competitive context, all car advertisements implicitly promote material consumption and an automobile-based lifestyle, once again in the absence of collusion or conscious intent to achieve this purpose. By extension, then, every ad for a Volvo car is also an advertisement for every other kind of car; the entire class of commodity (automobiles) benefits from any positive representation.

This process of meaning abstraction holds for every component of a particular representation, which can do work on many levels, again depending on context. If the owners of new Chevrolets are shown smoking in only 4% of print advertisements from the 1950s, for example, it would be challenging to make the case that these representations had much influence in promoting smoking. If that number was instead 58%, and was similar when controlling for car brand, and was this salient for fifteen year, then the interpretation would be different. Similarly, representations can function on a smaller scale. If a Chevrolet advertisement promotes all automobiles—a larger class of commodity—it can also promote a general subclass of commodity, such as the station wagon in the 1950s, or more recently, the minivan or the SUV. In each of these cases, there exists or existed a generalized image that characterizes the essence of the entity. For the SUV, this might include the large size of these vehicles, off-road capability and truck-based characteristics together with related, masculine affective associations with ruggedness, initially related to the outdoors and more recently with gritty urbanity thanks in part to prominently displayed Hummers and Cadillac Escalades in hip hop videos. The commodity details, however, are irrelevant; the larger point is that in the marketplace, conceptualized, essentialized representations exist that define a class of commodity. This is true as much for “SUV” (or “sportscar” or “smartphone”) as it is for “single-family house”—or “condo”, for that matter.
These sets of associations necessarily play some role in purchase decisions, unless the billions of dollars spent annually on advertising are entirely wasted. Note that I am not claiming that these sets of associations are the *only* ones used to represent the single-family house, or that there was no regional differentiation and so on. Nor am I claiming there was or is consensus about these meanings, or that individual experience matched what the set of associations promised. These and other issues, such as popular and academic critiques of suburbia and the single-family house, are related but not directly relevant. My concern is with the marketplace and purchase decisions, and here the evidence is quite clear that critiques of suburban living, for example, were far less influential than the positive associations that accumulated around the single-family house, whose popularity has hardly waned over more than half a century: “Clearly, people have voted with their feet on this matter” (Sies 2001, p. 329).

Similarly, it is not my intent to make any claims regarding the importance of media representations of the single-family house relative to the many other structural and facilitating circumstances in effect at the time. In other words, although I believe media representations are meaningful for people (particularly when deployed using affective techniques), I am not attempting to argue that these representations *drove* suburbanization, or that they alone caused people to buy houses. My claim is more modest: that mainstream representations—public images—play a role in the decision-making process related to purchases, and that people will be more favourably disposed to a commodity with a widely-shared, coherent and appealing public image and less favourably disposed to a commodity with no such image, or one that is negative. The bulk of this research illustrates a shift in the public image of the condominium from one that was unfocused and negative to one that is coherent and largely positive, through a process in which media representations played a highly visible role. The same general process occurred in the early postwar years, when the single-family home occupied a very prominent place in entertainment and news media. These representations individually and as a group helped create a public image of the single-family home that combined material expectations with a utopian ideology. The result was the idea(l) of the ‘Dream House’.
1.4 Defining the Dream House

“Fundamental to the suburb, of course, is the single-family detached house—in [the 1998 film] *Pleasantville* both the contemporary and 1950s suburb emphasize the house with a yard. These houses are nearly always placed along clean, well-maintained, quiet, tree-lined streets.” (Dickinson 2006, p. 219)

Although *Pleasantville* and other recent films concern themselves with the ideological aspects of suburban living, they invariably create their context through representations of the single-family house that reflect both the media representations of early postwar decades and the contemporary public image of this dwelling type. The fundamental attributes are at this point quite familiar, consisting of the ranch house with its picture window, located in the suburbs, situated on a comfortable lot with a white picket fence. All of these attributes, along with a ‘modern’ open floor plan emerged as a package in the early postwar years partly as a result of uniform and coherent representations in the entertainment media.

Early postwar houses were built in a variety of styles but it was the ranch house that came to dominate development and iconify the larger process of suburbanization, becoming “so much a part of the national landscape that we take it for granted” (James, 2009, p. 45). The only true competitor was the simplified Cape Cod style used in the construction of Levittown in Long Island, New York. Although Levitt sold thousands of Cape Cod-styled houses in the first years after the war, they were denigrated “by architects, intellectuals, and influential business magazines” (Baxandall & Ewen, 2000, p. 132). In response, Levitt introduced a ranch-style house in 1949. As a result of this change—which mirrored a nationwide trend among builders—ranch houses accounted for “virtually all” of the 1.25 million houses built in the United States in 1950 (Ingrassia, 1998, quoted in Baxandall & Ewen, 2000, p. 133).

Yet the ranch house did not achieve the popularity it did in the 1950s and 1960s simply due to these associations. The ranch house had been increasingly prominent in media for fifteen years, having been initially popularized in the 1930s by magazines like *Sunset*, which featured house plans drawn by California architect Cliff May (Clark, 1989). In the early postwar years, it was the large shelter magazines of the day—*Better Homes & Gardens, House Beautiful*, and *House & Garden*—that promoted a new image of the ranch house based on notions of informality, modern design, functionality and indoor/outdoor living (James, 2009). This image traded heavily
on a pre-existing image with positive characteristics: “the climate, beautiful scenery, and Hollywood glamour” of California (ibid., p. 50; Clark, 1989, p. 174).

Perhaps more importantly, this amalgam of qualities positioned the ranch house as the diametrical opposite of “its stuffy, cluttered Victorian predecessors” (Clark, 1989, p. 177). Its open floor plan, with connected living, dining and kitchen spaces facilitated informal living, while its picture windows and sliding glass doors blurred boundaries by visually reducing the barriers between indoors and outdoors. Difficult as it might be to imagine from a distance of more than half a century, these aspects of the configuration of the ranch house were somewhat daring in their embrace of a (high) modern design aesthetic. That Americans and Canadians of the 1940s and 1950s were even aware of design modernism is evidence of the reach of mainstream dwelling magazines, which “zealously promoted modernism by trying to educate their readers about the benefits of modern architecture, furniture, and art” (James, 2009, p. 49).

Part of the promotion of modernism took the form of profiles of houses designed by star architects such as Richard Neutra, Quincy Jones, Charles and Ray Eames. These houses represented the leading edge of residential architecture, and were often grand in scale and built in dramatic locations. Typically flat-roofed, they used glazing extensively, often with entire walls consisting of floor-to-ceiling windows. Strikingly open floor plans emphasized the views, and the indoor/outdoor connection created by window walls. It is these structures, along with structures by Frank Lloyd Wright that inspired them, that the ranch house claimed to emulate: even the “Levitts saw themselves as translators of modern architectural design for the masses” (Baxandall & Ewen, 2000, p. 133).

The resemblance between sleek houses in the Hollywood hills and tract houses was of course quite limited, but the ranch house could be positioned as a counterpart to the bespoke houses in California due to its open floor plan, its picture window and its “window wall”—later to be known as sliding glass doors (Spigel, 2001, p. 32). This is where the similarities end. It is needless to enumerate the differences between the high-end California modern house and suburban ranch; that there were any correspondences was enough to support the public image of the ranch house and to surround it in a discourse of design. Such a linking of these two types of dwelling may seem absurd to knowledgeable observers (now and in the past), but the purchasers of suburban tract houses were not particularly concerned with, or aware of, the finer points of
high-modern residential design. Instead, buyers simply wanted “a big picture window or sliding glass doors to make the house seem larger and more open. Preferably, the glass wall was in the back, facing the ‘outdoor living room,’ where so many activities associated with suburban living took place” (Wright, 1981, p. 254).

It must be emphasized, as well, that regardless of its variance from the California house, the ranch house with its picture windows and sliding glass doors did in fact offer a demonstrably ‘new’, brighter and less formal dwelling type than its competitors and certainly its predecessors. Although not implemented at the scale they were in architect-designed California houses, these features were innovative at the time and lent credibility to the link between the ranch house and high design. High design houses used glass extensively—culminating in a house by Phillip Johnson whose exterior walls were entirely glass—for aesthetic reasons: to bring the outdoors inside, and not coincidentally, privilege the spectacular west coast and southwest vistas that surrounded them. The ranch house typically implemented this design innovation in a much more limited manner, which might have rendered the practice no different than Detroit taking note of advances in aeronautics and then attaching tailfins to cars: a practice that might achieve notoriety for a brief time but quickly fade from view, derided for its superficiality. However, the ranch house avoided this fate as a by-product of its open concept floor plan and the importance of the back yard as family activity space. With the combined family room, dining room and kitchen at the back of the house, the picture window and the sliding door became highly functional features that allowed surveillance of children and easy outdoor access for the ‘man of the house’ to the “the garage, the tool room, the barbecue pit, [and] the yard” (Kenyon, 2004, p.63).

The use of glazing in this manner in the ranch house was clearly the result of what might be called aspirational borrowing, or the appropriation (and greatly diminished implementation) of upscale design cues by downmarket products in attempt to raise their perceived value and/or to differentiate themselves. Yet by happenstance, this ‘innovation’ by ranch house designers was actually functional and resulted in a configuration that was ideally suited to mainstream expectations of what a new suburban lifestyle constituted. At least as crucial, the utility and even the relatively modest aesthetic improvement brought about by increased glazing in the ranch house allowed it maintain its symbolic link with leading edge architecture and the spectacular residences that graced the architectural magazines of the day. The public image of the ranch house therefore included the notion of high design, a circumstance especially relevant in
legitimating it as a dwelling type. Purchase decisions are imbued with a fear of making a poor choice; the link between design and the ranch house provided reassurance that it was not only a safe choice, but a desirable one as well.

One other notable material attribute of the public image of the single-family ‘dream house’ was its suburban location, which, like the ranch house, “became invested with fixed symbolic meanings in the early postwar years” (Beuka, 2004, p. 4-5). Many of those meanings are of course bound together with the public image of the single-family house to such a degree that in many ways they amount to the same thing; neither could have existed without the other. As with the single-family house, ‘suburbia’ had a dual existence, both material and ideal: “if suburbia was a physical place, it was also an integral part of the postwar imaginary” (Kenyon, 2004, p. 1). And as with the single-family house, suburbia was to a great extent shaped by popular media representations, “especially television and popular magazines, [which] contributed through their glowing images of suburban life to an emerging sense of the suburbs as the promised land of the American middle class” (Beuka, 2004, p. 5).

The public image of the ranch house, then, was one surrounded by a discourse of design that positioned it as a dream house located in the promised land. It is challenging to imagine a more positive public image, and little wonder that the word utopian is so frequently used to characterize it (although heavenly might be just as appropriate). It would be fascinating to explore just what circumstances allowed such an idealistic and unrealistic public image to be formulated and subsequently found meaningful, but for my purposes, the crucial aspect is that the elevation of the public image of the ranch house that took place in the media between 1945 and 1950 was effectively an unplanned “act of consensus building by cultural institutions” (James, 2009, p. 46) that was so successful that “we remember the Fifties for the social aspects of suburban life, precisely because the architectural issues had been already settled” (ibid., p. 45).

Those ‘social aspects’ refer primarily to the linking of the single-family house with the nuclear family, a process in which popular media played a leading role. Early postwar populations were “deluged with images of nuclear family bliss” (Spigel 2001, p. 186) in magazine articles and advertisements, promotional and Hollywood-produced movies, and television shows. Regardless of format, the image being promoted was remarkably similar. It advocated young marriage, a
stay-at-home wife to raise young children, and a breadwinning husband. The pivotal part of this process was the attempt to convince women to abandon the “social freedoms and economic responsibilities” they had possessed during the war years (Beuka 2004, p. 151). This attempt was comprehensive and played out in “popular magazines, television sitcoms, and even the discourses of popular psychology and sociology [which] were filled with admonitions—ranging from the subtle to the absurd—designed to persuade new suburban housewives to accept a domesticated role” (ibid., p.152).

The shelter magazines of the era, for example, promoted domesticity in the form of advertisements by appliance and home products manufacturers that were part of a “massive public campaign to sell products for the family and the home… [that] presented a new model of middle-class family life” (Clark 1989, p. 172). These advertisements typically portrayed smartly dressed and impeccably coiffed women happily doing low effort housework, often while supervising their children and/or attending to their husbands. The meaning and mechanism of these advertisements was straightforward: to suggest that a fulfilling, effortless and glamorous
lifestyle could be obtained simply by acquiring a particular brand of appliances.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1: Happy and glamorous servitude in suburbia**

*Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1958, p. 74

Many advertisements, however, featured only the housewife, cementing the gendering of public and private space in the process, and assigning women the primary role in domestic consumption.
Other approaches were much less direct, employing an essentialist understanding of gender in which males were portrayed as naturally unsuited to, or incapable of performing any kind of
housekeeping or child-rearing task. This is dealt with in an unusually direct, although ‘humourous’ manner in the advertisement below (Figure 3).

![Advertisement Image](image)

**Figure 3: obligation posing as empowerment**

*Canadian Homes and Gardens, June 1957, p. 35*

The subtext of this ad is revealed in the first line of copy: “That’s no idle promise”, suggesting that the husband—shown in the background happily loading his golf clubs into the car—is unwilling to carry out even his few required tasks, such as mowing the lawn, and lackluster in performance when he does so. “You’ll do it better”, the ad promises female readers. Ads like this position men as ‘just big kids’, who by extension really should not be expected to shoulder adult
responsibilities. The benefit for males is obvious: fewer chores, and more leisure time, with the only cost being a few jokes at their expense.

A much more common approach to enforce female domesticity involves portraying males as bumbling novices incapable of carrying out even the simplest of domestic tasks: they are the “loveable but befuddled husbands and dads in such films as *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*” (Dolce, 2009, p. 161-2). They also appear in promotional films—the predecessor to today’s infomercial—such as 1952’s *Mother Takes a Holiday*, produced by Whirlpool, in which three female high-school students convince their mothers to take a weekend trip to the lake. The husbands are left behind, apparently eager to gather for a weekend-long cribbage binge—thus conforming to the notion that ‘boys will be boys’ although all of the men appear to be in their fifties. The only demand the wives make is that the husbands must do the family laundry.

The men are shown in a kitchen equipped with the latest Whirlpool washer and dryer, pontificating on the mechanical and design features of appliances like these, and how easy they are to use. After each bout of claims, the film intercuts documentary footage and narration that outlines the actual details of the engineering process involved in creating Whirlpool appliances. These make clear that the husbands had no idea what they were talking about. The skewering of masculinity is complete when, at the end of the film, two of the men realize that they have yet to do the laundry as promised and the weekend has nearly passed. Worse, they have no simple-to-use, functional and beautifully-designed Whirlpool appliances waiting for them at home. This engenders panic in the men, as they imagine themselves doing the necessary tasks. One of them is shown, wearing an apron at the clothesline—a device not required by women who own a Whirlpool clothes dryer—baffled at the prospect of having to attach a bra to the line (Figure 4). The men race to their local Whirlpool dealer and purchase two complete kitchens, having been asked to have these ready by the daughters when they originally hatched the plan.
A nearly identical concept is used in the 1955 film *A Word to the Wives*, in which housewife Jane, depressed that she does not own a ‘dream kitchen’ like the one her friend Alice has, takes a weekend trip to see her mother, leaving her husband George to look after the house and their young son. Jane’s hope is that George will have such difficulty with domestic tasks that he will happily purchase the kitchen she has been campaigning for. George is shown botching a number of simple tasks in the kitchen in slapstick fashion, and grows frustrated to the point that he screams and pounds on an uncooperative cupboard with his hand and finally a hammer. All of this is accompanied by a witty voiceover from a female narrator. Needless to say, Jane ends up with a new kitchen.
The message of the films is obvious: the suburban wife’s place is in the kitchen, and the suburban husband’s role is to provide sufficient economic resources required to purchase household “needs” like the latest kitchen appliances. The motivation for their mode of presentation is somewhat less obvious. In making men buffoons, and women as sanguine and practical, and by treating the idea of men doing domestic tasks as inherently ludicrous, both films put forward highly essentialized portrayals of men and women. These portrayals told female viewers that their problems and complaints were common, widespread and even comical. More importantly, such essentialized portrayals of gender roles told women that their situation was the result of nature, not a social construction. The proposed solution was not systematic change that would see men and women sharing domestic tasks equally. Instead, the solution was to make life easier through the acquisition of the latest appliances.

This approach, which appears to take women’s perspective, is patronizing in its attempt to convince women to embrace the domestic role being forced on them. Other approaches were more calculated and cynical. The 1962 promotional film *American Thrift*, for example, opens with images of American President Lincoln and the caption ‘Presented by Chevrolet as a tribute
to the American Woman’. The imagery shifts to a suburban house exterior, and then to an interior shot of a woman seated at a desk covered with envelopes as she does the family finances. Her husband leans against the wall, drinking coffee, not looking terribly involved in the proceedings.

Figure 6: gendered division of domestic labour


A male narrator intones piously intones, “More often than not, it is the woman who holds the family purse strings. To stretch out the family pay cheque—hers is the struggle eternal.” Later shown making children’s clothes from patterns while her husband reads the newspaper, the narrator tells us that “There are times she feels lonely in this responsibility to her family, yet she carries it in ways that are varied, in ways that are many, in ways that call for careful planning and for further use of what we already have, for making do so nothing will be wasted. Or, doing
without.” Her husband at this point contributes a brochure advertising an exotic vacation, oblivious to the financial situation suggested by his wife’s making clothes for their children. The narrator continues, “As she lives her life as the woman American, we often seem to charge her with the responsibility of getting more out of the family purse than is there.” Subsequently, the film turns into a celebration of the many clever ways that the American Woman makes intelligent purchase decisions and manages family resources. By way of contrast, the American male’s idea of thrift is illustrated by his driving around ceaselessly, trying in vain to find a parking meter with free time on it. Eventually, the film suggests that the entire American way of life depends on the kind of consumption practiced so well by American women and so foolishly by American men.

This approach therefore raises the stakes considerably, from achieving a better quality of life for oneself (and one’s family, of course) to safeguarding the American Way of Life. American Thrift is but one of many manifestations of the perception that “[i]n order to provide this domestic quest with a sense of urgency, women’s domestic roles needed to be infused with national purpose” (May, 1989, p. 159). Beyond safeguarding the American Way of Life, women were given the larger task of ensuring the nation’s survival through admonitions that their skills would be needed to keep households functioning in the event of nuclear war (ibid.). And of course the opposite was true as well: “Inside and outside the home, women who challenged traditional roles and restraints placed the security of the nation at risk” (ibid., p. 156).

The best known and perhaps most influential postwar portrayals of the nuclear family and domestic bliss were the situation comedies of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The leading shows of the period—*Ozzie and Harriet, Leave it to Beaver, The Donna Reed Show*, and *Father Knows Best*—all relied on the same middle-class, nuclear family dynamic and the same context: the suburban, single-family house. More importantly, all shared the same sensibility: that the problems encountered in this environment were minor and could be cured with a small amount of parental (usually paternal) wisdom. The implicit messages were clear regarding what the ideal social configuration involved, and by extension, so was the message that if individual women were unhappy with their situation for any reason, it was not due to any problem inherent in this configuration.
Media representations of men and their position in the suburban family home were less complex. Unlike the situation with women, there was no need to justify a subservient and regressive new social role for men. But masculinity was nonetheless linked to the suburban house beyond men’s role as breadwinners: “although suburbia may be resonant with images of feminine domesticity, it also resonates with images of masculine domesticity…images of men contributing to the domestic bliss of suburbia by mowing the lawn or ‘doing-it-themselves’” (Bondi, 1992, p. 163). Where representations of males mirrored that of females was in their satisfaction with their roles, particularly in the television sitcoms. Simply providing sufficient funds for the family was portrayed as constituting a completely fulfilling life for television fathers.

Many people have subsequently made the exceedingly obvious argument that this unnaturally rosy, ‘utopian’ presentation was in fact a false utopia, although in Welcome to the Dreamhouse, an examination of the influence of television on the propagation and adoption of suburban ideology, Lynn Spigel argues that the appeal of these shows relates to the circumstances that suburbanites found themselves in. New to home ownership, new to the suburbs, and having left friends and the familiar environment of the city behind, suburbanites experienced “a painful transition from the city to the suburb” (Spigel, 2001, p. 45). Television families filled a social void; they helped “suture the ‘crack’ in the picture window” (ibid.). Whether for the reasons that Spigel cites or not, the popularity of family sitcoms is quite remarkable. By the late 1950s, “the middle-class suburban sitcom had become the primary form for representing family life” (ibid., p. 118). Of the seventeen family sitcoms on TV at this point, fourteen were set in the suburbs (ibid.).

These statistics hint at what may be the most important aspect of the ways in which family sitcoms linked gender roles, family structure and the suburban, single-family house. Had Leave it to Beaver, for example, been one of a few shows exhibiting its suburban, nuclear family configuration, it would be challenging to claim it had any great degree of social influence. Conversely, the existence of so many family situation comedies in the late 1950s suggests the potential for profound social influence. Their nearly identical contexts implicitly create the suburban, single-family house as the natural context for the nuclear family, which is in turn naturalized as a social configuration. The predominance of the family sitcom virtually guaranteed that turning the dial from one such program would reveal another the duplicated it in all but the names of the characters.
The ubiquity of these shows constituted an attempt at consensus building, or what would be called agenda setting in studies of the influence of the news media. This attempt was not entirely successful. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963 and adroitly “ruptured the mystique of quotidian afternoons in suburban cul-de-sacs” (Doane, 2009, p. 155). Similar critiques of male gender roles such as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *The Organization Man* gained notoriety around the time the family sitcoms peaked in popularity. By 1966, there were no nuclear family-based, suburban situation comedies on American network television (Spigel, 2001, p. 118).

The ideals presented in these shows did not disappear, however; in fact, the shows have become synonymous with the idea of suburban living: “the word ‘suburb’ fires the same synapses in the American brain as those necessary to recall entire episodes of television classics such as ‘Leave it to Beaver’, [and] ‘Father Knows Best’” (Knapp, 2009, p. 811). The family sitcom dominated the networks for a relatively short period of time, but it would be difficult to argue that their influence was anything but highly disproportionate to their duration in cementing the links between gender, location and dwelling type.

Through various forms of media, the single-family house accumulated meaning operating at multiple levels. As a new kind of dwelling—especially in the form of the California ranch house but also in the mass-produced form pioneered by William Levitt—the single-family house participated in the creation of an entirely new lifestyle in a new location: the suburbs. Beyond these, it structured a newly contrived social organization based on the nuclear family that prescribed new roles, spaces and activities for men and women. All of these were packaged together as the dream house “to which all aspired, and not long after the century’s midpoint it became a standard in terms of which one’s personal expectations and lifelong accomplishments could be measured” (Archer, 2005, p. 250).

Apart from the complexity of the public image of the single-family house, what is most striking in the related research is the significance ascribed to the media. The many domestic magazines of the 1950s appear in almost every examination of postwar suburban life and are the subject of numerous articles and books (e.g. Doane, 2009; James, 2009; Korinek, 2000). Films of the era too, are discussed in numerous studies that highlight the positive portrayals of suburban life in films like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* as well as negative
portrayals in films such as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Archer, 2005; Beuka, 2004; Kelly, 1993; Knapp, 2009; Smiley, 2001; Wallack, 2009). Related research emphasizes the durability of the public image of the single-family house by exploring its symbolic use in more recent films such as *Edward Scissorhands*, *Pleasantville*, *Far From Heaven* and *The Truman Show* (Archer, 2005; Dickinson, 2006; Muzzio & Halper, 2002). However, it is research into the influence of 1950s television that dominates the work exploring the meaning of the suburban, single-family house. More specifically, it is the nuclear family-based situation comedy that dominates the research, exemplified by *The Donna Reed Show*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *I Love Lucy* and occasionally *The Honeymooners* to emphasize how far apart were the public images of the urban apartment and the suburban house. Apart from the many relatively brief discussions of these programs, several book length studies explore the 1950s sitcom as a reflection of the era’s (suburban) culture (e.g. Jones, 1993; Leibman, 1995; Marc, 1997). More notably, Lynn Spigel (1992, 1997, 2001) documents the importance of the television set to postwar families and their houses: where they or developers positioned the television in the house, how it changed their daily activities, how it aligned with the family-centric lifestyle being propagated at the time, and its role in the socialization of a new class living in a new environment in a new type of dwelling.

Regardless of their approaches and subject matter, all of these studies adopt what is essentially a geographic perspective: an implicit understanding that the environments in which human activity takes place is not simply a neutral backdrop. Instead, activity and place inform one another, with the necessary result that dwellings carry a profound symbolic freight. The single-family house is perhaps unique in the complexity of its public image, but all dwelling types have cultural meaning. Public meaning is strongly influenced by media portrayals and advertising (Richins, 1994), which means that understanding the meanings associated with present-day dwelling types will involve a thorough media analysis.

This research provides the broad outline of the ways that one media entity—the real estate section—helped associate a specific set of meanings with the high-rise condominium in Toronto. Although the reach of the real estate section is far smaller than that of primetime 1950s television, and the public image it reflects is less complex than that of the single-family house, the general relation between media and meaning creation still holds. In each case, media representations link lifestyle to dwelling type and simultaneously provide guidance to a new
segment of property owners living in a newly reworked dwelling type. In the case of the high-rise condominium, its story is still unfolding, but it has already altered the residential landscape of Toronto and shows little sign of receding. Instead, its continuing popularity suggests that it has become a viable, mainstream dwelling type where previously it was linked almost exclusively with speculative boom and bust cycles. If this is the case, the post-recession years are for the Toronto high-rise condo the equivalent to the early postwar years for the single-family house. Based on these ideas, I explore the evolution of the public image of the Toronto condo by adopting the media-centric approach of the academic literature that has examined the single-family house and its constellation of associations. The public image of the condo may be less complex than that of the single-family house, but it is my hope that this research will illustrate the surprising breadth of the condo’s public image, particularly as reflected in Condo Living and the thousands of articles it published, as well as the advertisements that surround them.

1.5 Context: Toronto and Condo Living

The motivation for the research is the idea that the current round of condominium development, begun in the mid-1990s, represents a profound break with previous development not only in scale but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the challenge it presents to the previously entrenched hierarchy of residential aspiration that had the detached, single-family house at its peak. While many cities have experienced rapid condominium development recently, in Toronto growth has been disproportionately rapid, making the city the largest condominium market in North America (Wong, 2007). The strength of this market is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the global economic ‘meltdown’ in 2007-2008 had little effect on condominium sales in Toronto. In fact, considered quarterly on a year over year basis, sales of new condominium units in Toronto increased every quarter between 1994 and 2010 (Ladurantaye, 2010). During the first 11 months of 2007, sales of new condominium units accounted for 52% of all sales in the GTA, crossing a threshold that is symbolic and telling, given that Toronto is a relatively sprawling city that is unconstrained by the geographic circumstances of cities traditionally associated with high-rise living like Vancouver, New York and Hong Kong.

What seems clear is that the recent Toronto experience constitutes a new phenomenon whose origins, trajectory and implications are at this point unknown. In many ways, the situation is comparable to the early postwar years, when the detached suburban house and the lifestyle that
was becoming associated with it were equally new. Like the postwar suburban house, the high-rise condominium apartment is associated with a particular form, location and lifestyle that define it as a distinct dwelling type. As has been so well documented (e.g. Fishman, 1987; Hayden, 2003; Jackson, 1985; Wright, 1981), the postwar suburban house is as much an idea—a representation—as a physical dwelling; the same might be true for the high-rise condominium.

With representation as the focus of the research, it was a given that a substantial amount of the work would involve evaluation of condominium advertisements, and therefore newspapers, where developers have traditionally advertised their projects since the inception of condominium tenure in Ontario in 1967. After comparisons were carried out between newspapers, the Toronto Star proved to be the best source, as it published more condo ads than its competitors the Globe and Mail and later the National Post. In general, the Globe publishes ads for products and companies that are more upscale than those in the Star, but this was not the case for condominium projects. Even the most expensive projects advertised in both papers, using the same advertisements; there was no tailoring of ads for the different papers. The Star has traditionally had a larger circulation, and likely due to cheaper rates, advertisements were printed much larger than in the Globe, no small consideration where archival research using scanned images is concerned.

What made the Star the clear choice, however, was the publication of a condominium-specific real estate section called Condo Living from 1997 to 2007. In addition to being the primary site of advertisements for condominium projects, Condo Living also published a range of articles and features that were positioned as being condominium specific. By highlighting what issues were important to condominium owners and potential purchasers, and by linking certain activities and events with the condominium, Condo Living had the potential to illustrate the values associated with the recent era Toronto condominium. In many ways, Condo Living played a role similar to magazines of the 1950s like Redbook and Canadian Homes and Gardens. Through articles about housekeeping, home improvement, shopping and decorating, Condo Living and the magazines of a half-century earlier both acted as normative guides for a new way of living that necessarily highlight the values and attitudes that surround the dwelling types they focus on. It is for this reason that I treated the Condo Living section as a niche-market periodical for its literal content but also to understand the interaction between articles and advertisements in promoting a particular representation of the high-rise condominium apartment. At the same time,
conceptualizing Condo Living as a periodical offered the possibility of considering its impact as a whole that arises equally from its mere existence as well as its inclusion in a socially authoritative entity.

The mere existence of a real estate section in a major newspaper dedicated exclusively to condominiums and related matters is symbolically profound and constitutes a highly visible act of legitimation, as I know from personal experience. In 2002 or 2003, I ‘discovered’ that the Toronto Star was publishing Condo Living, and was amazed to find that it was being published every week. An undergraduate student living in Kitchener at the time, I was aware of condominium development from occasional trips to Toronto—no visitor could fail to notice the many construction cranes dotting the horizon—but I was utterly unaware of the scale at which the process was operating. The thought of a weekly section in the Star devoted to condos seemed as unlikely as one devoted to coin collecting or synchronized swimming, yet there it was, week after week. I never became a regular reader; my fascination always revolved around the mere existence of a condo-only section in largest circulation newspaper in the nation's largest city, which indicated an ongoing and apparently well-entrenched phenomenon to which I had been completely oblivious. At the same time, it seemed a potentially powerful intervention in the housing market by a highly influential entity. What made it particularly compelling was Condo Living’s conformance to the graphic and layout standards of the Star’s ‘hard’ news sections, and the inclusion of content that obscured its generally promotional nature. Condo Living was therefore a real estate section that was unconventional in its content and its appearance. Together, these characteristics suggested that Condo Living had the potential to be much more than simply the sum of its parts, and certainly a worthy subject of analysis.

My ‘discovery’ of Condo Living resulted in a slightly modified version of my reality, which now included the condominium as a dwelling type that people were interested in owning. This experience can be seen as a classic example of the agenda-setting power of mass media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) in which people’s evaluation of the importance of a particular issue is related to the amount and characteristics of the media coverage of that issue. In this case, the existence of Condo Living implied that condominiums had become an important component of the residential landscape, otherwise the section would not exist. It seemed highly likely that other people’s experience would be similar, and I became fascinated with the idea that an entity like Condo Living had the potential to challenge the entrenched hierarchy of residential aspirations,
at whose peak was the suburban single-family house. As a result, I decided to centre my doctoral research on the Condo Living section of the *Toronto Star* with the goal of understanding the mechanisms of persuasion it used in promoting the public image of the condominium.

The result is this document, which examines how Condo Living represented condominiums and their owners, and how the various textual and pictorial representations worked together in coherently positioning the condominium as a stylish, urban dwelling that is particularly well-suited to young, middle-class women. Both the manner in which this image was created along with its consistency and durability over time so strongly resembled the promotional efforts of large corporations that it seemed conceptually beneficial to understand the process as one of branding that took place in a consumption context in which the strategies of branding have become the default mode of selling commodities and shaping attitudes. This idea of branding having transformed into a generalized mode of persuasion is examined in some detail in Chapter 3, but the ‘conventional’ aspects of branding are used throughout this research to analyze the representations of the high-rise condominium apartment.

The advertisements and articles in Condo Living, for example, can be seen to perform a number of brand-like activities. These include rebranding the condominium by countering existing stigmas attached to high-rise living, and differentiating the condominium from other dwelling types by emphasizing elaborate amenities and making associations with high culture and entertainment events. Condo advertisements and articles also identify a clear target market—young women and singles—just as conventional branding efforts do. Finally, Condo Living promoted an association between the high-rise rise condominium apartment and leading edge design in the same way that leading brands like Apple and BMW have also aligned themselves with design.

These ideas arose from an iterative research process, beginning with a coarse initial coding of advertisements designed to capture the broad outline of how the condominium was represented and to whom, and how those representations changed over time. To answer the latter question, I evaluated advertisements published in the *Toronto Star’s* conventional real estate section between 1967 and 1997, as well as those that appeared in Condo Living through 2007. Each phase became more specific than the last. For example, as the increasing prominence of women became clear, the advertisements database was recoded to capture the family and social
relationships of women. Subsequently, when advertisements over the past fifteen years were found to concentrate on young, single women, the database was once again recoded to assess how closely representations of women conformed to gender stereotypes.

The articles in Condo Living were similarly explored according the ways in which they might have contributed to the evolution the public image of the condo. All of the articles were coded in order to capture the broad areas of focus, such as legal issues, design, or site profiles, for example. Beyond this, however, article analysis was predominantly qualitative, undertaken with the goals of understanding how the articles individually, in groups, and as a whole addressed a number of points, including their strategy in dealing with negative connotations of high-rise and condominium living, the ways they foregrounded leading edge design, the kind of lifestyle they promoted, their thematic convergence with, and divergence from, condominium advertisements, how they position the condominium versus the single-family house, and their assumed target markets.

Overall, then, the approach involved the use of techniques of visual and textual analysis operating within a conceptual framework that used the concept of branding to interpret the representations and strategies—and their interplay—deployed in condominium advertisements and Condo Living articles. This approach was used in response to the thought that the condominium has recently been positioned as much more a conventional commodity than other dwelling types, and was therefore particularly amenable to being viewed through the lens of branding. Beyond that, the approach acknowledges context, a profoundly geographic concept that has generally been ignored in the tiny literature concerning real estate marketing. Ellis (1993) is unusual and perhaps unique in examining real estate advertisements not in isolation but as part of a cultural object: the real estate magazine. At the simplest level, the approach I have used simply acknowledges the status of the real estate section as a prominent and under-researched information resource for people considering a real estate purchase. At a deeper level, the approach strives to capture some of the importance of context in the process of meaning making, first by including the examination of advertisements and articles, and text and images. At the same time, the approach assumes that publication of articles and advertisements in a dedicated newspaper section is particularly meaningful in ways that cannot be duplicated by other media such as outdoor advertising or give-away booklets. The news media are generally considered influential in shaping opinion: 'Through the selection, reproduction and interpretation
of 'news', the media construct preferred readings which give meaning to events' (Burgess, 1985, p. 192). Considering advertisements in isolation would dismiss entirely this ability to construct ‘preferred readings’, which is, after all, a process of persuasion no different in its goals (and recently, in its mechanism) than branding. Particularly given the effort expended to make Condo Living appear as an ‘objective’, hard news section of the paper, it seemed necessary to examine the section and all of its contents as a whole.

1.6 Document structure

If this research is novel in positioning the real estate section as an influential cultural object, the same is true for its choice of subject matter. Chapter two of the dissertation highlights the near absence of urban research concentrating on high-rise condominiums in any way. A small flurry of condo-specific articles appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s documenting the Canadian situation, but since then very little has appeared. The situation is particularly difficult to understand given how substantially condominium development has altered the skylines of cities in Canada and the United States over the past fifteen years. The condo-specific research that does exist, however, deals most commonly with representation and gender. Recent work from Australia (Costello, 2005; Fincher, 2004; Shaw, 2005) and Canada (Kern, 2007, 2010) are examined in some detail in chapter two. A common theme in much of this work is that this latest round of condominium development represents something new and distinctive that has required a reworking of perceptions of high-rise living and ownership tenure, and has been a process in which female gender roles and stereotypes have been highly salient. This is in contrast to the ‘new build gentrification’ research, which is also considered in the literature review, although only briefly since it rarely differentiates condominiums from other dwelling types or examines them from a gender perspective. The chapter closes with an overview of the recent research that examines the link between real estate advertising (in many different forms and media) and meaning making. This body of work—which is probably too diverse and isolated to call a ‘body’—is not large, and as with the condo-specific literature, none of it deals with real estate sections specifically. It does, however, present a variety of approaches to analyzing visual and textual matter that were helpful in outlining the research approach used in the present research.

Chapter three outlines the theory that informs the sensibility of this research. Based primarily on work by Arvidsson (2005, 2006), Moor (2007, 2008), and Lury (1996, 2004), the perspective I
adopt is, as described above, based on the idea that branding has transformed beyond its roots as a commercial activity carried out by corporations to market themselves and their products. Moor links the ‘rise of branding’ to the concurrent rise of design as an aspect of consumption. Lury understands brands as continually evolving entities whose changes are driven by the interactions between brand owners and consumers.

I use these and related concepts throughout my research: they form a large part of the conceptual lens through which I interpret the advertisements and articles in Condo Living and position them as brand-like activity. At a higher level of abstraction, however, I imagine these relatively pragmatic and conventional understandings of branding to operate within a theoretical arena in which branding is much more than a novel marketing strategy. Arvidsson (2005) is not alone in claiming that affluent societies should be understood more by consumption than production, but he takes a new approach in arguing that it is a vastly expanded branding mechanism—and not simply ‘consumption’—that characterizes the present form of capitalism. Fundamental to Arvidsson’s work is the expansion of the strategies, which are now used widely for purposes that are not directly related to commerce and material consumption. A striking aspect of this expansion has been the adoption of branding strategies by all manner of institutions, including non-profits and political parties, for example. The implication is that branding has evolved from a marketing approach to a generalized mode of persuasion that we have become conditioned to expect, and to which we contribute even if unintentionally or against our wishes. It is this idea that is present throughout my own work: that the advertisements and articles in Condo Living were created and consumed within a context characterized by the pervasiveness of the vastly expanded and transformed strategies of branding.

Chapter four outlines my research approach and methodology. I discuss the role of the real estate section in residential decision-making process, arguing that the predominantly local nature of dwellings as commodities positioned the real estate section of the local newspaper as one of the leading sources of information for consumers. Because dwellings—for all their similarity—are unique products, they are not amenable to the national coverage that accompanies mass produced commodities. While there are countless information sources for consumers looking to purchase cars or televisions, for example, the same is not true for dwellings; until the rise of the internet, the local real estate section was the obvious source of information for consumers. This, combined with the perceived authority of newspapers, means that the real estate section had the
potential to exert considerable influence on real estate markets. Their existence for more than four decades would tend to support this idea. In the chapter I also discuss the databases of advertisements and articles that I assembled from the Toronto Star’s real estate and front sections for the years between 1967 and 1997, and from the Star’s Condo Living section between 1997 and 2007. Both databases are large, comprising more than 2,300 advertisements and over 5,000 articles. This kind of longitudinal study of a corpus of material is unusual in urban research—although it is quite common in media studies—but was appropriate here in order to assess whether the recent era (from the mid 1990s onward) actually represented the break with the past that it seemed to. This approach also coincided with the broad research goal of identifying the elements of the condo’s public image and the strategies by which it evolved over time.

The desire to map out the how the condominium, high-rise living, and their owners were represented also drove the analysis. With the advertisements, my aim was to establish their individual, primary message. To do so, I tended to privilege the images and captions of advertisements, since these elements typically occupy the majority of space in the ad, and are selected to quickly convey a message. The advertising copy, on the other hand, typically occupies a far smaller amount of space and exists to support the message being conveyed by the major image(s) and caption. In line with mapping out key representational themes and their relative salience, the results of this process are descriptive statistics and frequency counts. Conversely, the Condo Living articles and the section as a whole are largely analyzed qualitatively, according to the assumptions they attempt to naturalize, the imagery they employ, their size and location and so on. The primarily textual nature of the articles demands a different form of engagement from readers than advertisements do; the methods used here acknowledge this difference.

Chapter five explores how advertisements and articles in Condo Living can be understood to have participated in two distinct, conventional branding strategies in the recent era: rebranding the condominium in order to counter existing negative perceptions and stereotypes associated with high-rise living; and differentiating the condominium from its competitors, particularly the single-family house. The discussion of rebranding focuses on perceptions of the high-rise condominium as an inappropriate place in which to raise children, as a dwelling type associated with crime, and as a dwelling whose size imposes unappealing or unworkable constraints. It is shown how advertisements and Condo Living articles take different approaches in overcoming
these perceived objections. Advertisements ignore certain issues or reframe them in different terms: design is invoked to allay concerns about the small size of condominium units, while concierges and doormen promise hotel-style luxury but implicitly address security concerns as well. Conversely, articles in Condo Living are seen to acknowledge perceived objections directly, but to present them nearly universally as situations that have solutions.

The strategies of differentiation used in advertisements and articles are quite similar, unlike those just discussed. In both forms, the condominium is differentiated from the single-family house based on the former’s extravagant facilities, the carefree ‘adult’ lifestyle it offers, a concept of urbanity primarily defined high by profile sports, entertainment and cultural events, and its association with leading edge style and design. The condominium is therefore positioned as the polar opposite of the single-family house in certain ways, such as location, activities and the outward-focused, social nature of the lifestyle it promises. But at the same time, it offers amenities and spaces such as screening rooms, grand lobbies and multi-million dollar exercise facilities that far surpass what would be available in even the most expensive of exurban estates. Together, these approaches position the condominium not as a degraded version of dwelling to be chosen only when single-family house is beyond reach, but as a distinctly different form of dwelling that offers multiple advantages.

Chapter six expands on one of the differentiation strategies highlighted in the previous chapter, exploring the many ways that advertisements and articles link the recent era condominium with leading edge design. As used here, ‘design’ incorporates architecture, interior design, and ‘industrial’ or product design, including furniture but extending across the range of items found in domestic spaces. The chapter includes a somewhat detailed discussion of the state of current design in order to establish that a relatively coherent design aesthetic with origins in high modernism has become entrenched over the past fifteen years across numerous design disciplines. The argument I make is that this ‘contemporary’ design aesthetic is not simply a return of modernism but rather a reworking that combines multiple variations of midcentury modernism, and more importantly, a reworking that is ‘safe’ for women and one that is particularly well suited to small spaces like condominiums. The chapter illustrates how contemporary modernism became linked with the condominium in Toronto via high profile loft conversion projects, and how the aesthetic diffused to self-consciously high-style projects by small developers and finally to the mainstream projects of the largest developers. The process
was pushed forward in developer advertising, and particularly in Condo Living articles, which frequently focused site profiles—fundamentally promotional articles announcing a project coming to market—on architects and designers. Beyond these, architects and designers were featured in a range of other articles, including evaluations of model suites, as the subject of profiles of Toronto ‘Condo People’, as sources for expert advice on decorating or shopping. These articles comprise part of a discourse of design that characterizes the run of Condo Living, and was manifested in hundreds of design-related articles, from Christopher Hume’s long-running series that critiqued condominium architecture to accounts of international design shows and a series of ‘Canadian Icons’ articles that highlighted Canadian contributions to design over the past half century. In all of these cases, the link between leading edge design and the condominium is naturalized, and aligns the condominium with a range of products associated with high style and fashion that are predominantly female-coded such as designer clothing and fragrances but extend to more mundane items like ‘health and beauty’ products. All of these, including the recent era condominium, invoke notions of style, glamour and fashion, and employ the same conventions in their marketing to signal their participation in a well-identified category. The complete absence of any counterbalancing directed towards males is one of the reasons I refer to the condominium as a ‘female-coded’ product.

This issue—women constituting the primary focus of marketing for mainstream condominium units—is explored in chapter seven. The first part of the chapter evaluates portrayals of women in condominium advertisements over the entire forty-year study period based on frequency of appearance and type of relationship. The recent era is seen to be characterized by advertisements directed at young, single women. The mode of portrayal is subsequently assessed, and women are found to be predominantly portrayed in a relatively realistic, ‘normal’ manner (i.e. as opposed to an exploitative manner), further supporting the claim that the condominium has become female-coded. The second part of the chapter evaluates the many testimonial-style articles that appeared in Condo Living, almost all of them written by women, although of two age groups: those close to thirty years old, and those close to sixty. Frequently appearing on the front page of the section, and accompanied by large photographs, these articles are remarkably similar in tone and content within their demographic groups. For the young women, condo ownership was typically spurred by some kind of trigger event, like visiting the condo of a friend; previously, few had thought that condo ownership would be possible. The purchase and
ownership process is usually described as frantic, exciting and at times disappointing or annoying, but the universal message is positive: there may be challenges, but condo ownership is possible—and rewarding—even if you are young and do not have a partner. For older women, who are typically downsizing for health reasons or due to the loss of a partner, the process is far less ‘exciting’, but the recurring message that underlies much of what appeared in Condo Living is here too: there are challenges, but they can be overcome, and in the end, purchasing a condo is a good decision. Testimonial articles such as these are profound powerful branding mechanisms, since they originate with peers, they document ‘true’ situations, and like affective advertisements, their focus is on peak moments rather than explicit promotion. The chapter strongly supports the claim that the recent era condominium is predominantly represented as dwelling type that is ‘naturally’ well suited to women.

The final chapter highlights the major points of the research and suggests lines of future inquiry.

1.7 Summary

The crucial aspect of the way this research has been conceptualized is the premise that the recent round of condominium development in Toronto constitutes a new and distinctive phenomenon. Because of this, it seemed that using a conventional approach to exploring real estate development, such as the hegemonic ‘gentrification’ framework, would run the risk of obscuring the novel aspects the development process. As a result, I have used a framework derived from cultural studies, concentrating on representations of the high-rise condominium apartment both recently and in the past in order to discover if and how characterizations have changed over time. When I discovered the Condo Living section, I perceived it as a fascinating and almost alien artifact that became increasingly of interest to me over time as I sensed the degree to which a remarkably uniform and prescribed set of assumptions and expectations was manifested in its every aspect, from graphic layout to the content of articles. This experience elicited in me questions more common to archaeology than geography: who participated in the creation of this thing, and why? What was its purpose? For what audience was it created, and what did it say about their culture? What rules and conventions guided its construction, and what led to its consistency in linking women, style, and design to the condominium?

The theoretical framework I employ, based on the notion of ‘transformed branding’ offers a way to address these question and to understand two of the key findings of this research: that
developer promotional strategies and the articles in Condo Living present a remarkably cohesive and consistent image of the high-rise condominium apartment as a high-style residence for single women; and that developers have quite successfully been able to market condominium apartments using precisely the same imagery that is used to sell high fashion products. From the perspective of a branding-based framework, these circumstances conform perfectly to the notion that branding and its mechanisms have, due to saturation-level exposure to them, become internalized, per the idea that branding has been transformed into a fundamentally different and more elaborate process. The implication is that it has become ‘natural’ for us to interpret reality, particularly where consumption is directly involved, with an expectation that we will encounter brands and branding.

Although unconventional in the urban literature, this framework does what any theoretical framework should: provides a way of understanding why people do the things they do, individually and on a societal level. In this particular case, studying media representations of condominium apartments provides some insight into the unprecedented demand that has characterized the recent round of development in Toronto and other cities. At the same time, by concentrating on an influential local publication, the research can also comment on the more challenging question of why Toronto has experienced such disproportionate demand and development. On a more general level, the research suggests that the aspirational hierarchy of dwelling types may be changing, or at the very least be less well entrenched than might previously have been imagined. There are implications here for Toronto and many other cities which seek to implement higher density housing. Finally, at the broadest scale, the research illustrates the troubling ascension of a mode of persuasion based on branding that may already characterize the exchange of information in the public realm.
Chapter 2
Review of the literature

2.1 Overview

This research is concerned with the ways the Toronto Star’s Condo Living section represented high-rise condominiums in the advertisements and articles it published. I argue that the articles, advertisements, and their presence in a dedicated section in a large city newspaper participate in a larger process whose result was the positioning of the Toronto condominium as a design-led, female-coded brand. The concept of branding has appeared relatively frequently in the urban literature, most commonly regarding the marketing of cities to international audiences (e.g. Evans, 2003; Gotham, 2007; Rantisi & Leslie, 2006) but in many other forms as well. However, the mechanisms of branding have so far not been employed in relation to particular dwelling types like the condominium. As a result, there is no relevant body of literature to outline here related to both branding and dwellings, although in chapter 3 I discuss the branding-specific work that comprises my theoretical framework.

I therefore concentrate on the literature that explores the two discrete components of my research, condominiums and real estate marketing. Both of these subjects occupy a similar position in the urban geography literature, tending to appear frequently but briefly, and rarely acting as the primary focus of research. Given this circumstance, it almost goes with saying that research that combines both of these subjects is nearly non-existent. In this section, I review three limited bodies of research: the general, condominium-specific research; recent work that looks at ways in which the condominium is represented and imagined; and the literature that examines real estate advertising.

2.2 The absence of the condominium in urban research

The paucity of condominium research seems puzzling, particularly given the highly visible role that core area residential development has played in many cities since the mid-1990s. One factor that might partly account for this situation is that the condominium has rarely been considered to be a distinct dwelling type. High-rise apartments and condominiums probably appear most
frequently in the gentrification literature, a body of work that has traditionally paid a great deal of attention to the physical forms that gentrification took (e.g. Jager, 1986; Mills, 1988). Despite this—and the reliance on physical form in the original definition of gentrification (Glass, 1964)—the recent work in this area is generally more concerned with the mechanisms and implications of urban redevelopment and (understandably) less concerned with the specifics of the physical forms it takes. When research is primarily concerned with the loss of affordable housing and the displacement of existing residents, for example, there is little need to differentiate between low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise forms of residential development.

Similarly, research operating at a larger scale may cite high-rise development in accounts of city branding (Sandercock & Dovey, 2002) and the emergence of state-complicit, private-sector gentrification (Hackworth & Smith, 2001) but once again, this work has little need to explore the high-rise apartment or condominium as a distinct dwelling type.

It is only in the work concerning ‘new build gentrification’ that new high-rise projects are differentiated from other dwelling types, although for purposes of debating whether brownfield redevelopment can or should be labeled ‘gentrification’ (Lambert, 2002; Davidson & Lees, 2005; Boddy, 2007); the meanings, representations and perceptions of high-rise living are similarly not part of this work.

Although it may not recognize the high-rise apartment or condominium as distinct dwelling types, the gentrification literature has nonetheless strongly informed the small body of recent work that explores high-rise living by identifying a number of themes for exploration. The most prominent of these is probably the implications gentrification has for ‘urban citizenship’, based on examinations of the attitudes and values of gentrifiers, joining a long tradition of such work (notably Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1996; Smith, 1996 among many others). The dominant interpretation at the moment sees in the occupants of ‘new build gentrification’ as well as more traditional gentrifiers (i.e. those who renovate urban, single-family dwellings) many of the same tendencies and characteristics that have long been attributed to suburban residents, and especially those who live in gated communities: a fear-driven desire to physically and socially withdraw from their neighbours and society in general. Gentrifiers are positioned as urban survivalists, needlessly fearful—yet smug and safe—as they self-isolate using security technology in a process dubbed ‘padding the bunker’ (Atkinson, 2006). At issue in the studies is social interaction between different groups and classes, which is assumed to be under threat by new
Butler and Robson have, for example, published a multitude of studies in this vein, arguing that gentrifiers fail to meaningfully interact with non-gentrifier neighbours (e.g. Robson & Butler, 2001; Butler & Robson, 2003; Butler, 2003). This and related work has been highly influential: themes of fear, security, social interaction and urban citizenship appear in the majority of recent condominium-specific research that I discuss below.

2.3 Condominium-specific research: demographics, associations and attitudes

Although condominium tenure was introduced in many American and Canadian jurisdictions in the 1960s (van Weesep, 1987; Skaburskis, 1988), it was not until the late 1980s that academics in a series of articles attempted to answer some very broad and foundational questions about Canadian and American condominium apartments and the people who lived in them. The data that these articles provide are not directly relevant to this study—which is primarily concerned with how the condominium has been represented in media—but are nonetheless useful in illustrating how (and whether) the condominium differs from other dwelling types. Skaburskis (1998) analyses data accumulated in a nationwide survey of condominium occupants conducted by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 1983. He found two distinct submarkets. The first was composed of younger households (typically between 30 and 40 years of age) and another older, pre-retirement or ‘empty nester’ group. The younger group bought a condominium because they could not afford a single-family house and to upgrade their housing quality, often from rental. They tended to buy row or townhouse condominiums, and expected that they would move to a single-family house in the future. This is a group of people for whom condominium tenure provided an earlier opportunity to participate in the conventional housing paradigm that has the detached, suburban, single-family house at the top of its hierarchy.

The second submarket identified was older, typically people moving from a single family dwelling (i.e. ‘downsizing’) who were attracted by building amenities and lack of maintenance, and tended to live in high-rise buildings. They generally considered only condominiums when making their move, and they paid more than for their units than did the younger group. The mean size of condominiums was 1288 square feet, with more than two-thirds having three or more bedrooms. The public image of the high-rise condo circa 1980, was therefore associated primarily with large, luxury buildings populated by well-to-do empty-nesters. Unfortunately, no
similarly comprehensive survey has since been undertaken, and Canadian census data cannot be filtered to isolate high-rise condominium owners, so we have much less idea at present of who lives in condos.

Preston (1991) sought to answer this broad question as related to American condominiums. Based on census data for the years 1980, 1981 and 1983, Preston found that the cities with the highest number of condominium units are Chicago (150,200), Los Angeles (103,600), Miami (87,100) and New York (79,500). The study’s principal finding is that condominium markets varied widely, appealing primarily to ‘elderly people in Miami, middle-aged homeowners in Chicago, middle-aged first-time homebuyers in Los Angeles, and a cross-section of small households in New York’ (Preston, 1991, p. 12). In general, however, while owner profiles varied within the group of cities, condominium and co-op owners as a whole were found to be distinct from renters and homeowners, having much higher average incomes than the former but much smaller household sizes than the latter. The numbers also suggest support for the primacy of the ‘luxury condo’ in the early 1980s: based on 1983 data, condominium owners in Los Angeles and Chicago had higher average incomes than homeowners. In New York and Miami, the situation was the reverse, albeit with little separation. More than the Skaburskis study, Preston’s research suggests that there was no monolithic understanding of the condominium in the 1980s: locality and other circumstances made the condo a viable choice for a range of people.

In a subsequent paper, Preston, Murdie & Northrup (1993) explored the attitudes of people who purchased condominiums as investment instruments (i.e. to rent to other people) rather than to occupy themselves. Based on a survey of condominium owners in the City of Toronto, Preston found little difference in educational attainment, but noted that ‘resident owners’ were nearly twice as likely to belong to a ‘Charter’ (i.e. English or French) ethnicity as ‘non-resident owners’ (57% versus 25%). Contrary to stereotypes prevalent at the time that spoke of wealthy investors in Hong Kong snapping up multiple units—perhaps even before they were offered to Canadians, as occurred in Vancouver (Ley, 1996)—Asian non-resident owners were outnumbered by Europeans (26.2% versus 33.4%). Nearly 60% of non-resident owners had never owned more than one condominium, a far cry from perceptions. Despite this, non-resident owners’ average family income was significantly higher than that of resident owners ($90,455 versus $70, 214), far exceeding the city-wide average of just under $45,768 in 1986.
While the findings of the Preston article are interesting, it is the article’s context that is particularly noteworthy. Written shortly after the collapse of condominium prices in 1989 following four years of unprecedented increases, the article suggests that the discourse surrounding condominiums was one of anger directed at investors, and more precisely, at ‘foreign investors’. These sentiments were so strong and widespread that, as Preston noted, policymakers feared that ‘that investors [would] abandon their properties when prices fall, creating serious financial difficulties for condominium developers and the agencies that have guaranteed their construction loans’ (Preston, Murdie & Northrup, 1993, p. 283). As it happened, the issue became moot as the subsequent recession led to a dramatic decrease in new condominium development; the condominium advertisements of the early 1990s typically show pre- and post-crash pricing of remaining units just completed, with prices often reduced by 40% or more. The need to sell remaining inventory, the lack of demand for new units, and lead times of three years or longer when the recession showed signs of ending meant that the high-rise condominium effectively disappeared as a real estate product for the first half of the 1990s. What is clear from Preston’s article is that the discourse surrounding the condominium in the late 1980s and early 1990s had several negative aspects, including perceptions of condos as risky investments inevitably subject to unpredictable boom/bust cycles; as low status, heavily discounted products during the depths of the recession; and as dwellings predominantly being held as rentals by absentee owners demonized as wealthy ‘foreigners’. These existed atop the many pre-existing associations with urban high-rise living, most of which (crime, noise, high density, poverty) are binary opposites of typically suburban attributes (safety, quiet, space, affluence). Needless to say, this did not represent a positive set of associations.

When the condominium or owned, high-rise apartment did finally being to reappear in the mid 1990s, it did so as a new product, rebranded, in cities around the world, many of which did not have a particularly strong history of high-rise development. The rapid rise to prominence of the high-rise apartment in the post-recession period has attracted the attention of a number of researchers. Costello (2005), for example, outlines the dramatic swings in public attitudes toward high-rise living in Melbourne, Australia, beginning with a phase of optimism in the 1960s that saw the high-rise (and the slum clearing that accompanied it) as a solution to ‘housing the underprivileged masses’ (Costello, 2005, p. 50). As happened in many other cities, initial optimism faded quickly when high-rise towers failed to meet unrealistic expectations and were
branded slums by the 1970s. With strongly negative connotations linked to high-rise living, it is not surprising that in the 1980s, new residential high-rise units in Melbourne came primarily from the conversion of vacant—and therefore inexpensive for developers—office buildings rather than new developments; one suspects that this approach allowed developers to market these units as distinct and unusual, far removed from the social housing towers of previous decades. The use of office conversions as a transitional product may have facilitated subsequent development in the 1990s that led to the current situation in which ‘high-rise housing occupies a distinct place in the residential market and is now celebrated as a symbol of affluent living’ (Costello, 2005, p. 50).

Costello argues that several factors coalesced to transform perceptions of high-rise living from ‘prisons to penthouses’. One of the most obvious is the social class of occupants: affluent empty-nesters, as Skaburskis found in Canada in the 1980s, but also young professional couples. A second aspect is the lifestyle promised in developer marketing, at once relaxing due to the lack of maintenance obligations, and exciting due to project amenities and proximity to downtown attractions. Costello unfortunately does not identify what had changed that initially convinced developers to propose high-rise projects and customers to subsequently purchase them, other than briefly invoking Zukin’s concept of the reworking of inner city areas as zones of consumption to perhaps address this point.

Conversely, Costello explicitly argues that other than a demand for high quality finishes, the ‘other significant criterion for these new housing consumers is the childless discourses that circulate’ (Costello, 2005, p. 56). To support this claim, Costello provides quotes from developers describing their target markets as without children by choice, or because they are older empty-nesters. From these statements, it is argued that children are not welcome in high-rises, and that this sentiment has been carried over from the previous, social housing era of high-rise development. Unfortunately, in addition to providing no support for the claim that ‘childless discourses’ are a significant criterion for prospective customers, Costello fails to discuss in any detail the impact of societal-level perceptions of the appropriateness of the single-family suburban home as a site of child-rearing and how this dramatically reduces the potential market for ‘family’ sized units: in a market system, inner-city high-rise apartments of ‘appropriate’ size to raise a stereotypical nuclear family would be prohibitively expensive and prospective buyers few. Regardless of its shortcomings, the article is useful for its exploration of the changing
perceptions of high-rise living and illustrating that these perceptions are partly informed by attitudes concerning family structure, lifecycle, and child rearing.

Many of these themes appear in Fincher’s (2004) research into the attitudes of high-rise developers in Melbourne. The primary argument of the paper is that the narrative that developers employ to lure customers is profoundly conventional in its life-cycle and gender assumptions despite its claims to providing an innovative way of life for empty-nesters and young professionals. Women, for example, appear in developer narratives primarily as older suburban housewives in traditional nuclear families, or as young women destined to have children and move to the suburbs. The implication is that by concentrating on two arbitrarily created submarkets—empty-nesters and young people—developers will fail to meet the diverse needs of people such as single mothers, whose circumstances depart from hetero-normative ideals.

The latter argument dovetails with Costello’s work, arguing as it does that a leading theme of developer narratives is that high-rising living is particularly well suited and appropriate for people without ‘family’: as one developer put it, ‘The people we sell to are pre- and post-kids…basically they’re without kids’ (Fincher, 2004, p. 334). Developers are also quoted as pointing to a trend to having children later in life as one reason that high-rises are marketed to ‘couples without kids, single people, perhaps gays’ (ibid.). Fincher views these statements as justifications (whether disingenuous or a product of their conventional expectations is left unsaid) and cites census data to illustrate that children are not in fact absent from in inner Melbourne but are present in a lower proportion in areas dominated by high-rises. The implication seems to be that developer marketing has altered ‘natural’ settlement patterns by focusing on people without young children; and that, absent such marketing strategies, far more families with children would choose to raise their children in high-rise apartments, based on the census data showing the number children being raised in inner city Melbourne. There are a number of grounds on which this argument could be scrutinized, but the most prominent would seem to be the intersection of the economic and the social: Fincher should have addressed the widespread societal assumptions about appropriate locales for childrearing, and how those play out for those who have sufficient financial resources to allow them to choose their ideal location. To attribute settlement patterns wholly to developer marketing, and not consider other factors is to greatly simplify a complex process.
It also suggests intentionality where it may not exist. Developers are not unaffected by social norms and expectations. While Fincher sees a marketing strategy at work, it seems at least as plausible that developers are simply reproducing widely shared sentiments when they describe the detached, suburban house as a more appropriate place to raise children. The same mechanism accounts for their descriptions of their high-rise projects as catering to ‘couples, singles, gays, where you have different requirements that are not accommodated by the detached house in the “burbs”’ (ibid., p. 335). Whatever one feels about developer marketing tactics, this statement is undoubtedly accurate: suburban housing is in actuality formulated around the ideal of the nuclear family, and demonstrably does not accommodate other groups well. From this perspective, developer claims of being innovative may seem somewhat self-aggrandizing, but certainly understandable. Yet Fincher concludes that their failure to provide for families—i.e. the grouping most commonly associated with suburban housing—precludes the possibility of having provided anything useful: ‘Far from seeing themselves as neglecting to provide infrastructure, developers, in this last account, are praised for developing housing appropriate to neglected groups’ (ibid.).

This is a perplexing stance, to say the least. I would speculate that it is related to Fincher’s presentation of the owned high-rise apartment as a wholly invented product of marketing strategies by the public sector (selling inner city living in the name of inter-city competitiveness) and the private sector (selling their projects). The stance that Fincher seems to take is that such a product, because of its origins, can have no redeeming values. This resonates with the morality that surrounds the idea of ‘unnecessary’ consumption, which fails to acknowledge the personal and social value of the rituals and motivations that accompany acquisition and ownership of goods. Adhering to this stance inflexibly forces Fincher to implicitly praise suburban development and to denigrate a form that is demonstrably more suitable to certain populations.

At the same time, Fincher employs a very simplified model of the consumption process in which marketing appeals are apparently accepted uncritically and lead directly to purchases. She argues, for example, that developers needed to create a market for the owned, high-rise

2 Fincher (2007) covers much of the same ground, using the same data and method, and arriving at the same conclusion: that developer claims of being innovative are at the least disingenuous. There is no examination of the utility of inner city, owned apartments for groups not well-served by suburban housing.
apartment, a dwelling type with little presence in Melbourne prior to the 1990s: “For effective marketing of this new housing form, a credible story has to be created, justifying its sudden appearance” (Fincher, 2004, p. 329). The ‘credible story’ that emerges from interviews with developers begins with the creation of a need or desire, in this case, for ‘European’ living in an urban setting replete with cafes and other consumption opportunities. Suburban living, in this construction, is portrayed not only as isolated but also demanding maintenance and associated with child-rearing tasks. Purchasing a core area high-rise apartment is thus presented as the ‘solution’ to problems people didn’t know they had.

This understanding of the consumption process is of course not new, being essentially the same one that decried laundry detergent advertisements in the 1960s, in which advertisements were seen to create artificial needs by showing us our shortcomings (e.g. a ring around the collar), and promised that if we purchased the right product, those needs would be fulfilled. In the Melbourne case, public and private sector claims regarding new preferences for urban living are viewed as identical to 1950s claims about jet-fighter-like tailfins on cars: pure invention carefully designed to entice shallow consumers to purchase something they do not need. The shortcomings of this perspective are manifold, but all essentially relate to the over-simplification of what is a very complex process. Among the most obvious shortcomings of this model of consumption is its assumption that advertisements are profoundly and completely powerful, and that people are uncritical in internalizing each advertisement’s message. It also fails to acknowledge the social and cultural meaning of the purchase process and ownership of goods (Dant, 1996)—particularly regarding products like dwellings that have great social significance (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1991). Finally, it often relies on a highly dubious but unacknowledged distinction between legitimate consumption (‘needs’) and needless, frivolous consumption (‘wants’).

Regarding Canadian condominium development, Leslie Kern has produced numerous articles and a book, all based on seven interviews with industry professionals, and twenty-one interviews with female condominium owners (Kern 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Kern’s thesis, which strongly informs all of her work is that, ‘the neoliberal political–economic rationality underlying condominium development translates into changes in the ways that a particular group of city dwellers—women condominium owners—conceptualize their relationships to their homes, neighborhoods, and the city at large’ (Kern, 2007, p. 657-8). Developers are positioned as ‘luring’ young women into home ownership; subsequently, the attitudes of those women change
for the worse, becoming more aligned with neoliberalism. Kern acknowledges that this model is unproved, and requires testing: “However, it cannot be assumed that homeownership in general, and condominium ownership in particular, automatically produces a ‘neoliberal citizen’ with revanchist ideals about city life” (ibid., p. 661). To test this hypothesis, Kern conducts interviews with female condominium owners, asking them questions designed to elicit their attitudes toward concepts linked to neoliberalism and citizenship: ownership versus renting, safety and security, and interaction with other residents in their building, the surrounding area, and the city core as a whole.

It seems obvious enough that this article is a straightforward test of a hypothesis. Kern herself makes this explicit, noting:

[I]t is important to question the ways in which the shifting tenure structure of the city may affect the nature of people’s attachments to, or engagements with, city life and local issues without assuming a straightforward, top-down influence by the broader neoliberal objectives shaping city-building, or that neoliberal imperatives are the only forces shaping citizenship in this context. Therefore, in the latter portion of this article, I will examine the dimension of condominium ownership from the vantage point of everyday life, following Larner (2003), Peck (2004), and others who note the unevenness of neoliberalism ‘on the ground’ (Leitner et al., 2007)” (Kern, 2007, p. 661-2; emphasis added).

This passage, which reads very much like a response to critical comments from peer reviewers, suggest that the common-sense understanding is that ‘neoliberal imperatives’ strongly influence ‘urban citizenship’, but that, for methodological reasons, we must actually test it. Now, perhaps for critical geographers, it is taken for granted that entering into condominium ownership results in a conversion (to some degree) to neoliberal citizenship; unfortunately, neither this nor many other assumptions, such as what constitutes ‘good urban citizenship’, is addressed by Kern. The failure to even address what seem like fundamental points, such as whether the findings relate to all condominium owners or just women in new condominiums, for example, or why rental tenure is positioned as inherently superior to ownership tenure regarding ‘urban citizenship’, give one the sense that Kern is writing only for an audience that shares her sensibility. Perhaps those who share Kern’s sensibility will fill in the missing gaps—which will be extremely familiar to them—and read Kern’s work for what it adds to what is surely a rich and complex narrative. But for those who are outsiders, it can be difficult to look beyond what appear to be fundamental methodological problems. It is for this reason I am guessing that in a review of her book, Sex and the revitalized city: gender, condominium development, and urban citizenship, Richard Harris
notes that by failing to address its basic assumptions (and questions that arise from them), “Kern leaves the impression that she might have prejudged her results” (Harris, 2010, p. 770).

This impression is partly created by Kern’s use of her evidence, which she treats as unambiguously supporting her position when this does not appear to be case. Regarding ownership, for example, Kern quotes several of her interview subjects who predictably (because property ownership is a widely shared societal goal) make it clear they were and are attracted to ownership as opposed to rental tenure, and see benefits to it. Kern rightly emphasizes that ownership is socially constructed as the most desirable form of tenure, but then fails to consider to what degree this has affected responses: she seems to see statements of preference for ownership as the result of an ownership-induced attitude shift rather than an internalized, pre-existing social construct. Hence her conclusion—which is simply a restating of the hypothesis—that condominium ownership draws young women into “the social, economic, political, and moral structure of private property ownership (Blomley, 2004), and thereby into a particular model of citizenship based on an economic form of engagement with the city” (Kern, 2007, p. 669). What is missing is evidence of any kind of a causal link between achieving ownership tenure (and specifically, ownership of a new condominium apartment) and a shift in attitudes. This would be less problematic if Kern was testing a hypothesis that, for example, the young women buying condominiums were neoliberal citizens, but Kern is testing a hypothesis that condominium ownership results in changes in attitudes.

In addition to testing whether property ownership transforms people’s values, attitudes and behavior, Kern also sets herself the task of exploring whether ownership has the possibility of being ‘emancipatory’ for women. The evidence presented is slim: one interview subject mentions that she knew people who purchased a condominium only to find that their mortgage payments consumed most of their money. Kern concludes “becoming beholden to a mortgage is not necessarily freeing. Thus we cannot conclude here that homeownership is necessarily a form of gendered emancipation” (ibid.). Beyond the obvious—that rent too is an obligation—it would have been useful to see a more nuanced exploration of the gender implications of unprecedented numbers of women occupying the position of household Maintainers, both for the women themselves and for their potential to act as role models in reconstructing (or at least reconsidering) social norms. Kern’s position that condominium ownership is not emancipatory because not all women can achieve it dismisses any form of incremental change, which seems
both unproductive and idealistic. Just as Fincher assumed that the core area high-rise apartment could have no real utility due to its origins as a product of marketing, so Kern can see no potential in condominium ownership for affecting gender norms, presumably due to its role as neoliberal capitalism’s Trojan Horse.

Along with ownership—which is described without elaboration as a ‘troubling tenure’, contributing to the sense that Kern is writing for an audience that shares her sensibility—Kern hypothesizes that female condominium owners demand security features due to a “desire for a sense of enclosure and privacy, rather than public freedom” (Kern, 2007, p. 670). As with the issue of ownership versus rental, interview responses regarding safety and security are predictable: several women feel their buildings are located in parts of the city thought to be relatively dangerous, and interview subjects are generally pleased to have concierges and security features. This would seem to align with characterizations of condominium owners as people who wish to ‘pad the bunker’, and more to the point, the responses would presumably characterize a ‘neoliberal urban citizen’. Once again, Kern’s approach, which involves asking women how they feel about a certain issue, precludes the possibility of actually detecting changed attitudes due to ownership rather than pre-existing ones. Beyond that, however, it turns out that Kern’s respondents fail to meet the profile of neoliberal citizens because a crucial aspect, fear of the city—is absent. Kern notes that ‘all of the women interviewed here expressed comfort with the urban environment and a general sense of safety, belonging, and confidence that cannot be attributed to private security features’ (Kern, 2007, p. 672).

In a conventional hypothesis test, there would be at this point first an acknowledgement that the hypothesis was not supported on this point, and then a discussion as to why this might have been the case. Kern, however, turns the discussion to the societal understanding of security and safety, arguing it that may be shifting ‘in ways that emphasize the increasingly private nature of city life within enclosed condominium communities’ (ibid.). This is an interesting idea, but it departs from the stated task of the article, to use the everyday experiences of female condominium owners to test the assumption that ownership creates neoliberal citizens.

Regarding social interaction, a similar scenario occurs: a neoliberal citizen would be expected to shun social interaction, and instead remain in her ‘padded bunker’. Yet Kern finds that several of her interview subjects feel a strong sense of community within their buildings, and have used
gathering spaces created by the developer for this purpose. One woman reports that she and two other owners in the same building had met and forged business links among them. Others, however, feel that too much interaction takes places and employ strategies to avoid it, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Contrary to the conventional profile, condominium owners appear to engage in social interaction to a high degree; the tale of women forming a small business network in particular is precisely the sort of benefit that has been theorized by feminists promoting communal living for women from Charlotte Perkins Gilman onward (Hayden, 2002). Kern acknowledges that ‘communal living arrangements can be highly beneficial to women’ (Kern, 2007, p. 673) but then concludes that the kind of community found in condominiums can be ‘problematically insular’ since it consists of people with ‘similar social and economic status’ (ibid.). Once again, faced with evidence that refutes her hypothesis, Kern instead of exploring why this might be the case instead merely repeats the hypothesis, claiming ‘these new urban residents…may have a limited stake in maintaining quality public education, community centers, and/or services for new immigrants and lower-income households’ (ibid., p. 674).

Characteristic of this work is the tendency to believe that evidence speaks for itself and incontrovertibly supports Kern’s claims. There are, for example, a number of quotes regarding social interaction outside the condominium, some of which are reproduced here:

‘I think for me it would just be the fascination of, you know, I have the whole city to myself. Whatever I choose to do I can go and do it. That sort of thing. Kind of like going on a date with a big city. You can go anywhere, just have like a really fabulous time.’ (Jillian, age 30)

‘I like the noise. I like the amount of people, most of the time. And just the fact that I can pretty much do what I want, when I want. Everything’s available to me. I think that’s what I like.’ (Hope, age 29)

‘I want to experience all the city has to offer. A lot of events that go on, I try to attend those. Whatever there is to do, I want to do it.’ (Colleen, age 28)
'Work brings me into the city, and while I’m here, I’ve learned to love it and I might as well take advantage of it.… For me the reason for living downtown is because you’re so close to everything.’ (Amanda, age 29)

‘My number one pastime is shopping, and number two would be movies, and they’re both available.’ (Jaime, age 33)

‘I made the decision last summer to try to look at Toronto as a tourist would, and check things out. So last summer I started going to like the Bata Shoe Museum, I’ve been to the ROM [Royal Ontario Museum], I’ve been to the AGO [Art Gallery of Ontario], went over to the Islands…. I started to make a concerted effort to actually see things in the city, and indulge in this stuff.’ (Stephanie, age 35)

‘Oh I love the festivals. I would go to like every festival…. I take a lot of advantage of living in the city.’ (Rose, age 22)

These quotes are intended to illustrate a point borrowed from the gentrification literature: that condominium dwellers, like Neil Smith’s ‘revanchist’ gentrifiers, seek to remake the central city ‘as a site of spectacle and elite leisure activities’ (Kern, 2007, p. 674). But this is not the only interpretation. It would be quite easy to argue that the quotes (once again) refute the hypothesis and the conventional gentrifier. Far from illustrating that condominium dwellers are fearful shut-ins, the quotes seem to indicate quite positive attitudes toward urban (as compared to suburban) space. The activities involved are hardly ‘elite’, and only two are explicitly based on consumption. On the other hand, contra the conventional profile of condominium owners seeking spectacle and high profile consumption, many women in the study did not use the city in this way, and ‘expressed a sense that they could not (due to lack of time or financial constraints), or would not (due to general indifference), visit the city’s attractions or cultural venues’ (ibid., p. 675). Unusually, Kern acknowledges (although only implicitly) that the image of the condominium dweller as elite/revanchist consumer is inaccurate by concluding ‘it may be premature for the city to assume that the new residents will justify the massive expense of other forms of urban revitalization’ (ibid.). Once again, we have a situation in which the hypothesis has not been supported, but this remains unaddressed—and in fact, despite the work being put forward as a hypothesis test, there is no summation of the ways in which female condominium
owners adhered to or departed from expectations of a ‘neoliberal citizen’ and no final verdict regarding the hypothesis is produced. The result is that ‘some’ of Kern’s critique may be ‘plausible, but much of it…unpersuasive. It relies on argumentation, buttressed by abundant references to the literature, but too little on evidence’ Harris, 2010, p. 769).

Even in her conclusion, Kern evades the issue by addressing a straw-person argument that condominium ownership is emancipatory for all women:

I conclude this article with a similar sense that the freedoms experienced by women condominium owners do not represent a widespread change in the gendering of the social, economic, and political landscapes of the city, and that, indeed, the processes that direct such freedoms toward a socioeconomically privileged few are likely to have highly detrimental effects on the abilities of marginalized groups to claim space and rights in the competitive, postindustrial city (Kern, 2007, p. 676)

Any discussion of whether female condominiums owners have neoliberal attitudes, let alone whether it was moving to ownership tenure created these attitudes, is not addressed. The result is unsatisfying, not least because the evidence provided seems largely to not support the hypothesis that Kern states nor the discourse that surrounds the ‘new middle class’ occupants in the larger body of gentrification literature. What evidence Kern provides does not support the conventional profile of the fearful, isolated new urban ‘citizen’ whose life revolves around upscale urban consumption—the latter symbolized initially by Moroccan birdcages in Ley (1996) and subsequently via ‘cappuccino’ (Atkinson, 2003; Butler, 2007; Young et al., 2006; Zukin, 1998) and ‘latte’ (Peck, 2005; Slater, 2006). In this usage, people who purchase cappuccinos and lattes are positioned as shallow poseurs, purchasing needless products in an act of conspicuous consumption, all the while oblivious to the damage that they are their kind are doing to urban areas. Loretta Lees goes so far as to claim that she detects the disagreeable ‘smell of suburbia’ in gentrifying areas (Lees, 2007). They are, at any rate, clearly the Wrong Kind of People for urban areas, and it seems possible that these are the kinds of ‘neoliberal urban citizens’ that Kern thought she would encounter. The encounter, however, fails to take place, but Kern does not address this.

One area I do concur with Kern is that there is something palpably ‘different’ about the recent-era, high-rise condominium. One of those differences may certainly be gender, or more specifically, a link between women and the condominium. Kern certainly foregrounds gender, but as discussed earlier, gender is also central to the work of Costello and Shaw examining
condominium development in Australia. This idea, and the understanding of the high-rise condominium as a distinct dwelling type were influential in the formulation of my own research, particularly in providing a number of themes to explore, including gender, fear and security, family structure, lifecycle and social interaction.

2.4 Real estate advertising

While this research examines representations of condominiums, it is more properly about the persuasive strategies used in real estate advertising in conjunction with the articles in the real estate section, and how they contribute to the evolution of the condo’s public image. In other words, the research deals with the ways real estate advertising is implicated in the formation of meanings related to a particular dwelling type. The literature on real estate advertising addresses similar topics. Like the condominium, real estate advertising is mentioned frequently but seldom explored in depth. Typically used to illustrate accounts of suburban development, real estate advertising has rarely been presented as having the power to shape attitudes toward places and dwelling types (although see Duncan & Duncan, 2004; Ellis, 1993). Recently, however, researchers have produced a number of studies that treat the many forms of real estate marketing as complex processes that both reflect and influence the local and global cultures that produced them.

The approaches and subject matter of real estate marketing research are quite diverse, and range from quantitative analyses of linguistic variation in large databases of classified advertisements (Robertson & Doig, 2009; Pryce & Oates, 2008) to qualitative and mixed methods studies of a more cultural nature. The latter category of work is more relevant to my research, often dealing with the relation between of real estate advertising and perceptions of place. Perkins, Thorns & Newton, (2008) for example, argue that place meaning may be perpetuated or changed by the advertisements produced by real estate agents. Their study is primarily a text-based discourse analysis of print and web-based advertisements for houses and developments in five suburbs of Christchurch, New Zealand, each of which has a unique residential profile. Real estate agents are shown to carefully and selectively make appeals in property advertisements to place-dependent themes deemed to be meaningful to prospective buyers, including history, rurality, respectability and renewal. As produced by real estate agents, advertising and related promotional activities are
argued to constitute an ‘integral element in the social construction of urban space and the built environment’ (Perkins, 2008, p. 2075).

Collins & Kearns (2008) similarly implicate real estate advertisements in shaping attitudes towards place and dwellings, in this case the New Zealand beach cottage. The study is based on an analysis of 231 advertisements published in supplemental sections of two local newspapers. Descriptive statistics are produced regarding the themes that emerge from textual descriptions and visual representations. The salient finding is that views from the property being sold (as opposed to views of the property) are common, and that in most cases, there are no people visible in these representations. It is argued that such imagery encourages and naturalizes the appropriation of public spaces by private interests, just as it has in Hong Kong, where high-rise marketing similarly privileges unobstructed views (Cheng, 2001). The New Zealand study is unusual in according images a status equal to or greater than that of text. Many examinations of real estate advertising privilege text—sometimes exclusively—without questioning its relevance compared to visual elements (e.g. Mills, 1998; Peirce, 2002). Academics are trained and proficient textual analysts, of course, which may explain the tendency to concentrate on advertising text, but given the prominence of graphic elements in most advertisements compared to the often small, and sometimes non-existent space given to text, a text-privileged or text-exclusive approach may fail to capture important aspects of advertisements.

Real estate advertising is similarly construed as a highly influential and culturally significant force in the few existing studies of high-rise marketing. Shaw (2006) for example, looks at the widespread use of global imagery by developers in their promotional campaigns for new high-rise development in Sydney, Australia. Based on Podmore’s (1999) argument that global and local media shape perceptions and attitudes toward loft-style apartments in Montreal, Shaw positions the use of New York place names and imagery in marketing campaigns as part of a strategy by developers to create credibility and demand for a lifestyle and dwelling type—the owned, high-rise, loft-inspired apartment—that had no history in Sydney. A second theme that Shaw identifies in high-rise marketing in Sydney is security, and like many other commentators, she sees the apparent demand for security features as an indicator of a new and needlessly fearful urban population that seeks to isolate itself from the city. Shaw does not specify whether this population is attracted from other parts of the city or whether it is created by advertising, but her statement about the efficacy of developer strategies suggests the latter: ‘the marketing rhetoric
behind the promotions of Sydney's loft living produced certain kinds of urbanism, which were discursively embedded as part of Sydney's SoHo Syndrome’ (Shaw, 2006, p. 199).

In addition to linking real estate advertising to place meaning, lifestyle and perceptions of specific dwelling types, several studies have also examined the role of advertising and the reshaping of attitudes about what constitutes the ideal home. Cheung & Wa (2005), for example, evaluate five decades of print and television advertisements in Hong Kong, identifying changes over time in what aspects of the home were emphasized as well as highlighting a shift in overall approach from practical (e.g. based on the number of rooms) to emotional (based on images of privatized open spaces and individual privacy). Similarly, Pow & Kong (2007) identify the leading themes in promotional material produced by luxury, low-rise developers in recent Shanghai. These themes are little different from those employed by American and Canadian low-rise developers and include appeals to high social status, grandeur based on size, security and privilege, nature and the use of global imagery—which in this case is American, French and British.

Gender is a somewhat surprising omission from this list of themes investigated in the real estate advertising research, although it may be surprising only when viewed from what may be a unique set of circumstances in Toronto, where condominium advertising for new developments predominantly uses images of women. At various points in her work, Kern briefly deals looks at advertising. Kern’s (2010) article, for example, is based on the claim that condominium development benefits from presenting the city as dangerous—playing on societal gender associations between women, fear and security—and also from a competing image of the city as exciting. Although the article includes an examination of condominium advertising, and although it is titled ‘Selling the scary city’, it does not attempt to find evidence that condominium advertisements either create or reinforce perceptions that the city is dangerous or scary. Instead, the article devotes eight paragraphs to deconstructing five outdoor advertisements for condominiums to argue that they feminize or eroticize the city before once again making the arguments discussed above related to ownership, fear and security and neoliberal urban citizenship. Nonetheless, Kern’s evaluation of advertising is worth examining, for it is rare in combining condominiums, advertising and gender.
Three of the five advertisements that Kern presents depict ‘urbanity’ through images of people—attractive women, predominantly—in social situations at restaurants, clubs or coffee shops. The discussion revolves around the same issue that appeared in her 2007 work: are these images, or the activities they portray, progressive for women? She acknowledges the content of the advertisements suggest a seemingly progressive ‘city of and for women’ (Kern, 2010, p. 218), but at the same time cautions that the freedom being offered is related to consumption, and that only women from a small demographic group are portrayed enjoying this dubious freedom. The merits of this argument aside, it is indicative of the nature of Toronto condominium marketing that Kern would see the need to devote the majority of her discussion to images of women that from many perspectives would be considered positive.

The remaining two advertisements that Kern discusses depict women in a more objectified manner, literally and figuratively: rather than engaging in social activities, the women in the ads pose for the camera. Neither of the images makes any reference to condominiums: one advertisement, depicting a heavily made-up woman in an expensive-looking evening dress could be used to promote shampoo, make-up, jewellery, clothing or shoes. In the other advertisement, we see the tattooed back of a woman wearing only a pair of jeans, with a three artist’s paint brushes in the back pocket. Out of context, this would likely be assumed to be an advertisement for jeans—certainly not a condominium. Kern’s discussion is conventional: such images objectify women and reinforce and naturalize the masculine gaze in urban spaces. Both are valid arguments, but neither is condominium-specific: they employ precisely the same conventions used for decades in advertisements for fashion, attire, and personal care products for women. For this reason, the arguments Kern makes about these particular images simply duplicate what feminists have said for years. A more interesting approach might have looked at these depictions in the context of the complete advertising universe to explore why a dwelling type has been marketed in the same way as designer clothing and expensive fragrances.

Other than in Kern’s work, only Fincher (2004) links gender, advertising and high-rise development, although the link is assumed rather than demonstrated. Interestingly, the situation in Melbourne seems to have been quite different than in Toronto. Fincher notes that women are generally absent from developer discussions of high-rise projects apart from their frequent portrayal as ‘glamorous women…in the visual marketing of high-rise apartments’ (Fincher, 2004, p. 335). Apart from this, it is noted that the only time in interviews that developers
mention women is in regard to security. Developers claim to not see women as a distinct submarket to target, maintaining 'that they don’t market to women and don’t consider gender' (ibid., p. 332). Although these references to advertising are fleeting, they nonetheless provide useful avenues to explore, including the use of ‘glamorous’ women, and the gendered nature of perceived submarkets.

Apart from highlighting the role of real estate advertising in the formation and evolution of place meaning—surely an important contribution—the literature is quite useful in identifying a number of themes, particularly those related to gender. These range from the general, such as the perceived link between gender and recent-era condominiums, to the specific, such as the perception by Australian developers that women did not constitute a specific submarket (suggesting a relatively gender neutral marketing approach) but that, as in Toronto, images of glamorous women feature prominently in marketing materials. In addition, the real estate advertising literature reinforces the importance of the gender-related themes present in the gentrification literature involving, urbanity, fear and security and family. All of these concepts strongly influenced my research into the ways in which Toronto condominiums have been represented over the past forty years.
Chapter 3
Theoretical Framework

The previous chapters have raised a number of points that led to the adoption of a consumption-based theoretical framework in this research. One of these is the idea of the condominium being a distinct dwelling type, which is implicit in the publication of Condo Living in the Toronto Star, a real estate section dedicated exclusively to condominiums. A second point is the profoundly different ways in which condominiums have been marketed in cities around the world. A third point, likely the most important, is that recent-era condominiums in Toronto have been marketed not using traditional real estate imagery—trees and lakes in low-rise marketing, city skylines in high-rise marketing—but instead using imagery that is literally indistinguishable from that used in the marketing of upscale fashion, health and apparel products. This situation is novel in its implicit positioning of the condominium as belonging to a larger category of high-style goods, and more obviously in its (again implicit) target market: young, middle-class women. The condominium had always technically been a commodity, bought and sold, but recent representations seem to have truly ‘commodified’ it, and promoted a coherent set of associations for high-rise dwellings. For all of these reasons, it seemed sensible to employ a consumption-based theoretical framework.

3.1 The transformation of branding

Branding has a relatively long history; Josiah Wedgewood, for example, in 1771 sent ‘unsolicited parcels of his pottery to 1,000 members of the German aristocracy and nobility…accompanied by a circular advertising his products…and an invoice’ (Koehn, 2001, p. 32). However, branding as it is currently known has existed only since the end of the 19th century (Holt, 2006b). At that time, previously unmarked goods like soap began to be branded by their producers, adding new meanings and more importantly, value to products that were previously undifferentiated (O’Guinn & Muniz, 2005). Until recently, the motivation for, and mechanisms of branding changed little, with the brand being used as both as differentiator based on brand ‘values’ and as a guarantee of quality. Even when branding was linked with individuals, cities and countries (rather than commodities), it remained primarily a marketing-based approach to promoting an entity for commercial gain.
Theorists like Lury (2004), Moor (2007), and Arvidsson (2005, 2006) argue that a change in the nature of branding has occurred, expanding its reach, its uses and its power dramatically. Telecommunications technology has greatly extended the reach of branding in simple terms: advances in microprocessor and broadband wireless technology have put branded messages nearly everywhere. Less obvious is that these same technologies have facilitated an equally unprecedented production of information directly (e.g. connecting with a brand owner via email subscription, Facebook or Twitter) and indirectly by, for example, typing a search query into Google. All of this information feeds the branding process. From this perspective, information—attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and preferences—are the raw material of the branding process as well as its output, albeit in different form: whether it comes from traditional product marketing, or from statistics about web usage gathered by the analytical software built into most large websites, or from student retention rates, or from comments left by users on user forums, fan sites, or other ‘communities’, it is all part of the branding process for multiple brand producers.

A crucial point is that we cannot avoid participating in branding during the course of everyday activities, partly due to the saturation of branding, but more importantly, due to the array of information gathering and sharing techniques used by all brand producers from traditional brands to various levels of government. It is for this reason Arvidsson (2006) argues that if the production and management of information is what characterizes our society, then the branding paradigm represents the latest iteration of capitalism, with the brand being the present incarnation of the nineteenth century factory. Based on the notion that branding has expanded in scope and scale through technological advances and the adoption of branding for non-commercial purposes, it is argued that the primary productive ‘work’ people perform in affluent societies is producing information as a raw material for branding.

In this model, we as ‘consumers’ are fully complicit, providing information to brand owners directly and indirectly that leads to the evolution or ‘co-production’ (Lury, 2004) of brand identity. Continual participation in this process, it is theorized, has led to a branding-inflected perspective being internalized. It is precisely this internalization that allows branding to succeed for non-commercial purposes like the ‘internal branding’ that companies engage in to create in employees more positive attitudes toward the company.
Part of the appeal of the idea of an internalized branding paradigm is that, like the best general theories, it remains applicable even when adapted to unintended situations. One example is the notion of the existence of a brand without a brand owner, and without an intentional branding campaign. Another is the initially bizarre notion of marketing dwellings using imagery that is identical to that used to market shampoo and designer shoes. In each case, these scenarios are completely consistent with a situation in which the ‘branding paradigm’ has been internalized: developers will ‘naturally’ employ branding strategies (which includes monitoring and emulating competitors) and consumers will equally ‘naturally’ expect and receive information—particularly when related to actual consumption—as being branded in nature. This internalized branding paradigm is the conceptual framework on which my research is based, and is further explained in the following section.

3.2 The expansion of branding

Recent work by a handful of authors has attempted to position the brand as a complex theoretical object with far-reaching impacts at a variety of scales. Of the various interpretations, perhaps the most far-reaching is Arvidsson’s (2006) argument that brands have become the embodiment of, and synonymous with, global capitalism as it is currently organized. Arvidsson sees a pervasive “Media Culture” predicated on continual access and exposure to brand-mediated information and entertainment. Although the media are strongly implicated in this account of the expansion of brands, it is also possible to see the current prominence of branding as the logical conclusion of decades of increasing importance for the design professions, an argument made by Liz Moor (2007) and Guy Julier (2008). These conceptions appear to privilege the production of brands, yet common to all of them is an understanding of brand consumption as an active, socially productive process. From this perspective, the brand is a negotiated and contingent co-production of consumer and brand owner. Or, in Celia Lury’s terminology, the brand is a ‘new media object’, or interface through which brands evolve. I use aspects of each of these conceptions of brands and branding to form the basis of the ‘branding paradigm’ that strongly influences the way I explore the ways the condominium has been represented.

3.2.1 Everyday consumption and branding

Although there are certainly societal-level implications of changes to the residential location decision-making process, my research operates at a much smaller scale, that of the individual.
The brand theory that follows works from the bottom up and explores issues from the perspective of the individual experience of consumption. This foregrounds the mundane act of everyday consumption, rather than the societal issues such as democracy, citizenship, public space or social polarization that are the province of consumption work that operates at a regional, national or global scale. For more than a decade researchers have been making the case for nuanced explorations of mundane individual consumption (e.g. Miles & Paddison, 1998; Miller, 2001). Perhaps as a result, there has been a dramatic increase in urban research that privileges and explores the act of consumption (e.g. Jayne, 2006; Lury, 1996; Parr, 1999; Paterson, 2006; Reimer & Leslie, 2004). The following summaries of recent brand-related research are intended to sketch out the terrain from which I will work and to simultaneously highlight the specific aspects of brand theory that I will pull together in order to investigate the evolution of the public image of the recent-era condominium.

Some of the most recent work that employs an individual consumption perspective examines the role of the brand in contemporary society (Arvidsson, 2006; Lury, 2004; Moor, 2007). While objectives differ, the research exhibits a number of common themes. First among them is an understanding of brands as complex, social, and above all productive phenomena: ‘productive’ because the consumption of brands is understood to have meaningful social implications on processes such as identity formation and the creation of subcultures, for example. During processes like these, people may use brands and branded goods in ways unimagined by producers, and frequently the brand evolves as a result. Through a very ‘active’ form of consumption, consumers reshape brand representations and branded products. Two themes related to this process (and to each other) have been explored by brand researchers: the importance of design, materiality and spatiality, and the relationship between productive consumption and the co-production of brands.

### 3.2.2 Design and brands

That there is a link between design and branding seems indisputable; design has become the primary branding technique for numerous technology and automobile companies, for example, and virtually every large company uses graphic design and architecture to brand themselves. What is less certain is how prominent a role design has played in the rise of branding. Guy Julier sees branding as an exercise well suited to the “culture of design” that emerged in the 1980s
when the number of design consultancy firms blossomed as post-Fordist enterprises sought differentiation through branding (Julier, 2008). The link between the two processes, however, is not seen as being exclusive: “Branding is by no means the only driver and expression of contemporary design culture, but it is indicative of design culture’s multidimensional qualities” (ibid.). While Julier’s work is useful in highlighting the increasing salience of design, it is Liz Moor who links design and branding in a much more detailed manner.

Moor makes the case that the association between the design professions and branding may be more obvious now than in the past, but certainly is not new. She argues, in fact, that the current form of branding has direct origins in the 19th century innovation of mechanized product packaging (Moor, 2007). Previously, commodities (especially household items such as soap and sugar) were sold in bulk, and measured and packaged—annonymously, in brown paper—where they were sold. Mechanized packaging allowed manufacturers a much greater degree of control over their products, and most importantly, the ability to differentiate their product via package design from those of their competitors.

Subsequently, during the years between the first and second World Wars, design came to play a more prominent role, participating in not only the promotion of products but their appearance as well. Influenced by early modernism, and no doubt also by the Art Deco movement and Machine Age aesthetic of the time, manufacturers began to introduce highly styled products. Apart from the increased prominence of design, Moor argues that the real significance of the era’s futuristic and streamlined “refrigerators and waffle irons” (ibid., p. 25) is their departure from the modernist tenet that form follow function. She sees the decoupling of the two as “the basis for the blurring of object and image that characterizes contemporary branding” (ibid).

These two brand differentiation strategies—stylized packaging and highly styled products—were employed in the early postwar years to a degree never before seen, particularly in the United States but even in Canada and United Kingdom which did not, or were not able to, embrace mass consumerism at the same rate. In all those areas, however, a roughly similar set of circumstances were in place: large numbers of returning military personnel, a housing and material goods shortage stretching back to the beginning of the Depression, new economic prosperity and the desire to embark on a new form of living in the suburbs. It is therefore no surprise that when consumer goods were flooding the (super)market, flamboyant and high style was the order of the
day. This is a familiar story, but Moor points out that as well as the obvious move to processes of branding that match more closely those that exist today, the design-conscious postwar years were also the time when customer preferences were first being considered in the design phase. This represents the first application of process that at present has become quite sophisticated, with brand owners employing information gathering approaches more typically used in sociological research as well as on-the-street approaches such as trendspotting.

Although designing products with customer use in mind sounds like a very obvious and logical way to produce goods, and hardly worthy of being considered as an innovation, it is nonetheless true that a great many companies still do not follow this principle; computer software is as perhaps the best current example. Regardless, Moor is correct to point out that, at least in the companies that adopted a customer-focused design process, this was a pivotal moment: it positioned the designer as “a fully fledged symbolic intermediary, no longer simply responsible for designing or styling attractive and efficient objects, but now expected to identify him or herself with consumer taste and to both interpret and shape it” (Moor, 2007, p. 30).

With this as context, Moor elaborates a sequence of events similar to those outlined by Julier in which design consultancies become an integral component of corporate branding beginning in the 1980s. With the widespread acceptance of the notion of branding the company instead of its products, designers were called upon to employ their skills in new areas. The perceived need for brand consistency, for example, saw designers involved in the creation of corporate infrastructure, from stationery and furniture to uniforms and websites and trucks. At the same time, designers were integral to novel branding exercises, ranging in complexity from exhibition stands at one end of the scale to complete themed environments like NikeTown at the other.³

In Moor’s telling, there is a sharp divide between design and advertising, in which the former is positioned as a creative process while the latter is simply merchandising. In support of this position, Moor invokes the concept of materiality, arguing

…branding is much more immersive and immediate than advertising, and concerns the design of objects (products, stationery, uniforms, furniture) and spaces (shops, showrooms,

³ See Klingmann (2007) for a more detailed account of this form of environmental branding
events, trade stands) rather than -- or in addition to -- visual images on billboards and other types of screens" (Moor, 2007, p 9).

An emphasis on materiality characterizes current branding strategies that are undertaken for their perceived “capacity to affect people at the level of perception and affect rather than only through the more obviously cognitive work of 'persuasion'” (p 38). Whatever the merits of Moor’s argument may be, it is extremely helpful in highlighting assumptions about material goods and physical environments, namely that they can profoundly influence us:

   Branding is underpinned, in other words, by the belief that the material content of clothes, car upholstery, uniforms, urban furniture and the design and layout of buildings, among many other things, can embody brand values and 'narrate' them to others with demonstrable effects on practice, and in ways that are often deemed to be socially and politically, as well as economically, useful (Moor, 2007, p 146).

Although she introduces the notion of materiality, Moor does not delve much deeper into the consumption of branding, but this theme does emerge in the work of other brand theorists.

3.2.3 Productive consumption and the co-production of branding

Although brands themselves are now predominantly immaterial objects, and despite the shift to a post-Fordist economy, branding remains inextricably linked with the production and consumption of material goods. A great deal has been written about production, but until relatively recently, consumption and material culture in general have been much less studied. Further, research that privileges production has often employed overly simplistic conceptions of consumption. One the one hand, consumers have been portrayed as passive victims of marketing. On the other hand, consumption has often been presented as wasteful or frivolous (Arvidsson, 2005; Miller, 2001).

In neither of these approaches is there much room for consumption or material objects to perform any kind of positive function or, in other words, to be (socially) ‘productive’. However, over the past several years, particularly in sociology and related disciplines like cultural and communication studies, there has been a renewed interest in materialism and consumption issues (Lury, 2004). One result has been an increase in research that examines (to borrow a phrase) “actually existing” consumption as carried out by individuals. A common theme in this research
is that consumption is an active rather than a passive process and that material goods can be profoundly important. Celia Lury, for example, states that her work starts from “the premise that objects matter; that they orient communication, frame time and space, and co-ordinate social action; in short, that objects (co-)produce the social” (ibid., p 149). Other researchers might not be so bold, but nonetheless, an acknowledgement of consumption, brands, and material objects has become common enough that it is probably only a slight overstatement to claim that in academic consumer research “it has become ‘normal science’ to argue that consumption is a productive practice” (Arvidsson, 2005).

Arvidsson adds a wrinkle to the idea of productive consumption, arguing that our participation in consumption necessarily as a by-product creates the information that is the raw material of branding. From this perspective, “like the factory in times of Fordism, the brand stands out as a central institutionalization, a concrete manifestation of the abstract logic of accumulation that drives capital in the information age” (p 125). While consumption may be productive individually (e.g. in identity formation), it also represents an entirely new form of “work”: brand-informed interactions of any kind create social goods (attitudes, emotions, trends) that have become increasingly precious to prominent brands that profit according to their ability to re-deploy these goods. By living in a branded society of mediatized consumption, we unavoidably perform “immaterial labor” in every waking moment that has the result of perpetuating branded society itself by producing the raw materials or the dispositions that will feed future branding efforts—hence the claim that the pervasive branded context of consumption is the counterpart to the Industrial Revolution-era factory in the current form of capitalism.

This theory hinges on a number of assumptions about consumption. The first is that consumption is a socially productive activity in a number of ways. The rationale for this is that consumption has long been a mechanism of formal and informal community building. An example of the former would be groups organized around a particular brand, product type or material good, while the an example of the latter would be unorganized groups of people perceived to have a similar brand-based sensibility: e.g. “Mac” people or Sunday New York Times readers. Aware of the early lack of attention to consumption in the academy and the subsequent highly charged nature of much current consumption-related research, Arvidsson takes pains to point out that the many cultures and subcultures that have emerged in the postwar era have employed material goods, often in ways the manufacturers of these goods never imagined, such as the ways that
safety pins were used as ‘gruesome ornaments’ by members of the British punk movement (Hebdige, 1979, p. 107). Arvidsson also notes that consumption cannot be solely equated with mindless upper class consumption, citing how blue jeans were used to symbolize resistance in the 1960s and how the Skinhead movement used material goods in an attempt to “reconstruct a vanishing working class” (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 20).

With this as his perspective, Arvidsson examines postwar suburbanization and the role played by the media. One of his claims is that television shifted relatively quickly from being a broad entertainment novelty to a provider of narrow-focus information. Where once shows were broadcast uninterrupted and under the banner of a single sponsor, they were soon divided into several segments separated by advertisements from multiple sponsors. Similar changes took place in magazine publishing as well, which saw the introduction of ever-more specific titles. The motivation for these changes is attributed to an increasing demand for information (if not guidance) about how to construct what was initially a new suburban form of living. Arvidsson sees a clear path between the normative media messages of the immediate postwar years to the more life-style based media representations of the 1960s and 1970s, which had as its eager audience a “new suburban middle class…for whom the construction of new forms of social relations and identity through the productive use of consumer goods had become standard practice” (ibid., p. 24).

The three decades following the Second World War can therefore be seen as forming the foundation of our current ‘Media Culture’. The various media, and television in particular, become part of daily life as a source of lifestyle information: a normative cultural intermediary. With the increasing amount of consumption-related information available, and with it the perception of increased choice, markets (and therefore the methods of promotion of products) become more segmented and narrowly focused. And with the declining effectiveness of product-based advertising, the largest companies began to implement affective marketing in order to evoke positive associations with their brand.

The years from the 1980s to the present can easily be seen as having experienced a dramatic acceleration of each of these trends. Markets have continued to be segmented and the amount of consumption-related information has increased exponentially—and of course the same is true for the number of cultural intermediaries. Affective branding is now nearly universally practiced,
and has added a spatial dimension in the form of themed retail and entertainment outlets. If television’s role in branding and consumption has been reduced, it is only because the Internet has become so influential. At the same time, deregulation and neoliberal governance strategies have further opened previously brand-free places and institutions to market forces. Especially with the imminent availability of mobile broadband internet access, branding will be pervasive, to the point that “this complete integration of Media Culture and everyday life means that it no longer makes much sense to maintain a distinction between the two” (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 13).

The implication is that we unavoidably and continually take part in branding, particularly when the branding paradigm is employed in so many different forms beyond the marketing of consumer goods: in schools (e.g. naming rights, research funding), in the workplace (internal branding), in the mechanism of political parties, non-governmental organizations, and in sports and entertainment as more individuals become brands. Arvidsson’s claim is that “Media Culture works as a productive infrastructure that is put to work in the construction of a common social world” (ibid., p. 35). As such, in a pervasively branded culture, all our interactions (not just consumption-based activities) are brand-informed and necessarily produce information (attitudes and trends) that is valuable to brands—in fact, this information is the raw material for the creation and evolution of brands of all kinds, or, as Celia Lury puts it, the brand is “an object of information in this double sense: it is an object that is both constituted in and constituted of information” (Lury, 2004, p. 150; emphasis in original). This situation blurs the distinction between work and leisure and calls into question the idea of the workplace as the primary productive site for capitalism as carried out in developed countries. Thus “the brand becomes a hypersocialized, de-territorialized factory” (ibid., p. 82).

A useful adjunct to Arvidsson’s work is Celia Lury’s notion of the brand as interface. Like Arvidsson, she positions the brand as being a concrete manifestation of global capitalism, although in a more metaphorical way by finding similarities between the brand and ‘new media objects’ like computer programs. Framed like this, the account is not always convincing but it

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4 Arvidsson supports this claim (and his claims of the highly influential nature of media in our lives) by arguing that like media-based experiences, the “real world” is also mediated by language, ideology, distortion, and selective memory (p. 11).

5 However, Arvidsson also points out that the social information produced during non-work time is used in the workplace by people engaged directly or indirectly in brand formation.
does complement Arvidsson’s work by emphasizing the idea that postwar production has been profoundly influenced by the brand. Specifically, she argues that in the 1960s, the corporate view of marketing as essentially taking the form of stimulus (advertising) and response (purchase decisions) was replaced by an understanding of marketing as an exchange, a two-way interaction between producers and consumer.

The result was a new mode of production in which the product, along with previously privileged notions like ‘innovation’ and ‘progress’ were de-emphasized while focus shifted to “meeting the needs of the market, understood in terms of information about the consumer” (Lury, 2004, p. 57). This shift positioned the brand as an intermediary between consumer and producer, something that is negotiated over time and that, furthermore, gains some autonomy from its direct creators and from its consumers both due to the position it occupies between consumer and producer but also due to its interaction with other brands. As the brand emerges “as a set of relations between products, it begins to acquire a self-organising, recursive logic that cannot be reduced to the strategies of individual actors” (ibid., p. 51). The negotiated nature of brands, along with their unpredictability, leave room for individually productive consumption to occur—although Lury does acknowledge that the relations that take place across the brand/interface between consumer are “not direct, symmetrical or reversible” (ibid., p. 50).

These accounts position the branding paradigm as the logical conclusion of centuries of product promotion, whose trajectory has recently been pushed steeply upward by technology that has enabled the dissemination of branding and brand-related information. Events of the few short years since this theoretical work was published has only underscored its prescience, perhaps best illustrated by the astoundingly rapid adoption by people and organizations of social networking systems such as Facebook and Twitter. These technologies have brought brand producers and consumers into continual and instantaneous contact, albeit in the latter case, in a brief, character-limited format than inhibits complexity—which is undoubtedly part of its success.

These and other events, such as the ongoing transformation of the news media, seem to affirm conceptions of the branding paradigm as a media-enabled, generalized tool of persuasion, and this idea forms the foundation from which I work. The framework is primarily informed by Arvidsson’s work, but also incorporates Moor’s arguments about the increasing prominence of design—a practice strongly associated with the recent-era condominium, as I discuss in chapter
6. Lury’s notions of the co-production of brands, and particularly the malleability and ephemerality of brands are similarly incorporated into the framework for their ability to shed light onto processes such as rebranding.

Although theorized as having evolved substantially, the branding paradigm described here remains inextricably linked with the conventional techniques of branding that have been used for decades. For this reason, I explore the ways the Toronto condominium has accumulated meaning using as framework the techniques of conventional branding, which include brand positioning and differentiation, rebranding, as well as ‘emotional’ or affective branding. The latter strategy relies on creating strong, positive brand associations through emotional appeals to transcendent experiences on one hand, or profoundly personal or familial experiences on the other (Holt, 2004). Such appeals have recently become much more widespread than ever before, and crucially, much less immediately connected to the product or brand they are promoting. These strategies link ‘peak moments’ to products using arresting visual imagery, or by appealing to widely held beliefs and societal values, such as those relating to family. Thus slow-motion footage of a child taking her first ride on a bicycle after the training wheels have come off might be used in a commercial produced by a conservative political party, an insurance company or even a store that sells bicycles, although the last of these may be the least likely.

This research is concerned primarily with representation rather than how messages are received, but it is necessary to briefly consider how imagery, and particularly affective imagery, is received in order to highlight the importance of the branding paradigm. Affective approaches are so familiar that it can be difficult to see them as anything other than transparent attempts at manipulation. Yet the majority of the population lacks the well-honed critical skills that are second nature to academics, who are similarly highly unusual in conducting analyses in order to construct meaning based on logic and evidence. As a result, it seems clear that affective imagery ‘works’ despite the perceived transparency of its mechanism when subjected to scrutiny by academics. In more generalized terms, ‘arguments’ in any form based on affective appeals are more compelling to a wide audience than those based on logic and evidence. There is nothing particularly new here; the best marketers have always known to ‘sell the sizzle, not the steak’. What the branding paradigm suggests, however, is that public discourse (e.g. between politicians and voters, an employer and employees, a university and students) is increasingly becoming
characterized by ‘selling the sizzle’, or the conscious use of direct or indirect affective appeals to shape attitudes.

It is important to recognize that there is no glorious past in which people predominantly decided, for example, which party to vote for based on a critical analysis of platforms, promises and past performance; people’s critical skills have not declined recently, and in fact the opposite is surely true: that a higher percentage of the population has some training in critical thinking due to increased educational opportunities. What appears to be changing, according to the branding paradigm, is the perceived importance of logic and evidence-based approaches, which previously enjoyed unquestioned privilege since they (nominally but symbolically) formed the core of natural science, politics, philosophy and academia, and the law. As discussed here, branding—itself an affective process—has diffused from commercial pursuits to many diverse locations, aided by recent technological advancements that have unimaginably increased the flow of information in all forms. Tellingly, this diffusion has clearly been seen as unproblematic, if one can judge from the diverse types of institutions and organizations that have adopted branding strategies. This circumstance is at once fascinating and disturbing, because it suggests that affective persuasion is generally perceived as effective and ethical, meaning it has few barriers preventing it from being adopted more widely in the future. It also suggests a key point in this research: that the branding paradigm has been internalized, which heavily informs how we produce ‘information’ and consume it.

3.3 Brands and branding in this research

Until quite recently, it would have been accurate to define a brand as the set of associations linked to a particular company, created principally through branding strategies based on conventional print and television advertising, with the goal of creating the impression that all of the company’s products embody the elements of the brand. Automobile manufacturer GM, and subsequently, electronics companies like Sony and Apple exemplify this particular understanding of ‘brand’. While this understanding (and practice) of brands and branding remains valid, it struggles to describe the way that new entities have become brands, and the strategies they have used to achieve this. Non-governmental organizations, universities and political parties, to name but a few obvious examples, have all recently begun to engage in processes that clearly seem to constitute branding but are not intended to achieve the goals that
motivate conventional branding (i.e. to sell a range of commodities under the company logo). Universities, for example, routinely use email and other electronic media to present a relentlessly positive picture of the institution to its students, faculty and staff, stressing the ‘excellence’ of the institution. Many corporations similarly undertake this sort of ‘internal branding’, whose primary goal is to create a uniform set of positive impressions of the institution.

While these processes could be characterized as ultimately being concerned with institutional financial gain (except perhaps in the case of political parties), they fundamentally differ from conventional branding by applying branding strategies to things that are not commodities, and more importantly, by doing so in a context that will not be perceived as related to consumption. In other words, while the internal branding that companies engage in may be motivated by (indirect) monetary concerns, the arena in which internal branding takes place is not obviously a ‘site of consumption’; there is no direct promotion, no immediately apparent financial gain unless the entire process is put under scrutiny. Similarly, when universities brand internally, their motives may include productivity, but are also monetary in attempting to retain students and persuade them return for graduate studies, and become donors in the future. Yet the approach involves no direct pleas for money but consists instead of informational emails about the achievements of faculty, staff and institution; the monetary link is completely obscured, but the process itself is clearly one of branding whose immediate goal is to create a set of positive associations with the institution.

It is this use of branding strategies outside the arena of consumption that signals a new form of branding, and forms part of the branding paradigm I speak of in this research. The methods remain conventional in many regards, involving the use of logos and other graphic elements, for example, and of course advertisements but the absence of obvious mercenary purposes aligns the approach with what are sometimes categorized as public relations, ‘spin’ or propaganda. Like these modes of persuasion, the branding paradigm involves the production of coherently organized images of a particular entity, and this is the understanding I use in this research: that the strategies of conventional branding have been adopted so enthusiastically and by such a range of entities that ‘branding’ should be viewed as generalized mode of persuasion that is sometimes, but certainly not always, employed for directly commercial purposes. Because branding has expanded beyond directly commercial purposes, it means that anything can be a brand; we are no longer tied to the notion of a corporate brand owner, marketing itself in order to
sell its various products. What is fascinating is how readily we have been able to accommodate this profoundly different idea of a brand. Both in academia and society and general, virtually no effort was required to present individual people, cities, countries or regions as brands, for example. What is perhaps more fascinating is that branding has, at least at the societal level, generally been accepted as a ‘normal’ activity carried out by organizations, with none of the stigma of manipulation and ‘crass commercialism’ that accompanies advertising.

Both the willingness to accept unprecedented entities as brands, and the lack of ethical concern for the nearly universal use of branding suggests an internalization of the mechanisms of branding. A crucial driver of this internalization is sheer exposure. On one hand, conventional branding, in the form of logos or slogans, advertisements or ‘sponsorship’, is now nearly omnipresent; virtually no object or space is now considered an inappropriate site for branding. This is true both in physical space and virtual, where wireless broadband, smartphones, computers and other web-enabled devices deliver branded services and data non-stop. This constant exposure to, and unavoidable participation in branding in all environments—public, private, work, education—has caused us internalize and naturalize it, making it both normal and invisible. As a result, we will expect all our activities to be branding-inflected, and will use our competence in interpreting branding to interpret (and create) our reality. This circumstance of internalization—that we will tend to consume and produce information within the bounds of a branding-based framework—is the essence of the branding paradigm. It means on that one hand that when promoting a particular entity, institution or idea, we will tend to create it in a brand-like way. On the other hand, it means that when we encounter information in any form about a particular entity, we will tend see it from a branding perspective.

The condominium, it most be noted, is an extremely unusual commodity due in general to the local nature of its production and in particular to the circumstances in place in recent era Toronto, where a small group of design and architecture firms are responsible for a substantial number of high-profile projects. Regarding locality: like all forms of real estate development, residential condominium projects rely heavily on the characteristics of their location to define the form they will take. The majority of projects in a given neighbourhood will strongly tend to be variations on a single theme guided by pre-existing development in the area and the demographic profile and trajectory of its population. The diffusion of the contemporary aesthetic has somewhat diminished this locational specificity, but not erased it. The majority of suburban
condominium projects, for example, remain easily identifiable as suburban, just as projects in expensive areas still tend to use conservative, ‘historical’ styles.

One of the implications is that it is nearly impossible for a developer to differentiate a project in a given area from those of other developers. For other commodities, this is not nearly so problematic situation. The category of ‘sports cars’ to automobile manufacturers, for example, is analogous to a neighbourhood for a condominium developer. In each case, the product must meet the design expectations of the target market. Automobile manufacturers have two methods of maintaining brand identity in this situation: through the use of logos, which typically appear at the very least on the hood, each of the wheels and the bumper of car, and through the concept of ‘design DNA’ or features that are shared across the product line up. In the automobile world, the design of a car’s front grille is major implementation of this concept, but it can extend to the use of certain style of headlights or taillights and even to the shape and proportion of the vehicle. The condominium developer has no such possibilities. Their logos are temporary, visible only during the construction phase. And due to the requirement to address local expectations, which vary widely, implementing a design ‘signature’ would be difficult. This circumstance would be exacerbated by the relatively small number of projects any one developer has, even in a market as large as Toronto.

However, the biggest obstacle to creating a visible, identifiable brand for developers is the extremely widespread use of a very small number of independent architecture and design firms. This means that competing projects by different developers in a particular neighbourhood may have been drawn up by the same architect and had the same interior designers define the finishes and create the sales centres. The result are individual commodities that have no logo, no ‘design DNA’ that have been configured to meet local expectation, perhaps by the same architecture and design firms. This is the polar opposite of brand differentiation, obviously. This is not to say that the individual project all look the same; rather that they can look quite distinct in the way they address perceived market expectations, but there is nothing that allows one to identify individual projects as belonging to a particularly brand.

The result of all these circumstances is that promotional campaigns market the project first and the developer a distant second. Developers can hope that over time, their name will become widely known, but that is no guarantee of success, nor does it appear to be a major consideration
for buyers. A previously unknown developer in the city like Concord-Adex, for example, can appear ‘overnight’ and rapidly sell thousands of condominium units. There is no need for the developer to become known in the marketplace; what matters is the characteristics of the individual project. People do not buy or tell their friends they have bought a Lanterra condominium unit, or a Great Gulf Homes condominium unit. They buy a condo. Perceptually then, the ‘condo’ resembles a brand—with no logo—and projects are individual instances. When developers market projects, they simultaneously promote the larger condominium as a dwelling type—in other words, its public image—in the manner that, for example, nearly all advertisements promote a certain product but also necessarily promote consumption as the solution for a real or perceived need; or, at one scale down, all automobile ads implicitly promote automobility as well as specific vehicles and their manufacturer.

Using this understanding of branding and how it applies to the condominium as an unconventional commodity, I explore the ways that Condo Living contributed to the set of meanings, values and expectations that came to be associated with the high-rise condominium as a generalized entity. In a truly brand-like fashion, the articles and advertisements in Condo Living were remarkably coherent in how they represented the high-rise condo, who should live in it, and what they should expect. From perspectives other than that of the branding paradigm, it would be difficult to explain how this could have occurred, but the framework I employ, with its notion of internalized production and consumption of branding-inflected information provides a plausible way of understanding how Condo Living came to have the coherence it did.

Described like this, the branding paradigm occupies the same theoretical space as neoliberalism or any other philosophy, sensibility or ethic: it suggests that a particular logic dominates the creation of meaning and practice at a particular place and time and provides a framework for evaluating those things. In other words, it helps us understand why people do the things they do. I find it a compelling framework, but my purpose in this work is not to test it or evaluate it for its merits versus other frameworks. Instead, I generally treat it as a given, as the total context in which the production and consumption of representations of the Toronto high-rise condominium in Condo Living take place; the bulk of this work explores the nature of representations and how they changed over time.
To sum up, then, in this research I employ the concepts of the brand, conventional branding, and an expanded, transformed practice called the branding paradigm. A brand can be anything: a university, for example, or an individual, a geographic region or a dwelling type to which specific meanings values and expectations have been attached through various branding strategies. Conventional branding consists of the strategies used to market commodities; these include advertising, the use of logos, trademarks, corporate colours and so on. The branding paradigm is a theorized consumption context characterized by the internalization of branding as a mode of persuasion, whose origins lie in the expansion of conventional branding to new sites and its pervasive reach, and the expansion of conventional branding strategies beyond purely commercial purposes.

While the term ‘branding paradigm’ accurately suggests a mindset or worldview, it may nonetheless appear to overstate the importance of branding (Pike, 2009), but I think this is a function of the connotations of branding, particularly in its narrow sense as advertising strategies designed to sell commodities. The core of the ‘branding paradigm’ is affective persuasion, a process that can take place directly through the use of imagery that is symbolic or makes emotional appeals, or indirectly through the use of closely managed representations that suggest a particular interpretation (e.g. this institution is trustworthy, this product is safe and reliable). Affective persuasion is the counterpart to logic-and-evidence based persuasion. It would therefore be possible to replace every instance of ‘branding paradigm’ in this work with ‘affective persuasion’ and require no further changes to retain the intended ideas.

In this research, the high-rise condominium apartment is seen to acquire meanings that inform its public image as a dwelling type, partly shaped in Condo Living through conventional branding via developer advertisements, and partly as a function of the branding paradigm in the form of articles that coherently and consistently represent the condo in specific ways. A crucial component of the latter point is that context matters; that the interaction between articles and advertisements, and their presence in a newspaper section are meaningful from a branding perspective, and that they create Condo Living as a themed periodical rather than simply a promotional insert. The motivation for this approach, and the implications in shaping the research are outlined in the next section.
Chapter 4
Research Approach

4.1 Research sensibility

The central assumption of this research is that the condominium development that has occurred in Toronto since the mid 1990s constitutes a new phenomenon due both to the scale of development and the consequent emergence of the high-rise condominium apartment as a mainstream, viable dwelling type. To capture some of the novelty of the phenomenon, I employ concepts related to conventional branding to analyze the ways the condominium apartment has been represented. The rationale for this is the nature of the representations, which are so coherent and targeted that they closely resemble the imagery and messages of promotional campaigns carried out by ‘real’ brands. Like a brand, the public image of the condo is associated more with values and lifestyle than the physical characteristics of the commodity: specifically, the recent-era condominium apartment has continuously and predominantly been linked with fashion, design, style and urbanity, and marketed to single women.

4.2 Condominium development in Toronto

This research is very much concerned with the notion of context. One of its primary assumptions is that residential decisions are made within a consumption context that includes hierarchies of commodity desirability and suitability. The shape these hierarchies take is directly and indirectly influenced by media representations—which I examine in this research—but they are undoubtedly also affected by people’s individual and collective experience of the city. In virtually every area of Toronto, the condominium has been an increasingly salient aspect of that experience. In June 2008, for example, there were no less than 277 active condominium projects in the Greater Toronto Area (Wong, 2008), all of them attempting to be as visible as possible by using construction hoardings and sales centre signage—and even cranes, during construction—as advertising opportunities. The increasing prominence of the condominium in Toronto was therefore a very visible process that through its simple existence surely played a role in the ‘mainstreaming’ of the high-rise condominium in the city.

The raw numbers confirm the anecdotal perception that high-rise condominium towers have been rising at an unprecedented rate in the city. From 1986 to 1988, for example, at the peak of
Toronto’s most recent condo boom, an average of 12,500 new condominium units were sold annually (Slawych, 1998). After the subsequent collapse of prices, it was not until ten years later that sales exceeded even half of the boom numbers: there were approximately 7,000 new sales in 1998, a number that was thought to be ‘sustainable’. Against expectation, new unit sales in Toronto have continually increased, on a quarter-by-quarter basis, from 1994 through 2010 (Ladurantaye, 2010), with sales in several years recently being at or over 20,000. It is difficult to find reliable and comparable statistics on condominium sales, but these numbers appear to exceed those for any other city in Canada or the United States from the mid-1990s onward, with the possible exception being pre-crash Miami. As a result, Toronto is routinely described in Toronto media accounts as the largest condominium market in North America (e.g. Wong, 2007). Regardless of actual rankings, it seems indisputable that Toronto has over the past fifteen years become an extremely large and consistent condominium market, a circumstance that no one predicted.

For this research, there are two implications of recent-era development on representations and perceptions of the condominium as a dwelling type, the first of which is the constancy of demand, and therefore, the constancy of condominium promotion and construction. Cranes have dotted the Toronto skyline for more than fifteen years, essentially without cessation, and of course, the skyline has very visibly changed over that time and continues to do so. The constancy of development, and of media stories highlighting the trend, have participated in the rehabilitation of the condominium’s reputation, which had suffered as a result of the sharp run-up in prices and subsequent crash at the end of the 1980s. The continual presence of hundreds of in-progress condominium projects suggests widespread demand and thus performs a function that is central to all brands: it provides reassurance via the popularity it gives evidence of that purchasing a product is a prudent from a personal, social and financial perspective.

The second crucial implication of recent-era condominium development for the process of creating representations and changing perceptions has been the opportunity given to designers, architects, developers and marketers to refine their work over the course of time by participating in scores of projects in a highly competitive market. Repetition, particularly when it occurs at a rapid pace, allows developers to better understand what the market demands of a project in a certain part of the city. The process of refinement is particularly rapid and extensive because a relatively small number of design, architecture and marketing firms account for a
disproportionately high percentage of condominium work in Toronto, as will be explored in
Chapter 6. As well as learning from their own projects, developers also have the opportunity to
learn from the many projects of their competitors, as is evident in the narrative of condominium
development in Toronto, which involves the migration of loft-inspired features from niche
projects in the 1990s to large, mainstream developers in recent years. These circumstances,
coupled with the tendency of developers to implement incremental change—and then only with
cautions—provide an ideal environment for the creation of representations of the condominium
that are consistent and coherent (i.e. brand-like) even in the absence of nominal brand owner or a
purposive, collusive branding campaign.

One final aspect of condominium development in Toronto must be mentioned: it occurred at
such a scale that the city’s largest circulation newspaper, the Toronto Star saw in developer
advertising a potential income source reliable enough that it created the Condo Living section,
and devoted considerable resources to its production. This research is primarily concerned with
representation within the Condo Living section, and through its various editorial and graphic
layout strategies. Of particular note here is the decision to populate the section almost entirely
with articles by staff writers. In many real estate sections, articles are purchased from wire
services and typically consist of stories of broad appeal, related to notable sales trends, celebrity
houses, decorating tips or any number of topics associated with owning, purchasing or selling a
home. Such articles must necessarily be placeless so that they can be inserted in newspapers
across Canada and the United States; they similarly steer clear of controversial issues. It is for
these reasons that such articles are commonly known as “filler”. Condo Living, however, made
very little use of wire service articles and instead published articles that were condominium-
specific, local in context and addressed sometimes contentious issues. The legal aspects of
owning a condominium unit and operation of a condominium corporation in Ontario, for
example, were the subject of more than six hundred articles. While surprising because they
depart from the very rosy tone of the promotional articles, such articles seem appropriate because
they explicitly deal with condominiums.

Beyond this, the simple existence of the Condo Living section is of considerable importance. The
motives for creating Condo Living were undoubtedly practical and financial. First, the section
would gather almost all condominium advertising in a single section, making the newspaper a
much more efficient information source for readers. Second, it would potentially increase
advertising revenue by promising developers that their advertisements would be more likely to be seen when positioned in a dedicated section rather than scattered through the paper, or mixed with forty pages of low-rise advertisements in the conventional real estate section. Yet these origins do not detract from the symbolic value attached to the creation of Condo Living in legitimating and differentiating the high-rise condominium. Creating a new, condominium-focused section put an influential stamp of approval on the condo, positioning it as a unique, alternative dwelling to those found in the conventional real estate section of the paper.

In this research, I treat the real estate section as a distinct cultural entity, which is an unconventional position to take in the urban literature, meaning that I have had to formulate a novel approach rather than apply an existing strategy. In the next section, I discuss how I have used existing academic work related to real estate marketing in creating this approach.

4.3 The real estate section as object of study

The real estate section of newspaper is virtually invisible in the urban literature, which strikes me as a great oversight. I believe that the section’s inclusion in a newspaper is meaningful. There is no need here to establish the cultural importance of the newspaper on the one hand, nor its influence in framing attitudes and shaping public opinion on the other; the newspaper is not merely a neutral vector of information. Any component of the newspaper has at least the possibility of inheriting some of the associations of the newspaper as a whole. The business section certainly, and in some newspapers, the entertainment or arts section likely participate in the perceived authority of the newspaper. For other parts of the newspaper, this is much less certain: advertising flyers and television guides are obvious examples, but I would not include even run-of-the-mill real estate sections in this group because of the form they take. Unlike flyers and other inserts, the real estate sections of most newspapers adhere to the same graphic and layout conventions as the hard news sections of the paper. I see this as a crucial difference, based on the idea that these conventions create expectations, namely those associated with newspapers in general: that they provide an ‘objective account of the truth’. Flyers and other inserts, due to their size, colour and layout can make no pretense of being ‘news’. This is not the case for the real estate section. That the section is transparently an advertising vehicle is readily apparent to people like academics whose lives are centred on critical analysis, and I assume it is for this reason that the advertising section has been overlooked as an object of study. Yet I think it would
be a mistake to assume that the promotional nature of the real estate section is transparent to many people: journalists themselves—let alone readers—still strive for ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ in their reporting. This is not to argue that readers cannot differentiate between hard news and the real estate section, but that there certainly appears to be room for a real estate section to be perceived as other than a purely promotional device.

This is particularly the case for Condo Living, whose exclusive subject matter differentiated it even from other real estate sections, but especially because it used a number of strategies that helped disguise its promotional role and positioned it closer to hard news. These included framing conventional real estate section articles such as site profiles or project announcements as largely informational. A site profile in a conventional real estate section for a waterfront condominium would prominently feature an artist’s rendering of the project, a caption invoking the idea of water and if possible incorporating the project name. The copy would outline the history of the project and the projected timeline, along with the range of suites and amenities being offered. In Condo Living, the profile might appear under a caption asking how foundations were built in the water, and the main photograph might show cranes and workers onsite working on just such a foundation. That the article was a site profile would only become apparent well into the body of the article, when the range of suite prices and the location and hours of the sales were outlined.

In addition to creatively framing promotional stories, Condo Living also published articles that under other circumstances would appear in the front section of the newspaper, usually stories related to urban planning issues or statistical reports on the performance of the housing market. Beyond this, the articles in Condo Living were predominantly published under a by-line—like ‘real’ news—and were clearly original, condominium-specific pieces, as opposed to generic, anonymous wire-service articles. Again, the claim is not that the articles in Condo Living could not be differentiated from hard news, but that Condo Living kept to a minimum any cues that would overtly signal the promotional nature of the section. All real estate sections obey some of the conventions of hard news sections, simply by being printed on the same size paper, being given a section identifier, and using the same typeface, for example. The strategies Condo Living employed took this a step farther, moving it closer to the ‘news’ end of the spectrum than would otherwise be the case. At issue here is the relation between the form news takes and how it is perceived. Tuchman (1978) notes that the conventions of filming television news, based on
social rules, inform our interpretation: people deemed worthy of trust are filmed head on, in close-up or in ‘close social distance’—the distance we maintain in real world situations with close friends or family members; less trustworthy people (rioters, for example) are filmed from much different angles, usually oblique, often from above. These kinds of conventions condition and colour our experience of all media consumption. Condo Living adopted the conventions of hard news to a far greater extent than real estate sections usually do. Because it ostensibly presented advertisements and articles in a ‘news’ context rather than a consumption context, Condo Living had the potential to exert influence on perceptions of the condominium. In the existing research, the real estate section as an entity is considered irrelevant; my point here is that the form and content of Condo Living at the very least elevate it beyond irrelevance. I think it would be difficult to construct a convincing argument that the context in which real estate advertisements and articles appeared did not matter.

Apart from the specific case of Condo Living, there are grounds for exploring the relationship between real estate sections and perceptions and representations of dwellings. One reason is that the real estate section was for a long period of time, one of the few resources consumers could use to explore housing options. This is largely a function of the local nature of real estate development. For a variety of reasons, dwellings of all sorts are predominantly built on-site rather than in factories, and in conjunction with the specificity of their settings, they are essentially unique products despite their overall similarity. For this reason, there is no national or even regional media coverage related to dwellings. This is in marked contrast to global products like automobiles and technology devices, for which there are countless numbers of magazines, websites and television shows that contribute to creating a product brand. For dwellings, there are far fewer sources of information: newspapers, free flyers and magazines consisting entirely of advertisements, brochures distributed at model homes, and recently, developer websites. It is therefore not surprising that when people have sought out information to make housing decisions, they frequently consult the real estate section of local newspapers (Williams, 1995). This appears to have been the case particularly where apartments are concerned: Michelson notes that ‘newspapers are far more effective as sources of productive information about apartments than they are as sources about houses’ (Michelson, 1977, p. 106). Newspapers were identified as the leading source of information for people moving to apartments (used by between 68.5 and 79.8 percent of respondents) compared to other sources such as friends, relatives, real estate
agents, driving around and builder’s reputation. Condo Living can be expected to have been particularly significant due to its inclusion in the largest circulation newspaper in the nation’s largest city.

The decision to focus exclusively on Condo Living was informed by the idea the context does matter. As a result, this research is very much the study of one periodical; due to the particularities of each medium, a broader attempt to capture a ‘representative’ representation of condominiums would have been as unwieldy (and necessarily shallow) as an attempt to write a dissertation on, say, ‘representations of women in media’. That said, the local nature of real estate does nonetheless result in representativeness being achieved, at least where print advertisements are concerned. When I was formulating my approach, I performed two multi-year comparisons—one in the mid-1970s, another in the mid-1980s—between advertisements appearing in the Toronto Star and in the Globe and Mail, the city’s other large newspaper that published real estate advertisements from the time condominium tenure was enacted. I found that far more advertisements were printed in the Star and they were almost universally larger, which is not a trivial consideration given the poor quality of the archival scans. I found almost no cases of advertisements printed in the Globe that were not in the Star. These trial runs illustrated that developers used the same advertisements rather than creating different campaigns for each newspaper. Further, they illustrated that the Star was the preferred newspaper, based on the number of advertisements that appeared there.

4.4 Data

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, I felt it necessary to capture the entire contents of Condo Living, which was published between November 8, 1997 and May 26, 2007. The individual pages were retrieved from the ‘Pages of the Past’ online archive of the Toronto Star, and took the form of page scans of widely varying quality until 2002, and original PDFs between 2003 and 2005. The remaining editions were not available from the online archive and were taken from microform versions of scanned pages. As with the other scan-based documents, text was legible but the fine details of many images were difficult to discern.

While an analysis of Condo Living alone would have been interesting, I felt that it was necessary to also examine the advertisements that were published prior to its existence in order to establish if change had occurred in representations over time, and to what degree. Again, because no
similar work had been carried out, I felt compelled to capture the complete history of condominium advertisements in Toronto, a task made possible by the online archive mentioned above. The long lead times involved in condominium development—typically three to four years—means that developers tend to run the same advertisement many weeks at a time, and that few advertisements would appear only once, for example. For this reason, I examined only every week of the Star’s real estate section from 1967 forward. The process ended up less straightforward than initially thought due to the desire of certain developers to have their advertisements appear in the front section of the newspaper; eventually, nearly all of the condominium advertisements migrated to the front section in order to compete with other condominium ads and to differentiate themselves from the low-rise dominated real estate section. This undoubtedly was what led to the creation of Condo Living. In any event, for many of the years between 1967 and 1997 I examined both the front and real estate sections. Trials showed that a very small percentage of advertisements appeared in other sections, usually Business, but capturing these would have likely tripled the time spent on an acquisition process that eventually consumed more than seven months before analysis could began. At the end of the acquisition process, I had accumulated a database of 2,103 display-style advertisements (as opposed to classified or purely textual advertisements) and a second database of 5,063 articles from Condo Living.

Database records were created for each advertisement and Condo Living article, with basic attributes including publication date, page number, author, project name and location where applicable. One thing that became clear from reading the articles is that a very small group of developers, architects, interior designers and consultants appeared with great frequency, and more interestingly, several of them often worked together on the same projects. In order to follow up on comments they had made in the articles related to the importance of the broad concept of ‘design’ and inter-firm cooperation, I conducted interviews with six key members of this group: developer Howard Cohen of Context Developments, a niche-market developer of high-style projects; Linda Mitchell, beginning a new career as a consultant after two decades with mainstream developer Monarch; industry analyst Barry Lyon; architect Babak Eslajhou of Core Architects, a Toronto firm specializing in boutique mid-rise projects; interior designer Elaine Cecconi, of Cecconi Simone, a leading design firm in Toronto; and Brad Lamb, the most visible real estate broker in the city. Interviews were conducted in person excepting a telephone
interview with Barry Lyon, and were semi-structured in format. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed by the author.

4.5 Coding

The coding and analyses of these databases was necessarily a highly iterative process of refinement, motivated by questions that were initially quite broad and subsequently more specific. Each new phase involved the addition of new attributes to the databases and recoding of all of the records. The initial runs through the databases were intended simply to capture the major themes emerging from the advertisements and articles and their crude characteristics. For advertisements, for example, I captured the image medium (drawing or photograph), the number of people portrayed, whether children were present and the primary message (e.g. affordability, lifestyle, value, convenience and so on). For the articles, I captured author, date, title, page number and type. The ‘type’ category was largely established during trial runs and included choices such as ‘legal’, ‘buying advice’, ‘testimonial’, ‘site profile’ and ‘gardening’.

The process of acquiring and coding the advertisements and articles was extremely useful in identifying prominent themes. The subsequent round of coding built on this, with the addition of many attributes derived from questions that inform the three main body sections of this research. Chapter 5 seeks to understand in what ways ads and articles attempt to overcome the various stigmas associated with high-rise living, and how Condo Living attempted to differentiate the condominium from other dwelling types. Chapter 6 explores the ways contemporary design is presented, and how the aesthetic moved from niche to mainstream. Chapter 7 establishes the changing target markets for condominiums over time, and captures the way women have been represented in advertisements according to their portrayed relationships, activities and appearance. The individual chapters detail the specific methods and attributes that were used in each case.

4.6 Methods

By considering Condo Living (and the real estate) section as an entity, this research perhaps most closely resembles longitudinal examinations of single media sources, an approach that is common in other disciplines such as gender studies such as, for example, Brazeale’s (1994) look
at the early years of *Esquire* magazine and its construction of masculinity, or Korinek’s (2000) examination of the feminist sensibility of *Chatelaine* magazine in the 1950s and 1960s. This approach is understandably less common in the urban literature, but not unknown. Cheung & Ma (2005), for example, analyzed five decades of advertisements in Hong Kong’s *Sing Tao Daily* in order to capture the increasing importance of ownership tenure and the concurrent decline in status of rental tenure. Jacobs and Cairns (2007) examine the entire corpus of Singapore’s state-produced *Our Home* magazine to identify the normative strategies it employed in promoting the modern interior as part of a larger practice of identity creation predicated on home ownership.

The two studies use quite different methods. The former uses frequency counts (of the number of apartments and rooms offered for sale and rent over time) while the latter uses qualitative, discourse-based approach, with specific examples of images and text used to illustrate the themes the authors have identified.

Each of these approaches has its merits: the quantitative method outlined is useful in sketching broad themes and highlighting trends occurring over long study periods. It has little explanatory power, but this does not negate its utility in broadly characterizing a set of circumstances. The qualitative method is a more powerful analytical tool that has the opportunity to be explanatory rather than descriptive, and more importantly, to capture themes that are not amenable to being operationalized in a quantitative way. For these reasons, I adopted both of these approaches for use where most appropriate. The advertisements database is primarily explored using a quantitative approach in order to identify major themes. Chapter 7, for example, relies on frequency counts in arguing that young, single women have become the primary target market in recent-era condominium advertisements. The chapter contains a more detailed discussion of the methods used. The articles in Condo Living, conversely, are primarily analyzed in a qualitative fashion in order to characterize how they function as a whole, and in conjunction with condominium advertisements in carrying out various brand-like strategies.
Chapter 5
Updating the condo’s public image

This chapter explores the idea that Condo Living, through the articles and advertisements it published, engaged in a process of what might be called image management that consisted of two very common strategies of conventional branding: rebranding the high-rise condominium apartment by countering stigma associated with it, and differentiating the condo from other dwelling types. Although not the product of a purposive scheme, these attempts at reshaping perceptions bear a remarkable resemblance to the ways in which well-known corporate brands are managed, and the ways in which ‘internal’ branding is increasingly being practiced for non-commercial reasons. As such, the chapter provides a useful introduction to the idea that branding strategies have diffused and expanded into new realms, and that, as suggested by the branding paradigm, that the widespread acceptance of this approach to disseminating information has become internalized, and become the default mode of persuasion.

In the case of Condo Living, what is striking is how closely it adheres to the principle of presenting the condominium in an entirely positive light. This form of image management is one of the fundamental aspects of conventional branding as currently carried out for directly commercial purposes. Any public appearance of a company’s brand, regardless whether it is in the form of an advertisement, the sponsorship of an event, or simply on a particular product, must conform to the brand image in order to maintain the coherence of the intended brand image. Anything that has the potential not just to harm, but even to dilute or confuse the brand image is to be avoided; or, if a harmful perception exists, it must be countered and defused. This strategy has survived the expansion of branding beyond directly commercial uses, and in fact is likely one of the reasons why this expansion occurred. Whether it is a running shoe company, a museum, a university or political party, what has come to characterize their interactions with the public, other institutions, and tellingly, their own ‘constituents’ (in one form or another) is the closely managed and calculated nature of communication. The goal of this approach is to always stay ‘on message’ with the understanding that through repetition over time the message will become accepted as reality, particularly in the absence of any suggestion that it is inaccurate. The mechanism is quite simple, relying heavily on the inclusion and exclusion of certain ideas and information, which legitimates the former and diminishes the perceived importance of the latter.
In essence, the process can be understood as one of ‘framing’, public relations or ‘spin’—or propaganda, for that matter.

What is notable is that this approach does not use logic and evidence to make its points; instead, it makes an identical point over and over. ‘You work for one of leading technology companies in the world’, for example, would be a typical message of internal or corporate branding carried out through weekly updates sent to employees touting recent awards and achievements. Omitting or refusing to acknowledge non-conforming images works to the same ends, but it is important to recognize that it is possible to appear to address negative images and have them reaffirm the corporate brand image. This is typically done through affective approaches, which by definition also do not employ logic and evidence to persuade. All of these strategies are apparent in the ways Condo Living represents high-rise living and the condominium apartment.

Since the mid-1990s, the high-rise condominium in Toronto has been represented in a novel and distinctive way that departs sharply from previous representations. Establishing the character and type of these differences as represented in the advertisements and articles published in the Toronto Star’s Condo Living section, is one of the objectives of this research. This chapter sees two parallel processes at work in Condo Living that can be understood in terms of conventional branding practices. The first process involves the rebranding of the condominium and high-rise living in order to counter pre-existing negative associations including those related to family, safety and security, and size. The second process differentiates the condominium from competing dwelling types, and specifically from the detached, single-family house. This process of differentiation involves linking the condominium with leading edge style and design, extravagant facilities, and the notion of urbanity in the form of promises of a social lifestyle dependent on high culture and popular entertainment. Apart from their specific appeals, these aspects position the condominium as an alternative, and in many cases superior, dwelling type compared to the single-family house rather than a poor imitation. This message appears in developer advertisements and is affirmed and reinforced by articles in Condo Living, including prominently placed testimonial or ‘lived experience’ articles written by condo owners that have the possibility of being profoundly influential branding mechanisms.
5.1 Brands, branding and dwellings

Throughout this research, I use the techniques of conventional branding to understand the creation of meaning attached to the high-rise condominium apartment. I do so to emphasize how consistent a representation of the condominium has emerged since the 1990s. I also do so because the public image of the condo mimics actual brands by relying not on their materiality but on aspirational and highly symbolic associations with fashion and design, urbanity, and high profile cultural entertainment events. I imagine the condominium participating in a residential marketplace dominated by the detached single-family house, which similarly relies on associations to define it. The single-family house is linked with economic achievement, social status, family and citizenship, signifying it as a highly symbolic rather than merely functional commodity. The stereotypically suburban location of the single-family house confers another set of associations, including notions of peacefulness, nature, safety, orderliness that have positioned the suburban, single-family house as the ideal setting in which to raise children. From this perspective, the associations that people have with the suburban, single-family house are what defines the brand to a far greater extent than the specifics of individual houses—which may partly explain the ongoing success of a product that fails to withstand much scrutiny regarding many of its purported advantages, let alone its design, or its environmental, health, or social impacts.

5.2 Early representations of high-rise living

Regardless of the gap between reality and representations, the single-family house and the dispersed urban form that accompanies it have become entrenched in Canada, reflecting a ‘self-perpetuating consumer preference for the single-family home, for privacy, and for low-density, natural-like places’ (Bunting & Filion, 1999, p. 283). It is therefore against the single-family house that all other dwelling types are judged. High-rise dwellings, whether rental apartments or condominium units, would appear to be particularly likely to be found wanting in such a comparison because so many of its characteristics run counter to the idealized attributes of the single-family house. In societies that valorize ownership, rental tenure—and renters—are frequently stigmatized (Hunter, 1999). Instead of the peace, quiet and nature theoretically offered by the single-family house, the condominium is associated with congested, loud and dangerous urban areas. Rather than being a symbol economic achievement and personal responsibility and
stability—like the single-family house—high-rise living is associated with social housing. It is not simply that social housing is “commonly coupled with social disorder and crime” (Costello, 2005, p. 53). Rather, it is that the spectacular failures of social housing became the public image, the logo, of high-rise housing. Cabrini Green and Pruitt-Igoe are icons of decay and urban decline that cast a dark shadow on the high-rise social housing projects that remain, like St. Jamestown in Toronto. Unsurprisingly, residents of such projects have also been stigmatized (Purdy, 2004), and as one study points out with a remarkable degree of understatement, “Part of the distaste for high-rise housing may come from a desire for insulation from the sorts of people who live there” (Appold & Yuen, 2007, p. 570).

The ownership aspect of condominium tenure put this type of dwelling on a somewhat different trajectory than the rental or social housing high-rise apartment, but it brought with it a different set of negative associations. After an initial wave of popularity, notably in Florida in the 1970s, condominium buyers became disenchanted with shoddy construction and found they had little legal recourse since early legislation strongly favoured developers (van Weesep, 1987). Despite subsequently improved consumer protection legislation in some jurisdictions, condominium tenure is perceived as a complex form of ownership with possibly onerous legal conditions. In the 1980s, condos gained popularity as an investment, but the market crash of 1988 left them with a reputation as a risky purchase for individuals popularly associated with wealthy, ‘foreign’ absentee owners, and a dubious redevelopment instrument for cities (Preston, Murdie & Northrup, 1993). During this era, if there was a public image of the condominium, it would have been based on associations with the ‘luxury condo’ as a dwelling type for urban empty-nesters, as indicated by contemporary research (Skaburskis, 1988). This positioned the condominium as a niche product with limited demographic appeal. Despite the theoretical advantages of connotations of luxury, this public image—associated with retirees—would be difficult to transform into mainstream success. By the end of the 1980s then, the high-rise condominium had a number of negative associations, and even its positive association with luxury may well have been detrimental to achieving mainstream acceptance.

5.3 Countering stigma

One of the assumptions I make in this research is that the recent round of condominium development that began in the mid 1990s is a novel phenomenon for many reasons, one of which
is the mainstream acceptance of the high-rise condominium apartment in Toronto and other cities. The question that naturally arises concerns what led to this already-established type of tenure and residential form achieving unprecedented levels of demand during this period and specifically, not in the form of the boom/bust cycle that characterized previous rounds of condominium development in Toronto. A number of factors undoubtedly played a role in this process and it would be difficult to identify them all and ascertain their relative importance. From a branding perspective, however, it can be shown that one aspect that differentiates the recent development era from those prior is that condo-related advertisements and articles participate in a process of recuperating the image of high-rise living by countering stigma and defining the condominium in a consistent way. This shift from high-rise living having generally negative associations to being in high demand and perhaps aspirational is a common theme in the recent academic work concerning condominiums: Costello (2005), Fincher (2004), Shaw (2005) and Kern (2010) all deal with this issue to some degree. In order to ascertain how advertisements and Condo Living articles addressed the negative associations with high-rise living, I begin by exploring three issues raised in the literature: the suitability of condominiums as a place to raise children, the issue of crime and safety, and the perception that the limited size of condominium imposes unacceptable constraints.

5.3.1 Condos are for families, too (?)

Costello (2005) notes that in their transformation from ‘prisons to penthouses in the sky’, high-rise apartments have shed all of their negative connotations but one: that high-rise apartments are not an appropriate place for children. Implicit in this is the assumption that single-family house is the ideal place to raise children, a perception that has been integral to the process of suburbanization that characterizes twentieth century residential development patterns (Wright, 1981, p. 210; Harris, 1996, p. 89). The high-rise apartment, conversely, has been positioned as its polar opposite, whether as the ‘unsanitary’ and ‘immoral’ tenements of a century ago or as decaying social housing towers more recently (Mee, 2007). Societal perceptions of the unfitness of high-rise dwellings for children have not disappeared with the arrival of condominium tenure. This section explores how developers have portrayed children and family in condominium advertisements, and how these representations have changed over time.
Children are obvious primarily by their absence from condominium advertisements. Of the 2,318 advertisements that were examined in this research, only 53 of them include depictions of children. Of these, the vast majority, 43, appeared in the 1970s, when condominiums could compete on size with detached houses and offer lower purchase prices due to relatively low land and development costs. Prior to 1983, for example, more than half of all condominium units in Canada had three or more bedrooms (Skaburskis, 1988), a situation quite different at present, when new two bedroom units are relatively rare, and three bedroom units nearly non-existent. Whatever circumstances may have led to this situation, the result is that a new condominium unit large enough to be deemed suitable for a (nuclear) family has long since become unaffordable in Toronto for all but the wealthy. Yet it is striking that even in the 1970s, when developers did have the possibility of marketing affordable projects suitable for families, few chose to do so.
One partial explanation that emerges from the early advertisements is not so much that high-rise living was inappropriate for children—for their own sake—but that children were not desirable occupants and would reduce the quality of life of other occupants. This anti-child sentiment appeared with different degrees of explicitness. Some projects were simply marketed using euphemisms such as ‘for adults over 18 years of age’, ‘adult building’, or ‘adult style living’. Other projects, however, based entire campaigns on explicit anti-child advertisements. One advertisement’s headline reads ‘The one condominium not designed with kids in mind’ ([Toronto Star, 26 November, 1977, E7](https://www.torontostar.com)) while another encourages people to ‘Live where you can play with kids your own age’ ([Toronto Star, 10 December 1977, E10](https://www.torontostar.com)). The years after the 1970s, however, are marked not so much by anti-child discourse as by the nearly complete absence of references to children at all, be they implicit or explicit. It is certainly possible that this absence naturalizes the perception that children do not belong in high-rises, if it is true that what is not portrayed can be as meaningful as what is portrayed. Judith Williamson
argues that simply juxtaposing people and objects in advertisements (e.g. Catherine Deneuve and a bottle of perfume) can create in the viewer a meaningful link between the two (Williamson, 2005). The opposite may be argued as well: that the near complete absence of children in condominium advertisements has helped naturalize the notion that children do not belong in high-rises—and by extension, affirmed the perception that the appropriate place to raise children is in a detached, single family house.

If developers have simply ignored the issue of family and children in advertisements, the same is not true of the articles in Condo Living, several of which address the appropriateness of the condominium as a place to raise children. Consistent with the goal of promoting condominium sales, the articles are generally positive but defensive; there is in them clearly a perceived need to argue what is evidently an unconventional position. ‘Condos are for families, too’ is the headline of one such article that acknowledges, ‘at first glance, high-rise condominiums may seem synonymous with an adult life style. But across the Greater Toronto Area, there are families who call them home’ (Hawkins, 1998). Yet third person accounts may appear unconvincing, particularly when arguing a highly unconventional point. Perhaps for this reason, many of the family-positive articles in Condo Living are ‘lived experience’ accounts of high-rise living. ‘Family of five cozy in midtown condo’, for example, is the title of one woman’s account of her suburban family’s move to a city condo, which emphasizes that the smaller space has brought them closer together as a family (Aston, 2003). In another article, a grandfather relates the many positive aspects of high-rise living enjoyed by his eight-month old grandson (McDonald, 2003), including the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people with different backgrounds. Another article that profiles a couple mentions these same benefits of raising a child in an urban environment, along with having easy access to cultural events. The article’s conclusion weakens its argument, however, noting that, ‘When they outgrow the condo, he and [wife] Heather would like to find a townhouse nearby’ (Laporte, 2003). Nonetheless, the overall message that these articles is one that is characteristic of the way that Condo Living dealt with perceived shortcomings of high-rise living: to suggest that there are obstacles, but ones that can be overcome, with a result that is ultimately rewarding and worth the effort.

Interestingly, articles that interrogate or even question societal perceptions regarding where children should be raised—as opposed to simply suggesting that condominiums can meet
existing expectations—are quite rare. One article, for example, points to survey data indicating that people between the ages of 25 and 34 were the most likely (46 per cent) to agree with the statement that ‘Living in a condo is suitable for families with very young children’ (Anonymous, 2006). Yet for many developers, even when faced with evidence from their own projects, the notion of children in high-rise buildings remains unthinkable: ‘at Mystic Pointe in Etobicoke, about 25 percent of the building has been sold to families with either new babies or teenagers. Still, sales representative Wendy MacIntyre says they are not actively promoting the family-friendly aspects of the area to potential buyers’ (Hawkins, 1998).

Developers, then, have in the recent era dealt with the issue of children largely by ignoring it, partly because confronting it would entail added capital costs in the form additional infrastructure (e.g. playgrounds, daycare areas and so on) as noted by Fincher (2004). Land economics and disproportionate increases in prices have surely also come into play, as well as reluctance to tinker with what has been a very successful development formula. From this perspective, developer silence regarding families is the understandable (from a branding perspective) but regrettable response to a situation that offers them little or no possibility of financial gain. While not actively boasting of that their projects are not designed for children, developers have essentially affirmed societal perceptions by ignoring children in their marketing. Even the ostensibly family-positive articles in Condo Living may end up reinforcing what is implicit in condominium advertisements: that it is unusual to raise children in a high-rise setting. In this case, the rebranding that has taken place effectively involves the adoption rather than the refutation of societal perceptions, a strategy that clarifies the public image in line with a larger strategy of positioning the condominium as a dwelling particularly well-suited to young, single women.

5.3.2 Crime and safety

With the high-rise historically linked with urban locations, it is not surprising that the fears of crime that have long been associated with urban places (Jackson, 1987, p. 70) have affected perceptions of high-rise living in the past and continue to do so. Fear, and the need for security measures feature prominently in the recent urban literature, (e.g. Atkinson, 2006; Butler, 2007; Low, 2004). Fear and security have been especially salient in the literature examining recent
high-rise development, particularly the ways in which women have been portrayed as needing or desiring security (Fincher, 2004; Kern, 2010). This shows that the existence of a strong perceived link between security and high-rise living that applies not only to a previous generation of rental and social housing but also to today’s designer condominium towers—and by extension, a possible target of rebranding efforts.

Yet in contrast to the salience of the issue in academic work, security-related imagery was found to be nearly non-existent in advertisements for Toronto condominiums: only 14 advertisements of more than 2,300 total made notable reference to security in the form of representations of security guards, doormen, concierges or by the prominent placement of security-related features in the advertising copy. Of these, six appeared during the 1970s, five during the 1980s, one in the 1990s and the remaining two in the 2000s. The most explicit are the earliest, including one from 1970 that employs a relatively large drawing of a surveillance camera and another from 1976 whose primary graphic content, comprising nearly the entire advertisement, is a photograph of a security guard in his booth, flanked by a bank of surveillance monitors, examining a car entering the building’s parking lot. The large-point caption reads ‘We never sleep’ (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Marketing security in the past
(Source: Toronto Star 15 May 1976, E18)

A similarly threatening approach is taking in another ad, whose large caption reads ‘24-hour security’, above a smaller line concluding ‘for your peace of mind’. Beneath this caption is a photograph of six uniformed guards, standing shoulder to shoulder at the brick gatehouse of the condominium (Toronto Star, 24 January, 1976, E30).

The two recent-era advertisements in which security plays a prominent role are much more subtle. An advertisement for a project called Domain is captioned ‘Secure your domain’ and
highlights ‘24 hour concierge’ as one of the features it offers (Toronto Star, 15 March 2003, P4). The other advertisement devotes half of its space to a computer-rendered image of a lobby, where a concierge is visible behind a counter, recalling a hotel more than a condominium. This ad, too, prominently includes ‘24 hour concierge’ among a very short list of features it provides. Over time, then, security is de-emphasized, perhaps to allay fears of suggesting a particular project is located in a dangerous area, but also to take advantage of an opportunity to associate the project with luxury. Thus in advertisements, security personnel appear either as concierges, or, more frequently, as jovial doormen who would not look out of place at a luxury hotel. This approach implies security, but takes the more palatable form of luxury and service.

Only three of the advertisements prominently featuring security are gendered, all published prior to 1986 (all Toronto Star: 15 October 1977, E22; 27 October 1984, E27; 26 October 1985, E30). These advertisements all depict an interaction between a doorman and a woman. In each case, the woman is either driving or getting out of the car from the driver’s side, suggesting strongly that she is alone in her car. There are no advertisements showing a male interacting with a doorman, concierge or guard in any manner. The findings therefore align with gendered perceptions relating to security. The most striking fact, however, is simply the rarity of security-themed advertisements, especially since some of the ads coded as security-related might not even be seen as such by readers; advertisements featuring concierges, for example, might be perceived by readers to primarily convey luxury and service rather than protection.

The paucity of security-related advertisements would seem therefore to suggest that security is not a concern of buyers—or at least not a marketable concern—and that security is not particularly related to gender. Yet in the articles in the Toronto Star’s Condo Living section that profile new developments or discuss the lived experience of condominium dwellers, security is
presented as being of great importance to buyers, and directly linked to gender. In these articles, the developer perspective is that security features may be excessive, but are demanded by prospective buyers.

In a site profile of new project, a developer is asked why people need ‘Fort Knox-style’ security. He responds: ‘they really don’t need this level of security in this city...but it’s expected. It gives people peace of mind’ (MacKinnon, 2000c). Another developer claims that in focus groups, ‘eighty percent of buyers and potential buyers judged security as the Number 1 issue’ (Austin-Bunyak, 1998).

While these statements are gender-neutral, the majority of articles link women, fear, and a perceived need for security. A prominent condominium broker directly attributes the presence of security features to women, saying that builders are responding to requests for ‘full security’ including ‘underground parking with…a 24-hour concierge and camera systems’ (Ghafour, 1998). Regarding a specific project, one developer speculates that the ‘ultra modern features of the suites and the state-of-the-art security system will make Uptown an attractive residence for single women. He expects single women to account for a high percentage of their sales’ (Brennan, 2000). A female marketing executive of a major developer declares, ‘Purchasers, especially single women, like feeling secure in their suites and in the building’s common areas, because security brings with it a sense of comfort’ (Irish, 2005). As in the security-related advertisements, mentions of security in Condo Living articles are either gender neutral, or explicitly related to women; men are never mentioned as needing or being concerned about safety.

Developer statements about the nearly universal demand for security features might be viewed with suspicion (as self-serving) but statements from condominium dwellers in Condo Living articles—all female—suggest that developers’ claims may be accurate. In one article, a young condominium buyer relates that security was ‘the most important’ factor in her purchase decision (Austin-Bunyak, 1998). In a different article examining the biometric security features at a new project, a woman relates that a man broke into her apartment in another city. Due to this, she embraces security because ‘anything that can keep her family away from danger is welcome’ (Irish, 2005). This same owner tacitly acknowledges that her building’s security features are perhaps more elaborate than necessary when she says: ‘But I feel very good here. There’s
nothing wrong with being extra safe’. A middle aged woman in a different, older project makes a similar point while considering the relative value she receives from security staff in their concierge and security roles: ‘Still, these guys and girls are probably most important to me as security guards. I live alone. Friends who come to visit tell me the guards are extremely helpful and courteous, but ain’t nobody gonna get by ‘em who shouldn’t. Can’t say I’ve ever been particularly paranoid about any of that, but suddenly I do feel perfectly safe. And cared about’ (Cunliffe, 2002).

Therefore, the lack of ads explicitly addressing security is not a reflection of lack of interest, but instead the result of a different approach to countering security concerns. Developer marketing and the articles in Condo Living now work together in a much more subtle and effective way in dealing with perceived security concerns than was the case during earlier bouts of condominium development when security was addressed more explicitly. Developers can provide an array of security features not from necessity but due to customer demands; in recent advertisements, security appears as just another amenity. The articles generally support this view, positioning security features as insurance against a highly unlikely event rather than a necessary defense against a true threat—which is certainly the implication of earlier advertisements portraying uniformed security staff. Advertisements and articles divert emphasis from fear and crime by recasting security staff as concierges, or by concentrating on the technology of new security features rather than the threat they imply. This seems to be a particularly deft example of rebranding, since it allows developers to link their products with technology and hotel-style personal service while addressing the concerns of security-minded prospective customers.

5.3.3 Size

The condominium apartment is again the polar opposite of the single-family house regarding perceptions of size and space. Ideas of size and space have always been strongly associated with low-rise development, with more of each understood to be better, and over time, single-family houses have continually gained size. Although building parcels have decreased in size, they still typically offer useful front and backyard areas. Condominiums, meanwhile, have shrunk markedly over the past twenty-five years to the point that some units are below 400 square feet, and many offer little or no outdoor space. In order to address concerns about size, developers
have foregrounded the quality of the space—i.e. its design attributes—rather than its quantity. Loft-inspired design features such as tall ceilings, large windows, and open-concept floorplans are employed in the majority of new-build projects and these are emphasized in advertisements. At the same time—and often in the same advertisements—architects and designers are named and/or pictured, which builds celebrity and positions the condominium as a design-focused product.

The perception that condominiums are small is not new. Even in the 1970s, when the size difference between condominium units and houses was relatively small, high-rise developers felt the need to explicitly challenge these perceptions. An advertisement for the grandly named but mainstream project in Etobicoke called Buckingham Place has as its headline ‘More room for a family than many detached homes’. An advertisement for another suburban development similarly claims ‘Larger than most homes’. The largest units in these developments range from 1,547 square feet to 1657, but standard units (as opposed to penthouses) of more than 3,000 square feet were not uncommon through the 1970s both in ‘luxury’ condominiums on Toronto’s waterfront and midtown areas, and in more upscale suburban projects.

Despite these marketing attempts, the perception of high-rise units being small remained intact. During the run-up of prices during the 1980s, standard units became much smaller, and it was only in luxury projects that units approaching 1,500 square feet were available. After the recession of the early 1990s, one of the many fundamental changes in condominium development was the adoption of loft-inspired design features. Part of the reason for this change must be the high level of visibility that ‘hard’ or ‘true’ lofts (i.e. industrial buildings of a previous era converted into residential use) had at the time. Lofts offered character and ‘authenticity’ that was absent in the condominium units of the 1980; instead of being a ‘cookie-cutter’ drywall box laid out like every other apartment for the past thirty years, the loft was different in every way, and each unit was unique. Instead of eight-foot popcorn ceilings, the loft offered fourteen or sixteen foot ceilings, with visible beams. Instead of standard aluminum windows, the loft had large expanses of floor to ceiling windows. Instead of broadloom, there was exposed concrete or hardwood. Exposed mechanicals, exposed bricks, sliding doors, reduced height walls (or no walls) all differentiated the hard loft from the condominium unit. Their location in formerly non-residential areas added to their appeal, and of course they
leveraged the mature ‘loft brand’ and all its positive associations that was invented and refined in Manhattan from the 1960s through the 1980s (Zukin, 1982).

‘True’ lofts represented a tiny fraction of all condominium units on the market at any one time, but it would be difficult to overstate their importance on condominium design since the mid 1990s. The degree to which developers implemented loft-inspired design varied greatly, from new build projects that attempted to replicate true lofts to mainstream units that adopted higher ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and an open concept floor plan. New build projects also borrowed from the loft aesthetic in designing their model suites, using stainless steel appliances, granite countertops, stark white walls, and furniture from (or inspired by) the canon of European modernist design.

Although new build projects in Toronto used loft-like features, they were somewhat surprisingly never labeled as inauthentic pretenders, something that occurred in Montreal at the same time (Podmore, 1998). Instead, the true division that developed was between new condominium projects built after the recession in the mid-1990s and later, and those built in the 1980s and earlier. Loft conversions retained their cachet and authenticity, but because of their rarity constituted a very small fraction of condominium units put on the market. Apart from being a design inspiration, the loft conversion had a ‘halo effect’ over all condominium development, casting a favourable light over an entire product range (Dean, 1999).

One of the immediate benefits that the adoption of loft-inspired design and decoration had for developers was the ability to confront perceptions about unit size in their marketing strategies. Almost any unit with floor-to-ceiling windows, along with nine or ten foot ceilings, can be made to look spacious in a photograph. The possibilities are greater for units split over two full floors, or those using a mezzanine-style lofted area: in either case there will be sixteen feet of vertical glass wall to photograph. Corner units can be made to look particularly dramatic and spacious, as can units configured to be much wider than they are deep, resulting in long expanses of windows. Regardless of configuration, the spare, uncluttered decoration and (frequently scaled down) furniture commonly employed in condominium advertisements emphasizes the available space. The message that these representations give is not one of unlimited space, but one of space that is stylish, dramatic, functional and perhaps most importantly, different from older condominium units in every way. The strategy does address the issue of unit size, but it does so
indirectly, suggesting that the quality of the space, rather than the quantity, is of paramount importance.

In the articles in Condo Living, however, unit size is the context for a great many articles—such as those on storage and organizing—and frequently their explicit subject matter. This is somewhat unexpected, for it would certainly have been possible to view the condominium as existing in isolation, and not relative to the single-family house and its expectations. Instead, Condo Living published articles on its front page entitled “It’s a small world” (Laporte, 2000) and “How small can they go?” (Binks, 2002) that directly address the continually diminishing size of units in new projects.

Two themes emerge from these articles. The first, as with many perceived obstacles to high-rise living covered in Condo Living, is that size is a concern, but that with planning and adjustments, it need not be a problem—and may turn out to have unexpected and positive outcomes. One article warns, ‘… just like the person who sacrifices some wants and needs to buy a starter house, so too does the new condo buyer’. Having acknowledged the situation, articles like this one most commonly provide straightforward, functional strategies that involve getting rid of possessions (‘decluttering’ and ‘downsizing’), maximizing storage, or implementing a flexible configuration (e.g. using a Murphy bed) that allows rooms, spaces, and furniture to be used more multiple purposes. Articles like these are numerous, and the wealth of suggestions they propose suggest that every conceivable storage problem has a workable solution. Much the same message is put forward by the 255 articles published in Condo Living that evaluate floor plans submitted by readers: that a pleasant space can be created through use of certain kinds furniture, mirrors, wall treatments, flooring, lighting and the occasional removal of a wall.

Condo Living primarily confronts the issue of condominium size via expert advice, but it also uses testimonial or ‘lived experience’ articles written by or about condo dwellers. ‘Little loft teaches how to live with less’ (MacKinnon, 2000a), for examples, describes the strategies used by a couple to lived contentedly in their 517 square foot loft, involving both design changes and developing a new attitude toward consumption. Many articles repeat this structure. ‘Not too much space, but a lot of satisfaction’ (MacKinnon, 2000b) emphasizes the importance of design for a woman who has moved from a 300 square foot rental to a 455 square foot condo. The article enthuses, “Good things do come in small packages for Jackie Roberts, who loves her
compact 455-square-foot condo in downtown Toronto” (ibid.). A more extreme article appearing on the front page of the Condo Living sections asks ‘How small can they go?’ (Binks, 2002).

The article’s subheading matches the jovial, positive tone of the photograph that accompanies the article, stating ‘Buyers are living large in Toronto’s incredible shrinking condos’. The photograph may be the most eloquent part of the article. Taken by a photographer sitting at the family dinner table, it positions the reader as a guest at the family’s Thanksgiving meal (Figure 10). Everything including the expressions of the people pictured conveys an unrehearsed ease, informality and strong family bonds. This is precisely the kind of meaningful moments that advertisers attempt to create using actors, but often it fails. Here it sets the tone, and in a brief glance conveys the primary message of the article.

The details in the text are much more straightforward. Although the unit pictured is only 427 square feet, we are told that the retired owners were able to have six guests for Thanksgiving, and were expecting nine for Christmas. Their move from a 3,000 square foot suburban house required ridding themselves of nearly all their material possessions, but ‘Dianne found it liberating getting rid of many belongings’ (ibid., p. 24). By being creative with storage, they find they have plenty of space for themselves, their cat and dog, and guests.

The mundane narrative somewhat disguises the two levels on which the article works. First, it legitimates high-rise living through owner testimonials, which appear particularly credible in the context of a newspaper section whose function is obviously promotional. Perhaps more
importantly, it uses an extreme case to make its point regarding size, suggesting that if this couple can be happy in a 427 square foot condominium, then any retiree couple buying (as one would expect) a unit twice that size or bigger will be even happier.

Combined with the strong introductory photograph, these are the lasting messages of the article, although it is characteristic of the Condo Living articles that this one too mentions negative aspects of high-rise living related to unit size: a local realtor says that it is to his benefit when couples buy six- or seven hundred square foot condominiums because a year later, he will be selling this unit when they separate and then helping each partner buy a new place. Again characteristically, the article has only put up an obstruction in order to counter it. The happy couple is not worried; the article’s concluding paragraph is this: ‘We’ve gotten to know each other again,’ Dianne says. ‘The more rooms we had, the more we separated ourselves. Now we have to live together and it’s not bad. We were great buddies to begin with.’ (ibid.).

Like the photograph that accompanies the article, the conclusion is particularly effective because it deals with meaningful emotion and narrative. The admission by the wife that ‘we separated ourselves’ alludes to a painful summing up having taken place, adding a certain poignancy to the account. She attributes the separation to living space, something that would surely resonate with a good number of empty-nesters rattling around in suburban house after their children have gone. But there is a happy ending: they have gotten to know one another again, and turned back the clock to become the ‘great buddies’ they had been when they first knew one another. It is difficult to imagine a more affecting narrative for peers, and more to the point, it positively links profound personal events with small spaces. This is a far more meaningful kind of brand association than those created by articles whose solutions are functional.

A final way that articles confront the issue of size is by the repetition of a much more traditionally promotional justification: that the purchasers of small units are so active socially, or so dedicated to their work, or so wealthy (in the case of people owning a pied-a-terre) that they neither want nor need more space. A developer claims that purchasers of small units ‘tend to be very active, they’re out and about, in the clubs or in their offices, so they’re not always home’ (Binks, 2002). In an article title ‘Young buyers thinking small’, a real estate agent concurs that suites between 250 and 400 square feet are perfect for young people working downtown, investors, and business people (Adair, 2002). Another realtor invokes the related (and frequent)
theme that building amenities and public areas are your living space: ‘You don’t need a huge living room if you book the party room’ (ibid.).

It is tempting to dismiss these claims by marketing people as transparent hucksterism, but that would ignore the aspirational appeals they make, particularly to young people. Regardless of the reality, they position condominium owners, and particularly owners of small condominiums, as people who are taking advantage of urban nightlife, or who have careers to which they are highly committed. Males and females are both represented, responding to stereotypically female (i.e. social) and male (i.e. economic/status) aspirations. This is a somewhat bold approach, although one used for many years in advertising: presenting a product with low commercial appeal as suitable to the worthy few ‘special’ consumers who can appreciate its unique appeals.

Therefore, we see that developers primarily use design to counter concerns about condominium size, by emphasizing the quality of interior space through the use of attributes borrowed from lofts. The articles in Condo Living, conversely, take a number of different approaches that suggest that small spaces may be more suitable for some people than large spaces, including young people with a very social lifestyle or empty nesters who may have drifted apart. As always, the overriding message of these articles is that the perceived constraints of living in a condominium can be overcome.

A final point here is that the emphasis on design is not specific to countering negative perceptions related to condominium size. In fact, design in all its forms (interior and exterior architecture, materials and finishes, decoration and furniture) is closely aligned with condominiums in advertisements and articles. Chapter 6 details the many links between condominiums and design, but suffice it to say that the design-related responses to negative perceptions of condominium size are likely much more influential when part of a larger discourse based around design rather than the arbitrary, isolated strategies they might have appeared to be in this account.

5.3.4 Other negative perceptions of high-rise living

Other widespread concerns about high-rise living are dealt with less frequently, but for each issue, the message is the same: the perceived shortcomings related to condominium tenure are
exaggerated or incorrect, and can be overcome. One realtor, for example, states that many seniors do not consider condominiums for fear of “not being able to have a garden anymore” (Day, 1999). This concern must be relatively widespread: Condo Living published 190 articles about high-rise gardening during its run, all of them outlining different projects rather than attempting to reassure readers that condo gardening is possible. The lack of a perceived need to address this point is in direct contrast to the articles arguing that condominiums were suitable for family, for example. Here, the ability of condominium owners to (easily) garden is implicit, and assumed, and thus plays a strongly normative role.

Regarding perceptions of the condominium as a risky investment, few (14 of 944) recent era advertisements make appeals to investment worthiness. The articles in Condo Living, however, follow real estate section tradition by publishing regular features related to condominium starts, sales and other statistics. These and other articles have the ostensible purpose of providing ‘objective’ data; their latent function is of course to legitimate property ownership and related activities in general, and condominium purchases in particular. Some of these are almost quaint in their hyperbole: “Still growing strong,” (Boyle, 2005) and “The sky’s the limit” (Harding, 2002a) are two such. Others argue more subtly for condominium purchases, such as an article by an industry consultant titled “Demographic shift means steady demand for condos,” (Shim, 2004). Regardless of their content, the form and appearance of these articles are often quite close to hard news, peppered with quotes from consultants and industry insiders and supported by quantitative data in the form of sales figures, graphs, charts and statistics, from real estate boards, realtors and Statistics Canada. This is one of many strategies used to disguise the promotional role of Condo Living and position it alongside the more authoritative sections of the newspaper.

What are notably absent from Condo Living are articles that concentrate on economic gain. While increases in equity are mentioned in many articles, they are never the focus. This absence is particularly surprising because tales of economic windfalls were quite common in various media (and public discourse) in the years prior to sub-prime crash. In the early and mid 2000s, for example, there were several real estate and DIY television shows whose central theme was ‘flipping’ real estate for quick profit. One possible reason is that developers in Toronto might not have been pleased to see anything that might negatively affect (by possibly bringing about a price peak and subsequent collapse) what was a relatively predictable, growing and seemingly
sustainable market. Instead, the message of the Condo Living articles was simply the established wisdom in the industry: real estate is a good long-term investment.

Very rarely, an article would appear that attempted to counter the perception that condominium owners will have little concern or connection with their neighbourhood, a point examined by Kern (2007). An article about author Joy Kogawa and her husband counters this, suggesting that condos and their residents can be a vital part of their neighbourhoods. Kogawa was initially reluctant to move into a condo, the “glitz and power and high-rise stuff that I have always railed against…where the enemy dwelled, up in the sky, removed” (LaPorte, 1998). After engaging with community through various volunteer efforts, however, Kogawa notes “The road I’m on right now is so rich that I can’t imagine it being richer” (ibid).

5.3.5 Testimonial articles, peer groups and meaning

Condo Living published a number of articles written by condominium owners that can be interpreted as potentially powerful branding mechanisms. In these articles, the authors typically describe what they experienced during the process of buying a condominium and subsequently moving in. The articles were prominently featured, typically being positioned on the front page of the section, accompanied by a large photograph. Apart from their salience, testimonial articles are worth considering for many reasons. They provide authenticity for the section by creating the impression that it is a source of objective information (i.e. from real condominium owners) and not simply a mouthpiece for developers. The nearly universally positive message of the testimonials also provides support for both the articles and advertisements in Condo Living, again helping to defuse suspicions about the promotional nature of the real estate section. More importantly, however, testimonial articles are important because, as described above, they have the ability to connect meaningful life events to condominiums and allow readers—and especially peer group readers—to easily identify with the experiences being related by the author. For every person, there are peer or ‘reference groups’ with whom they identify or whom they reject, and advertising images using either of these groups can be particularly persuasive in either a positive or negative sense (O’Shaughnessy, 2004). People tend strongly to conform to group norms, part of the reason why testimonial advertisements have existed for decades. Beyond that, however, by dealing with meaningful life moments, the testimonials in Condo Living make a strong
emotional appeal, and this has profound implications for branding: ‘Anything that concerns us has the potential to arouse our emotions… [E]motions engage us with their objects in such a way as to make them lose their neutrality: they become marked by being lovable, disgusting, exciting, fearful and so on. The same applies if the object of the emotion is a market offering: we are no longer indifferent to it… Advertising that resonates emotionally stands more chance of inducing a change in beliefs and values/motives/wants/desires than one based on logic alone’ (ibid., p. 27). From this perspective, it is easy to imagine the testimonial playing precisely the same role as affective visual imagery in conventional commercials, connecting strong emotions and positive life events with a product, in this case the condominium. Strange as it might seem, the most powerful promotional material in Condo Living may be neither its advertisements, nor the articles produced by its staff, but the lived experience articles written by condominium owners.

A total of 84 testimonial or lived experience articles appeared in Condo Living, with the vast majority (80) being written by women. The most compelling are those written by young women and seniors, since both groups describe life-changing experiences. Some of these accounts are detailed in Chapter 7, which explores how testimonial articles help define two target markets for Toronto condominiums. The accounts by women between these two age groups often relate the details of a move from an existing home to a new condominium, and therefore lack the drama and emotion experienced by first time buyers and downsizers. As a result, they often take the form of buyer’s advice, alerting people to what they should look for during their pre-delivery inspection, how to choose finishes, legal obligations and other technical phases of the condominium purchase process. There are exceptions however, which simply approach condominium living as a novel experience whose implications need to be considered and described. These accounts may be particularly influential testimonials because they act as positive, generalized ‘user reviews’ for the idea of living in a condominium, which by implication is a novel or unconventional choice—or at least one that needs explanation and justification.

Among the notable lived experience articles is a group of essays by a middle-aged woman called Lilianne White, which began in July 2000 with her reflecting on her recent move from a house in the suburbs to a downtown Toronto condominium. Like many others of its kind, the article consumes most of the first page of the Condo Living section, and is accompanied by two large photographs. One photograph shows the interior of her condominium, and like the photograph of
the Thanksgiving dinner discussed above, this one is notable for how far it departs from the
public image of the condominium: instead of high modern and minimal, this unit is
conventional and casual in its furnishings and decoration. The windows are large, but they are
not floor-to-ceiling, nor do they consume the entire wall. Although less eloquent than the
Thanksgiving photograph—there is no narrative to this one—it is nonetheless extremely useful in
establishing credibility, and in demonstrating that the condominium does not require a high
modern, minimalist aesthetic. It promises that the experience that the author relates is
applicable to ‘normal’ people, and that what follows is a credible account of what
condominium is really like, as opposed to what is presented in advertisements. This process of
perception, regardless of how poorly it would stand up to academic scrutiny, is the raison

d’être for testimonial articles.

The article’s subhead delivers the message quickly: ‘Bye, bye burbs, hello convenient downtown
digs’ (White, 2000). The author expands on the theme, contrasting the demands made on her by
her four-bedroom suburban house, and the rewards she finds in her downtown condominium and
its one bedroom and den. The bulk of the article deals with the author’s sense of wonder at the
amount of free time she has added to her life by eliminating a daily commute that was taking two
hours or more. It seems an obvious idea that moving closer to work would save time, yet the
space the author devotes to it (talking about using the project facilities, exercising, reading,
pursuing hobbies and so on) indicates that an unexpected attitude shift has taken place, that she
perhaps simply never questioned that moving to the suburbs was what people did, and that doing
so necessarily entailed long commutes. In other words, it seems very likely that the author did
not perceive living in a condominium as an option that was available to her. (Incidentally, this is
a latent theme in many of the testimonial articles: that people ‘never considered’ living in a condominium until some facilitating event or circumstance took place.) This is part of what makes the article compelling; people enjoy reading about other people’s life transformations, particularly if they have happy endings. Like the Thanksgiving testimonial, this one will resonate particularly strongly with peer group members who are also evaluating their life at middle age and perhaps finding it less than perfect. More to the point, this testimonial similarly links highly positive life events to the condominium while questioning the realities and implications of suburban home ownership.

The author notes that her only real fear was not having enough space, but finds that getting rid of unused objects takes care of the problem. Not only is her 800 square foot condominium satisfactory, ‘I wouldn’t trade my condo in Toronto for one twice the size if it were more than a short distance from where I work’. Again, conventional notions of appropriate living space are questioned, and found wanting: ‘People often ask me, “So, how do you like it in the big city?” My answer: “Fantastic—I’m having the time of my life” (ibid.).

Follow-up articles expand on these themes, playing off the convenience of the condominium versus the demands of the single-family house in the suburbs. There is, however, another smaller attitude shift discussed. After months of enjoying the opportunity to walk to work and various amenities, the author of the testimonial begins to question her need for a car, and confronts the naturalness of automobile ownership: ‘I’d owned a car since I was 16 years old. How could I possibly exist without one?’ (White, 2001). The answer she provides: ‘as I’ve discovered, better than ever’. She relates the ways walking has improved her life, which completes her repudiation of the suburban dream: she has eliminated both the single-family house and the automobile from her life, and the agent of change has been the condominium. Again, I think it would be difficult to overstate the importance of messages like this—revolving around positive life transformations—for brand creation, particularly when delivered by a peer.

The mandate of Condo Living was to sell advertising, and indirectly, to sell condominiums, but through testimonials like these, it may have also played a role in a much larger process involving changed attitudes toward high-rise living. It seems clear that for many people who have the resources to choose their residence, the condominium has not been among their list of possibilities; like all social constructions, the stated preference for suburban living in detached
houses succeeds and is perpetuated by its naturalness and its appearance as ‘obviously’ the best and most logical type of dwelling to aspire to. Testimonials like those discussed are subversive because they (often explicitly) question these assumptions. They are appealing because of their positive narrative arc and compelling because they invoke strong emotions and major life events to make their point. At the same time, they have plausible, anecdotal evidence to support their positions, and thus avoid being read as either transparently promotional hyperbole or agenda-driven polemics.

Regarding the rebranding process as a whole, what is fascinating to note is the increasing reluctance over time of condominium developers to attempt to counter negative perceptions about their product in advertisements. Nothing sums up this evolution than the issue of crime and security. In the 1970s, we have six uniformed guards standing beside a condominium entry point; in the recent era, we have a stylishly dressed concierge standing behind a counter that would not be out of place in a boutique hotel. Yet even this indirect nod to concerns about safety is somewhat unusual, compared to the nearly complete absence of advertisements that attempt to justify the small size or the investment potential of condominiums. The articles in Condo Living, conversely, operate from an entirely different sensibility, presenting high-rise living as a residential option that presents barriers, but ones that can be overcome relatively easily as part of process that will ultimately be personally and financially rewarding. This juxtaposition of sensibilities is one of the primary reasons the Condo Living section has the possibility of being much more than the sum of its parts: rather than diminishing the credibility of advertisements, the articles in Condo Living ground them in reality by presenting what appears to be objective information about high-rise living. Therefore what appears to be dubious editorial policy—publishing articles that highlight perceived shortcoming of the product which funds the section—instead turns out to comprise an effective manner of adding credibility to the public image of the condo while countering objections.

5.4 Differentiating the condo from other dwelling types

Overcoming the perceived negative perceptions of high-rise living is only one part of the rebranding process. A crucial second step involves creating an identity, or a set of positive associations. This section examines condominium imagery in advertisements in order to argue
that in the recent-era, the public image of the condominium became quite narrowly defined—as a high-style dwelling type well-suited to young, single women—yet simultaneously maintained broad appeal by emphasizing the structural and design attributes of condominiums, along with its positive social and cultural lifestyle implications. More specifically, it will be shown that exterior and interior design, and project facilities structurally differentiate the high-rise condominium from other dwelling types. Similarly, lifestyle associations with convenience, urbanity, legitimate culture and formal luxury contribute to a representation of condominiums as a dwelling type that facilitates social, public activities—in direct contrast to the inward-directed, isolationist sensibility that characterizes a suburban low-rise lifestyle. And finally, it will be shown that the public image of the condominium has a distinct set of target markets—predominantly female—that overlap very little with that of the single-family house.

5.4.1 The structural aspects of the public image of the condo

While the single-family home exists as an ideological construct, it is also true that it has a more tangible existence as well, related to configuration expectations involving the number and size of rooms, overall size and appearance of the dwelling, and size of the land parcel it occupies. The subject of this section is how the public image of the condominium was formulated to counter these aspirational dwelling expectations. Previously, it was shown that developers chose to engage negative perceptions related to condominium size rather than simply ignore them, as was the case with negative associations related to family. It seems an odd strategy, given that the condominium offers literally none of the structural characteristics that the single-family house does. The recent-era condominium is typically far smaller, and contains far fewer rooms than even ‘starter’ houses in new subdivisions. If a condominium unit has any outdoor space—and many do not—it is likely to be similarly small and offer little privacy. In its style, the mainstream condominium unit can make no appeals to the historicist architectural styles to which people seem increasingly drawn, and which characterize the new suburban house (Harris & Dostrovsky, 2008; Dostrovsky & Harris, 2008). On a more pragmatic level, while low-rise marketing relies heavily on images of particular models—allowing customer to see ‘their’ house—high-rise marketing cannot: the entire structure can of course be shown, but not individual units. This is somewhat akin to attempting to sell a car using only images of, and taken from, its interior. Given this combination of circumstances, it is somewhat surprising to discover that developers
have *increasingly* foregrounded the physical characteristics of condominium units in their marketing.

Rather than confronting the perceived structural shortcomings of the condominium, the strategy that emerged followed the lead of prominent niche brands like Apple and BMW in surrounding the condominium with a discourse of leading-edge design. The approach involves the linking of exterior architecture, interior layout and configuration, and interior decoration with the latest trends in these fields, bolstered by the simultaneous (although happenstance) promotion of a relatively small group of Toronto-based architects and interior designers in marketing materials and in Condo Living articles. This has occurred during (and has participated in) a return to, and reworking of, the modernist design aesthetics that reached their peak in the 1950s. The result is that the condominium gained cachet for embodying the latest design trends and also gained a ready-made cultural legitimacy through its association with increasingly admired mid-century design along with celebrity designers and architects of the past and present. This approach, like many others that characterize the recent-era condo succeeds by not attempting to compete directly with the perceived assets of the single-family house—a competition that would always result in failure—but by emphasizing difference. As a result of this differentiation, the condominium can be positioned not as a poor imitation of the single-family house but as an innovative and distinct dwelling type with its own set of unique advantages.

The linking of condominiums with design is evident in the prominence of architecture and interior design in advertisements and Condo Living articles. While large-volume developers like Tridel, Monarch and Pemberton remained relatively conservative in their architecture during the post-recession era, numerous other, less well-established developers turned to aggressive architecture as a way to differentiate themselves. Unsurprisingly, they placed far greater importance on architecture in their marketing, and exterior architecture became increasingly prominent both in frequency of representation in advertisements and in the discourse surrounding condominiums. Table 1, below, details the trend, with advertisements portraying only the exterior of projects increasing from 39% in the early study period to 58% in the most recent period.
Beyond this, Condo Living made architecture front page news—the front page of the real estate section at least—by profiling local architects and their firms. Condo Living also published a long running series by Christopher Hume that critiqued the architecture of condominiums. Through these and related articles, as well as advertisements for high-design projects, architecture and the condominium were continually linked.

A similar situation occurred regarding interior designers, who are virtually absent from condominium advertisements until the mid-1990s when they began to be named and portrayed prominently in marketing campaigns. A long-running series of advertisements for the Merchandise Building, for example, was based entirely on design, featuring the work of Toronto firm Cecconi Simone in laying out and decorating the project’s suites. Even when interior designers were not made part of print advertising campaigns, they remained crucial to the packaging of the condominium because they were employed to design the model suites and sales centres of all but the most mundane projects. Whatever their role, designers provided Condo Living writers and editors with the opportunity to personalize promotional articles that outlined a project’s details or described the opening of a model suite; nearly every edition of Condo Living made mention of a local designer in either an advertisement or article.

A fascinating by-product of salience of architecture and interior design is that a small group of local firms became brands in their own right, recursively enhancing the importance of design for

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Table 1: Interior and exterior portrayals by era (%)
condominiums while simultaneously adding disproportionately greater value to the projects with which they were associated. This elevation, or process of celebrity making, of local designers is illustrated by the publication of a full-page advertisement to announce the grand opening of a waterfront project. The advertisement featured a small artist’s rendering of the project in the lower right corner; the top two-thirds of the advertisement comprises pictures of four interior designers and their work at the project: Bryan Gluckstein, Mike Niven, Cecconi Simone, and Ralph Lauren. What is most notable is that the internationally prominent Lauren is given no greater prominence than the other three, all of whom are Toronto-based. Beyond that, it is illustrative that the developer did not simply hire Ralph Lauren only, as would likely have occurred in the past. That the developer used no less than four leading interior designers, and based their grand opening marketing campaign around them is even more telling.

This continual linking of architecture and interior design with the condominium is a powerful form of branding described by Douglas Holt as “mind share” branding that occurs with the repetition of a specific message over time, so that when a consumer thinks of a particular brand—Volvo, say—they think of the repeated attributes: boxy, and safe (Holt, 2004). Nonetheless, the link between design and condominiums was not simply a hollow marketing ploy: one reason the public image of the Toronto condominium gained traction and remained durable is likely because the product generally delivered what the marketing discourse promised. Design changes created demonstrable differences between the recent era condominium and its predecessors. While niche market developers took the lead, even mainstream developers eventually adopted higher ceilings, floor to ceiling windows, upgraded finishes and revised layouts that not only made units more attractive to consumers but also differentiated them from older developments. There is undoubtedly an aspect of ‘planned obsolescence’ predicated on the predictable consumer demand for whatever is new, but it would be difficult, I think, to argue that the layout changes in particular represented more style than substance: taller ceilings, expanses of glass, and open concept layouts do make small condominium units far more pleasant spaces than the gloomy products of previous rounds of condominium developments.

Chapter 6 discusses these and other design-related ideas in greater detail, but suffice it here to say that it would be difficult to overstate the importance of representing the public image of the condominium as design-led in the effort to differentiate the condominium from its competitors.
5.4.2 Facilities

While design has recently emerged as a leading differentiator for condominiums, project amenities have always played this role: the first advertisement for a high-rise condominium to appear in the *Toronto Star* (21 February 1970) lists an outdoor pool, gym, sauna and outdoor playground among the project’s attributes, and many projects had lengthier lists. Apart from simply listing amenities in advertising copy, it was quite common for developers to use hand-drawn montages of people using a project’s many amenities: depictions of people swimming, enjoying the sauna, and exercising were *de rigeur*. Partly this was done to display young people in limited clothing, both as an attention-getting advertising technique and to suggest that this was the kind of lifestyle on offer. Beyond these virtually standard amenities, developers added a surprisingly broad range of other facilities and activity spaces such as party rooms, woodworking studios, ping-pong and billiards rooms.

One particularly creative developer included pictures (but no confirming text) showing people golfing and playing tennis—relatively common amenities—but also scuba diving, fencing, and horseback riding.

It is clear from these examples that there was a pre-existing expectation that condominiums would provide amenities, almost certainly due to the inclusion of similar amenities by rental apartments. The need to differentiate condominiums from rental apartments likely explains excesses like those mentioned above but also the changes that occurred during the 1980s in which amenities came to be marketed according to their grandeur and luxury. While apartments had lobbies, they were not likely to have multi-story lobbies clad in marble; while apartments might have an exercise room, condominiums boasted of huge, modern gyms with professional...
equipment. And while apartments might have an intercom system, condominiums had concierges and extensive security systems.

In the recent era, amenities have ceased to occupy a central place in condominium marketing even as their extravagance has continued to increase, particularly in large, mainstream projects. One reason for this surely the general shift in advertising that relies more heavily on affective than informational approaches. Another reason may be that that developers had no need to differentiate their products from rentals because so few high-rise rentals have been built over the past quarter century. In addition, very visible condominium types like the high-design mid-rise, and the loft conversion have tended to have few or no amenities since the initial capital cost and the subsequent maintenance would be prohibitive for projects with relatively few owners.

This is not to say that amenities are no longer important or wanted. Rather, that at this point, condominiums are so closely associated with amenities that there would be little to be gained by focusing promotional campaigns around attributes likes gyms and pools that are simply expected to be present. Facilities, then, currently function as differentiators within the condominium universe as opposed to features around which marketing campaigns are based.

The apparent paradox this presents is the position of amenities as secondary to marketing campaigns—suggesting their importance is also secondary to prospective buyers—despite the elaborate sets of amenities that characterize many condominium projects. The situation is made more perplexing by the low usage rate of amenities: even the most optimistic estimates see 40% of residents using amenities frequently, with other estimates pegging the number at 10% and rising to at most one-third of residents (Binks, 2004). Especially since it seems that condominium owners and prospective buyers (mistakenly) assume that amenities are the major component of their condo fees, it seems puzzling that people would be willing to pay for amenities they will likely not use.

Developers contend that buyers feel that amenities will help resale value (Adair, 2002), but it seems equally likely that elaborate amenities are implemented by developers in order to differentiate their project from those of competitors: buyers in Toronto have had many projects from which to choose, leading one developer to comment, ‘that’s why we have to come up with something different’ (Bain, 1998). Specific amenities may appeal to certain individuals: exercise enthusiasts, for example, may be able to cancel costly memberships to health clubs if their
condominium has a well-equipped gym. Nonetheless, one possibility to explain the paradox of amenities is that individual amenities may not differentiate the condominium from other dwelling types but the idea of amenities (and perceptions of what they say about condominium owners) do.

It may be that, for condominium owners, a project’s amenities are at least as important in how well they reflect owners’ aspirations and support their self-image as they are for their objective utility. The array of amenities varies from project to project and by location, and demographics, but the lifestyle they promise is uniformly one that suggests leisure and luxury—and, by extension, wealth. ‘They may not use them, but they want them there’ says a spokesperson for a large mainstream developer’ (Binks, 2004). Another developer concurs, noting that when people are selling, amenities are one of the first things shown to prospective buyers. In a testimonial article, one condominium owner notes, after having three nights of having the project pool entirely to themselves, ‘it felt as if we’d stepped into the picture-perfect luxury world portrayed in condo brochures’ (Mattos, 2007). More tellingly, the author subsequently says that she is quickly becoming bored with swimming ‘but our private-pool time was worth every penny spent on maintenance fees’ (ibid). The message is clear: even when the author stops using the pool—an event that seems certain—she will still gain satisfaction from it. A developer coincidentally likens the attitude of condominium owners toward unused facilities to owners of houses with a backyard pool, arguing that ‘just because they are not using it doesn’t mean they are not appreciating it’ (Binks, 2004). Beyond its plausible explanation of condominium owners’ attitudes towards amenities, this statement is interesting in suggesting that the commonly owned facilities present in condominium projects may be perceived in a way identical to that which single-family house owners perceived their privately owned amenities. If accurate, it presents the novel idea that the condominium can be differentiated as a distinct dwelling type yet still compete directly with the single-family in some respects.

The physical form of the condominium therefore differentiates it from other dwelling types due to the discourse of design that informs representations of condominiums and in the range and magnitude of facilities that are offered. At the same time, however, the grandeur and privilege associated with an extravagant array of amenities may allow a simultaneous positioning of the condominium as a novel counterpart to exurban estates by making identical appeals to pride of ownership, status and sense of achievement. As a result, condominium owners can feel as though
they have made a safe and socially legitimated purchase decision that aligns with aspirations to owning a ‘dream’ home. It is apparent that this kind of meaning would have a much greater chance of achieving mainstream success than one that positioned the condominium as the complete antithesis to the single-family house. Few consumers are willing to completely reject a dominant commodity type like the single-family house and its largely positive associations; doing so equates to a conscious decision to opt out of widespread beliefs. Conversely, a commodity that claims to offer similar (or better) rewards than the dominant one, but does so in a new way will have a much greater chance of mainstream success. Now as in the past, ‘new and improved’ products that closely resemble category leaders typically fare much better than products that attempt to invent entirely new categories. It may be that the continually increasing extravagance of amenities over time has allowed the recent-era condominium to be perceived much more as a ‘new and improved’ dwelling that reworks and offers improvements on (rather than rejects) the concepts associated with the single-family home.

The structural attributes of the high-rise condominium would seem to present a serious obstacle to the creation of positive perceptions of the high-rise condominium, especially concerning the size of units. Yet by emphasizing exterior and interior design, developers have recast unit size as a relative problem that can be overcome, stylishly. In addition, the possibility that condominium owners’ attitudes toward commonly owned amenities mirrors the attitudes of house owners to their amenities may help blunt concerns about condominium size. Together, these two processes represent a substantial rebranding of the condominium by taking what was previously a negative—the physical constraints of high-rise living—and turning them into a positive by invoking style, design, and conventional aspirations to exurban grandeur. What may have contributed to the success of the processes is how well they fit with existing and reworked representations of the lifestyle(s) that condominiums promise, which is the subject matter of the following section.

5.4.3 Lifestyle

The high-rise condominium has always been understood to entail the adoption by residents of a set of activities and responsibilities (i.e. a ‘lifestyle’) that are unconventional relative to those thought to accompany life in a detached, single-family house. As outlined above, some of these
lifestyle changes are a function of condominium owners having access to a range of amenities, and some a function of the physical configuration of high-rise towers as multi-family dwellings. Beyond these, the condominium has been similarly closely identified with lifestyle changes involving convenience as it relates to location within the city and to reduced maintenance requirements. As early as 1970, developers were promoting condominium living as “carefree” and urging people to buy a unit “then relax—no lawn cutting, snow shoveling, waste collection or maintenance of grounds, lobbies, corridors, landscaping etc” (Figure 13).

While convenience remains strongly associated with condominium living, it featured prominently in advertisements for only a few years. Other lifestyle themes have been much more durable. Condominiums have long been, and remain, positioned as country clubs or resorts, and as ‘adult lifestyle’ residences perfectly suited to young singles. In the recent era, however, the leading lifestyle themes are those related to a broad interpretation of ‘urbanity’, relying on representations of ‘culture’, entertainment and consumption. In this section, I will outline how appeals to urbanity—virtually absent until the mid-1980s—have come to define the lifestyle associations of the condominium in advertisements and how articles in Condo Living supported these representations. Before beginning that discussion, however, it may be useful to first specify what appeals condominium advertisements have tended to make.

Condominium advertisements, even when they occupy an entire newspaper page, are generally quite straightforward documents that usually rely on a single concept in their attempt to attract purchasers. Although an advertisement may, for example, list a number of reasons to justify the purchase of a condominium such as amenities, location and suite size, these may all be subservient to a more salient reason such as affordability or value. The reliance on a single, primary motivator in advertisements makes sense from a marketing perspective: better to leave readers with a single, strong message than two potentially competing messages. In order to
characterize the nature of appeals made in condominium advertisements, each ad in the database was coded according to its primary appeal, using the choices (derived from trials) listed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Example themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Convenience, urbanity, adult lifestyle, spa/resort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Great spaces, famous architect or designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Affordability, value, investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Hurry, nearly sold out; grand opening at noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxury</td>
<td>Romantic dinners or social events; high culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Green space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer reputation</td>
<td>Trust [developer] to repeat their previous successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building history</td>
<td>Live in a historic building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>The perfect place for your children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Your safety is our biggest concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>The latest entertainment and security technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Attributes used to code advertisement theme

The coding rules were not elaborate. Advertisements whose primary message revolved around how one’s activities and habits would be transformed by condominium ownership were coded ‘lifestyle’. Design appeals are those which detail novel or unusual configurations, finishes or decoration. Advertisements whose primary message is affordability, or value for money, or investment potential were coded ‘financial’. Advertisements that appeal to concepts of luxury or exclusivity explicitly through text, or implicitly through the use of visual cues such as formal
attire, jewellery, and champagne were coded as ‘luxury’. The remaining attributes, which comprised a tiny minority of all appeals, are self-explanatory.

I debated whether the luxury category should be folded into the lifestyle category but decided against it on the rationale that appeals to luxury are likely to be perceived as symbolic, that the message is simply that the project is one that has luxurious appointments and is somewhat exclusive—not that people in tuxedos, evening gowns and diamonds are spotted with great frequency in the lobbies and hallways.

The most subjective aspect of the coding was of course deciding what each advertisement’s primary appeal was. Nearly every advertisement, for example, lists price and amenities, meaning that affordability or value could be the primary appeal. Similarly, many advertisements show people engaged in enjoyable activities—although a surprising number of advertisements depict people doing vigorous exercise, including many instances of women on exercise bicycles—which raises the possibility of lifestyle being the primary appeal. In the end, I classified advertisements by evaluating whether textual or graphic appeals were most prominent, which messages appeared with greatest frequency, and whether there was cohesion between text and graphics or within text alone. An advertisement using the skyline of Toronto as its background—suggesting urbanity, and therefore ‘lifestyle’—would not likely be classified as having lifestyle as its primary message if the accompanying text failed to mention the benefits of city living, or exhorted people to buy quickly, or merely listed amenities. Conversely, an advertisement using multiple small pictures of urban settings, and a large headline reading ‘Live Downtown!’ would likely be coded ‘lifestyle’ despite the inclusion of a prominent sidebar outlining prices and amenities.

Table 3 shows these appeals and their frequency.
Here, as in many of the other analyses carried out as part of this research, there appears to be a disjunction between the most recent study period and the two previous ones. In this case, appeals to lifestyle and design account for a combined 69% of all advertisements from 1995 to 2007 compared to only relatively similarly totals of 42% and 36% in the earlier periods. The gains in lifestyle and design appeal come at the expense of appeals to finance and luxury, which together effectively comprised half of the advertisements in the early study periods but less than a quarter in the most recent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxury</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer reputation</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building history</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>0%</td>
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</tr>
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**Table 3: Primary ad theme, by era (%)**
The increased reliance on lifestyle appeals is perhaps the least surprising since it mirrors shifts in advertising as whole in which products have increasingly been marketed not on their particular attributes but on how they can improve people’s lives. Something similar may account for the increased prominence of design: as will be argued in the next chapter, the high-rise condominium has participated in the rise of high-design consumer products that has accelerated in recent years (Moor, 2007) and this is reflected in a notable increase in appeals to design in promotional campaigns.

The notable decline in financial appeals represents a repositioning of the condominium. Appeals based on affordability and value are typically made by brands and products that have little else to recommend them; upscale and premium brands rarely market their value-for-dollar, preferring to focus on an attribute such as heritage or design that has positive, aspirational or exclusive associations. Appeals to affordability and value, on the other hand, suggest that a product is cheap in absolute terms, or suspiciously inexpensive given the claims it makes. In the case of the condominium, the high frequency of appeals to finance in the early study periods implicitly positioned it as a poor cousin to the single-family house with only its low price or good value for money to recommend it. Conversely, the markedly reduced appeals to finance-related concerns in the recent study period indicate an upward repositioning of the condominium to the class of design-led brands whose promises are far different: namely, you may have to pay more for them, but it will be money well spent. A fascinating aspect of this shift is that it has been achieved for mainstream condominiums: appeals to traditional luxury are by far the fewest in the recent study period, indicating that rebranding as a lifestyle and design-based product is not camouflage for a dramatic move upward in pricing.

Although the changes in these attributes would be interesting to explore in greater detail, the discussion that follows concentrates on lifestyle because appeals to it are the most numerous in the recent study period but also because these appeals take a variety of different approaches that nonetheless articulate a coherent lifestyle image for the high-rise condominium.

As noted in the introduction to this section, appeals based on convenience, and especially those regarding low maintenance requirements appeared with far less frequency than was expected, given the strong association this concept has with the condominium. Instead, three other forms of lifestyle appeals characterize the early study period: two different interpretations of ‘adult
lifestyle’, and—much less frequently—an approach that equates the condominium with a country club, based on the leisure activities that both provide.

In the first kind of ‘adult lifestyle’ appeal, the term or a variant was used as a euphemism for ‘children not welcome’ in order to warn off families while attracting people who wanted to live in a child-free building. In the majority of cases, the anti-child message is left implicit. Typical is a 1978 advertisement captioned ‘a private retreat for adults’ (Figure 14). In 1971 and 1972, a project ran a series of ten advertisements that prominently described it as ‘an adult building’. The anti-child message was delivered by including in each advertisement a photograph of unit owners, all of whom appear to be in their sixties and seventies. Similarly, another project exhorted prospective buyers to ‘Come play our adult games’ (Toronto Star, 18 March 1978, E22), which appeared in large print above a drawing of a tennis racquet, pool cues and balls, and exercise bike, and shuffleboard equipment. The text promises that the project’s recreational facilities are ‘devoted exclusively to the whims and pleasures of the grownup adult’. Another ad in the series acknowledges that buyers can choose from many new condominiums, ‘assuming, of course, that you don’t mind living in a building which also caters to families with young children’ (Toronto Star, 10 December 1977, E10). Captioned ‘Live where you can play with children your own age’, the ad boasts that the project is designed exclusively for adults, ‘not for trivial, childish needs’. Driving the point home, the text subsequently notes that ‘we love children just as much as the next person. In fact, they’re more than welcome to visit you any time you wish’. In the advertisement’s concluding block of text, age discrimination is presented as a joke that reads more like a threat: ‘So cheer-up, grownup, and come see [project name]. It’s the one condominium designed especially for you. No kidding.’

The second form of ‘adult lifestyle’ appeal, which occurs far more frequently, is one that promises an active social life for singles. Where advertisements hinting at (or promising) a child-free environment employ illustrations of older residents, or simply the building exterior, appeals
to a busy social life use illustrations of young and stylish people. Particularly in the 1970s, this kind of advertisement shows of high degree of conformity, consisting of a hand-drawn montage and an accompanying, large-print tagline that consume two-thirds of the advertisement’s space.

**Figure 15: Social, ‘adult-lifestyle’ advertisements**
(Source: Toronto Star 5 October 1974, E20; 17 May 1975, A4)

In some arrangement, the montage typically contains representations of the project exterior, single people (often women in bikinis), extravagantly dressed young couples wearing sunglasses, engaging in social activities or simply looking stylish. Cocktail and wine glasses are common. Portrayals of individuals enjoying the project’s amenities are also common. The overall impression these images give is one of constant activity being available in a convivial, party atmosphere conducive to meeting people. A 1978 advertisement (Figure 16), for example, uses a hand drawn montage of four sets of people: a young couple in bathing suits, walks toward the right

**Figure 16: adult-lifestyle montage**
(Source: Toronto Star 19 August 1978, E13)
border of the advertisement. A woman in a bathing suit sits on a chaise longue being serenaded by a man (also in a bathing suit) playing a guitar; a group of three people, appearing only as small silhouettes, sit beneath a large umbrella; and another young couple, fully dressed this time, laugh as they lean on their balcony railing, cocktails in hand, looking off into the distance. The ad’s large caption reads, ‘for the better times’.

This message, if not its mode, has survived through the years. A 2005 advertisement depicts a young man and woman laughing exuberantly, foreheads touching, under a large point caption that reads “action central” (Toronto Star, 26 March 2005, P8). The same developer sank to new and unprecedented depths by creating an advertisement for a different project that featured a close-up photograph of a young Asian woman over the caption “Yonge and enticing” (Toronto Star, 19 March 2005, P16). More subtle approaches are far more common, however. A full-page 2003 advertisement (Figure 17, below), for example, is little more than a recent-era update of the 1970s adult-lifestyle montage, but in this case using photographs—more than thirty of them—instead of drawings. The advertisement is part of a multi-year campaign that adopts the visual style of advertisements for Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger to the point of employing unusually attractive models (when more ‘normal’ looking models are the rule) as well as a frequently repeated, rectilinear logo in red, white and blue that strongly recalls the Hilfiger logo. The imagery is little changed from that of the 1970s, featuring lightly dressed young people engaged in all sorts of sports and leisure activities; when couples are portrayed they are predominantly shown sharing a romantic, intimate moment while singles are shown swimming, cycling or jogging. Interspersed are images of sailboats on the water, a cliché that similarly dates back to the earliest advertisements for waterfront condominiums.
Figure 1: present-day, adult-lifestyle photo-montage
(Source: Toronto Star 22 February 2003, R8)
What separates the recent era ‘adult lifestyle’ advertisements is the greatly increased frequency with which people in groups are portrayed. In the montages of the 1970s, many people are depicted, but in the vast majority of cases, they are singles or couples rather than the groups of four, or five people that are relatively common in recent advertisements. The majority of recent advertisements depict groups of people interacting in spaces that we assume are part of the owner’s apartment (although it usually impossible to discern which person is the unit owner) or a project facility such as a party room or rooftop patio. In some cases, however, groups are shown in non-specific locations that make no attempt at connecting the people, the activity and the project being advertised.

Figure 18: Advertisements using images of people in groups have become more common
(Source: Toronto Star 31 May 2003, P4; 21 September 2002, P2)

What functions do these images have? Most obviously, they act as demographic signifiers in the same way as the 1970s testimonial advertisements that used photographs of seniors to warn off younger buyers. At the same time, these advertisements are predicated on, and promise, a ‘social’ lifestyle that takes place outside the home that, to a great extent, involves acquaintances and friends rather than family members. This is classic emotional marketing that says little about
the product specifically but implies through imagery that ownership will be rewarding on many levels. More important, however, is how profoundly these images of an outward-directed, social lifestyle vary from the inward-directed, family-based lifestyle that characterizes low-rise marketing. As with invocations of design in advertisements and articles, this approach positions the condominium not as a lesser version of the single-family house (and all that it promises) but as a distinct dwelling type with its own unique benefits.

5.4.4 Invoking Urbanity

Claiming that urbanity is central to the image of condominiums is likely to bring about yawns and shrugs rather than gasps of astonishment, since even ‘suburban’ condominiums tend to be located along major arteries, making them relatively central—‘urban’ even—in comparison to the far more peripheral locations in which low-rise housing has been built over the past few decades. Yet advertisements invoking urbanity in any form were virtually absent until the early 1980s, and did not appear with any great frequency until the end of that decade. From the mid-1990s, however, notions of urbanity in various forms have become predominant, employing visual cues such as skylines and waterfronts, well-known locations and intersections, and references to (and associations with) cultural and entertainment venues, and luxury and boutique hotels. At the same time, projects located in the ‘suburban downtowns’ of North York and Mississauga have promised a different sort of enclosed, all-under-one-roof urbanity that is in many ways reminiscent of shopping malls or the spaces created within the giant casino complexes that line the south end of the Strip in Las Vegas.

As with many of the processes discussed here, the use of urbanity to differentiate the condominium was a product of circumstance rather than the result of a coherent plan. In this case, invocations of urbanity increased in lock step with the percentage of advertised condominiums built within the boundaries of the former City of Toronto (which excludes York and East York, along with the suburbs of Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke Mississauga). Between 1969 and 1984, for example, only 15% of the high-rise projects advertised were located in Toronto. Between 1985 and 1994 this number rises to 32%. After 1995, when urbanity is a leading theme, fully 72% of the projects advertised were located in Toronto. I am not certain how accurately this mirrors the actual construction of condominium units in the Greater Toronto
Area, so this remains an interesting if secondary point. Nonetheless, the public image constructed in the recent era clearly relies heavily on representations of condominiums located in Toronto.

In advertisements from the 1980s, representations of urbanity were often linked to location through one or more of the following strategies, the first of which is naming a project after its address. Using the project address as its name seems particularly common for projects located on a high-profile street such as Bloor Street, Bay Street or St. Clair Avenue. Regardless of the notoriety of the street however, this naming approach clearly differentiates condominiums from low-rise projects, which use the same naming strategy that has been in force for past half century of peripheral development: making claims to nature, nobility or both, as seen in names such as Millpond, Windsong, Hawthorne Village, Riverview, and Castlemore Crossing—all low-rise ‘communities’ currently being built in southern Ontario. Given the notion of urbanity inherent in the use of an address as a project name, it is therefore not surprising that 83% of advertisements for address-named projects are located in the old city of Toronto.

A second form of locational link to urbanity is achieved by stressing the convenience of the project to popular downtown sites. A 1986 advertisement for a downtown project prominently features a drawing of the Toronto skyline above an unusually dense block of text with the heading, ‘Downtown condominiums at City Hall Square from $80,500’ (*Toronto Star*, 19 July 1986, A17). The copy notes that the project is ‘tucked between Chinatown and City Hall, steps from the Courthouse and Osgoode Hall, steps from the office towers of University Avenue, steps from the Eaton Centre and Yonge Street’. Scores of advertisements adopt this approach, changing only the names of the attractions: a 1987 advertisement, to give only one example, uses a very large-point caption (‘Where the city lives!’) over a rendering of the project and an illustration of the Toronto skyline, accompanied by slightly more effusive text that reads, in part, ‘Enjoy life in the heart of downtown Toronto. A location that puts you in touch with haute couture, world-class hotels, and the finest restaurants and clubs. A home where you can enjoy immediate proximity to the waterfront and walk to the Royal Alex, O’Keefe Centre, St. Lawrence Market and soon the new SkyDome Stadium’ (*Toronto Star*, 5 December 1987, A16).

Although low-rise developments make similar, location-based claims (albeit to different forms of middle class consumption), the use of location-based urbanity claims by high-rise projects differentiates the condominium through the salience of these claims. The project just described,
for example, is being marketing *primarily* based on its location: other than the small rendering of the project, the only details given about the project itself is a single line that reads, ‘An excellent, but limited selection of one and two bedroom suite, each with guaranteed parking is available from $249,000 to $649,000’. In contrast, the location appeal of a low-rise project is always secondary (or tertiary) to the details of the house and the subdivision; it would be unthinkable for a low-rise developer to create a location-based marketing campaign which described the houses available almost as an afterthought, perhaps mentioning that ‘A selection of three and four bedroom houses is available from $449,000 to $699,000’. Location is always important in real estate, but what the high-rise advertisements that use location-based amenity as their angle illustrate is that the appeal of certain urban locations is so great that the specifics of the development, like unit size, configuration, finishes, views and so on, are essentially irrelevant. While relying on existing notions of urbanity, therefore, these advertisements at the same time reinforce and further naturalize these positive associations with urbanity.

A third form of location-based amenity claims are those that trade off the connotations of the area in which the project is built. In certain cases, the area has strong, pre-existing associations, as is the case with the Annex, Yorkville and Queen Street West neighbourhoods. Projects in these areas have obvious and essentially inevitable marketing approaches that necessarily concentrate on the widely-known attributes of their location. A 1997 advertisement for a project near the Kensington Market, for examples, exclaims that ‘living in Kensington could be described as the closest thing to a European lifestyle this side of the Atlantic. Shop fresh everyday from independent merchants, and live in a vibrant residential community. Walk to the restaurants and clubs of College Street and Little Italy, stroll to the Art Gallery of Ontario and Queen Street West. Kensington Market Lofts is the best location in the city. The world is literally at your doorstep’ (*Toronto Star*, 25 October 1997, A15). Hyperbole aside, the appeal is prototypically urban, based on the longstanding reputation of Kensington as a busy (with people and activity), high-density neighbourhood. Again, this strongly differentiates the condominium from low-rise housing: this project is being sold not because it *has access* to a certain amenity, but because it is positioned *in the midst* of a bustling, urban area which offers none of the attributes typically emphasized in low-rise marketing, such as a nature, peace, quiet and security.

From one perspective, these methods of invoking urbanity are predictable because they represent the most obvious marketing theme for projects located in the core area. A few projects in
unusually ‘green’ areas of the GTA have promoted their link to nature rather than urbanity but the matching of high-rises with nature seems forced and contrived. One such project apparently felt the need to re-introduce the urban into its campaign: initially (and improbably) marketed as ‘Chestnut Place on the Creek by the Park’, it was subsequently (and even more improbably) rebranded as ‘Chestnut Place on the Creek by the Park in the City’. It seems entirely understandable, then, that developers in the early 2000s would name their Bloor Street West project BeBloor, and advertise the project with pictures of signs for the subway, and people on Vespa scooters (Toronto Star, 14 June 2003, P7); or that another project being developed at the same time would similarly be called ‘Bloor Street Neighbourhood’, and marketed with pictures of upscale Yorkville stores (Toronto Star, 24 May 2003, P14).

What this perspective overlooks, however, is that with a few exceptions—such as the mention of a ‘European lifestyle’ in the copy for the Kensington project above—invocations of urbanity are almost entirely reliant on widely-held perceptions of local urbanity. This is a far different situation than in Sydney, Australia for example, where developers mined—strip-mined, even—New York City for dozens of place names and associations for use in marketing high-rises. The often explicit message to buyers was that to such an extent that it was seen by the as evidence that Sydney had a ‘SoHo Syndrome’ (Shaw, 2006). In Melbourne, it is not New York but Europe that is linked with urbanity: high-rise developers imagine (and presumably market) their projects as being designed for people who seek a ‘European lifestyle’ in which cafés are prominent (Fincher, 2004). In Toronto, conversely, developers in general have not felt the need to use global imagery to the same extent in order to legitimate—or perhaps more accurately, to explain and make appealing—high-rise and/or core area living. This suggests the possibility of widely differing attitudes to urban places between these cities, and may partly explain the unprecedented demand for Toronto condominiums.

This is not to say that Toronto developers did not use global imagery in their marketing. Since the late 1980s, 30 core area projects used images and associations of other cities in their marketing, and of these, the majority (17) used New York-based imagery. The remainder are scattered around the globe, including California (3), Europe (2), London (2), Paris (2). In only a handful of cases does the use of global imagery extend beyond the project name. A project built on the former site of the national broadcaster CBC was named Radio City by its developer, and profits from a perceived link to the New York theatre, but nothing else in the marketing makes
the link explicit. Similarly, advertisements for projects called Chelsea Lofts and SoHo Metropolitan make no other use of New York images or associations.

It is interesting to note that although suburban projects deploy global imagery only slightly less frequently (in absolute terms) than projects in the former City of Toronto, the use often extends beyond naming. A 1981 advertisement for a North York project, for example, uses a large drawing of an apple along with the caption, ‘The exclusive taste of the Big Apple’ and text reading, ‘Metro Toronto’s most beautiful condominium with the suite taste of Manhattan luxury’ (*Toronto Star*, 14 March 1981, A5). Exactly what this means is left unclear, which is perhaps the point: what is being sold here are stereotypes of New York, implicitly positioned as different and better than what is available in Toronto. As with many of the advertisements for suburban projects that use notions of urbanity, there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between suburban reality and the urban visions being sold. A subsequent advertisement (*Toronto Star*, 12 June 1982, A8) for the same project, for example, promises that a ‘new downtown is coming to North York’, mentions the elegant suites the project will have, and urges prospective buyers to visit the sales centre on Yonge Street, four blocks north of Sheppard ‘(at rear of Country Style Donut Shop)’.

Nearly two decades later, a major developer used the same general approach, but on a much larger scale, in a way that is reminiscent of what Shaw observed in contemporary Sydney. The project in North York, called ‘NY Towers’, was marketed with a series of advertisements centred around the theme of New York (iconified in the form of the Statue of Liberty) coming to North York. Visually, this was achieved through images that showed the Statue of Liberty being transported—aboard an ocean freighter in one advertisement (*Toronto Star*, 25 September 1999, R11), on the back of a transport truck in another (*Toronto Star*, 15 January 2000, P5), and finally, on an entirely inaccurate plateau with the rest of North York, looming over Toronto from a great height (*Toronto Star*, 29 April 2000, P15). The copy accompanying these images invoke New York theme, but with little more specificity or credibility than the Manhattan Place advertisement of the early 1980s: ‘And now, for those with a penchant for truly cosmopolitan living, we offer NY Towers on Bayview. This luxurious residential enclave is modeled on New York’s finest: an exclusive gated community with all the privacy, the lifestyle, the rewards of a
very upscale club. A European-style spa, virtual golf, indoor pool and even a putting green’ (Toronto Star, 25 September 1999, R11). How these latter amenities in particular embody ‘New York’s finest’ is a mystery, but again, what is being sold in these advertisements is the pre-existing set of associations that people have with New York as a product of the many representations of Manhattan in popular media. What is remarkable about the marketing of this project is the extent to which the concept is implemented. Even the project’s architecture was conceived to broadcast the New York brand as loudly as possible: two of the four towers that eventually comprised the finished project are clumsy replicas of the Chrysler Building in New York, complete with Art Deco inspired pinnacles, while the other two are imitations of the Empire State Building.

Seeing replicas of iconic New York buildings in North York immediately brings to mind the New York, New York hotel in Las Vegas, not only due to their recreations of New York buildings but also because they share and promote a similarly enclosed version of urbanity—and are designed to appeal to the same, broad demographic. In Las Vegas, enclosure is primarily a mechanism to retain customers and their money, but it is an enclosure that many people seem happy to submit to, perhaps due to a half century of middle-class fascination with enclosed and themed consumption spaces. In suburban condominium developments, the same dynamic is likely in play: urbanity is linked solely with convenient consumption. This sensibility informs many suburban condominium complexes. One project, for example, geared its entire marketing campaign

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Figure 19: Project promoting enclosed urbanity
(Source: Toronto Star 7 March 1998, P3)
around enclosed urbanity, claiming, ‘You’ll enjoy a whole world of shopping and entertainment, PLUS DIRECT ACCESS TO THE SUBWAY, without ever having to leave your building!’ (Toronto Star, 7 March 1998, P5).

What makes this project notable is its adaptation of one of the most salient strategies of differentiation employed by core area condominiums since the mid-1990s: one based on links to entertainment and high culture. Like many projects in the Toronto core, this one touts its convenience to transportation, shopping and entertainment, promotes the status of its neighbourhood (‘across from City Hall’) and makes links to high culture (‘adjacent to the Ford Theatre for the Performing Arts’). The names and status of the consumption options are different than they would be for core projects, but essentially the same appeal to urbanity is being made. It is of course open to question whether ‘an exclusive gated community’ like NY Towers or similar projects is truly urban\(^6\), but such questions would obscure the point: that regardless of authenticity, suburban projects like NY Towers have frequently invoked notions of urbanity in their marketing.

While promoting links to entertainment and, especially, high culture is novel and unusual for suburban projects, it has become an increasingly common strategy for downtown Toronto projects. In some cases, the link between condominium and a cultural or entertainment facility is one based purely on proximity, just as it is in the North York example above. The Radio City project mentioned previously, for example, alludes disingenuously to the famous New York theatre of the same name, and shares its site with the National Ballet School. The Pantages hotel/condominium project is located near the historic theatre of the same name (now renamed the Canon Theatre). The Maple Leaf Square project sits on the grounds of the Air Canada Centre, home to Toronto’s professional basketball and hockey teams; echoing suburban appeals, the project offers residents underground access to the arena. The Festival Tower project, however, displays a far greater degree of integration: the complex combines condominiums and the headquarters of the Toronto International Film Festival—including several cinemas—within

\(^6\) Although one could cite New York’s gated, exclusive Gramercy Park as an example to support NY Towers’ claim to urbanity
the same structure. It would perhaps be more accurate to describe this as the merging, rather than
the linking, of the high-rise condominium and cultural amenities.

An identical and parallel process has also given rise to projects that, in various permutations,
merge together condominium units and a luxury hotel: the Ritz-Carlton, Pantages, Trump Tower,
and SoHo Metropolitan are all such projects that rely on the emergence of the luxury hotel as an
aspirational (if temporary) residential dwelling. Although largely unremarked in the urban
literature, the new prominence of luxury hotels has occurred through the forging of a strong link
with design. Leading architecture, design and travel magazines and television shows have helped
to establish luxury and boutique hotels as the embodiment of ‘an explicitly urbane design ethos,
challenging the rural idiom of the likes of House Beautiful and Homes and Gardens’ (McNeill,

The emphasis on design is seen in Condo Living articles that frequently invoke images of the
luxury hotel. ‘Want to make the bedroom of your condo suite feel more like a hotel room?’ asks
one of many articles that play on this theme (Anonymous, 2001). Articles that evaluate condo
floor plans evaluations make hotel style their goal, proclaiming ‘This suite deserves chic hotel
look’ (MacKinnon, 2003). Site profiles detail the explicit desire to emulate luxury hotels in
claiming ‘Yorkville project aims for style of boutique hotel’ (Anonymous, 1999). Another
project is explicitly described by its developer as a ‘boutique condominium’ (Hanes, 2003),
while a spokesperson for a developer says of another project ‘The lobby is a welcoming
statement for the building. It reminds me of a boutique hotel’ (Greer, 2006). Another developer
left no doubts about inspiration or aspiration by naming its condo project Boutique, as detailed in
an article titled ‘European boutique hotels inspire King West condo’ (Lighthall, 2005).

These projects constitute only a small fraction of the condominium units built in Toronto, but
due to their novelty, they garnered a disproportionate amount of media attention that goes
beyond the real estate section. Despite the small number of such projects, the long lead times
between the initial sales launch and the completion of construction gives real estate sections (in
particular) the opportunity to present updates and features on high-profile projects quite regularly
over a period of years. These projects therefore play the role of the ‘halo product’, a term
commonly used in the automobile business to describe the positive associations that can accrue
to the entire brand from the publicity surrounding flashy, high-profile but low-volume vehicles.
Despite not being part of an intentional branding strategy, the projects described above—and especially, the hybrid hotel-condominium projects—nonetheless construct a coherent new identity for the downtown condominium as a participant in some of the Toronto’s highest profile entertainment and cultural activities. At the same time, the emergence of mid-rise condominiums that mimic the design and services of boutique hotels have added a different form of cachet, but one that is equally urban and aspirational in its associations.

5.4.5 Summary

What emerged in the recent era, then, is a public image of the condo that included associations with structure, location and lifestyle. More specifically, the leading representation of the condominium came to link high-rise and high style in an urban location with a lifestyle based on social interaction in the consumption of cultural and entertainment opportunities. This revised public image was perfectly consonant with increasingly positive attitudes toward central cities that were partly a function of societal level changes regarding family structure, gender roles, educational attainment and economic restructuring. Condo ads and articles did not create or initiate the general revaluing of urban consumption, but they did inevitably participate in popularizing and legitimating this change.

What is most notable about the revised image of the condo is how completely it runs counter to the structure, location and lifestyle associations that characterize the ‘single-family house’, which is defined by its low-rise structure, peripheral location and inward, privatized lifestyle. This perfectly illustrates what has been seen throughout this chapter: that with a few notable exceptions, the recent era condominium has avoided direct competition with the single-family house. In earlier eras, this was not the case; condominiums did attempt to compete directly on size and value, but this approach was unlikely to succeed: judged according to the values and expectations linked to the single-family house, any competitor would inevitably come up short. The recent-era condominium in effect refuses to participate in a hierarchy of housing desirability whose highest spot is occupied by the single-family house. Instead, bolstered in particular by testimonial articles that question previously unexamined assumptions about residential expectations, the condominium is positioned as a distinct dwelling type whose unique characteristics mark it as a viable alternative to—rather than a lesser version of—the suburban single-family house.
This repositioning is a product of a new design sensibility that affected the exterior and interior spaces of high-rise condominiums, as well as more sophisticated advertising in the recent era. That latter is typified by the changing representations of security over time, beginning with bleak photographs of security personnel in the 1970s, shifting to drawing of liveried doormen in the 1980s, to images of concierges in polished lobbies. But some of the complexity of the condo image described here derives from the articles in Condo Living, and how they interact with the advertisements. Although inherently promotional in nature, Condo Living articles address issues from a reader perspective, and even the non-testimonial articles suggest that a true insight into high-rise living is being portrayed; this is particularly true for the articles that are not visibly linked to new condominium projects, like the articles discussing legal concerns, condo gardening or coping with small spaces, for example. The testimonial articles, however, offer the greatest potential for Condo Living to act as a persuasive form of branding by presenting theoretically disinterested first-person accounts of meaningful life events, written by people—predominantly women—likely to be in the largest peer or reference group of potential condominium buyers. A crucial by-product of these testimonials is to add credibility as a reliable information source to a real estate section that has already employed many strategies to de-emphasize its promotional mission.

The strategies of image management that are a fundamental aspect of branding are on clear display in this chapter. Where negative associations exist, brand managers may either ignore them, direct attention away by concentrating on a related issue in order to de-emphasize the negative association, or attempt to overcome the association by dealing with it directly in an affective manner. The ways that Condo Living addressed the issue of families and high-rise living are exemplify these strategies.

High-rise apartments, regardless of tenure type, have traditionally been perceived as less than ideal places to raise a nuclear family. The negative perception—and the associated perception that the suburban house was an ideal location for families—was addressed in the recent era both by ignoring it (in developer advertisements) and through the use of affective representations to counter it. In the early study period, developers used images of children and nuclear families relatively frequently in order to compete with the suburban house, but in the recent study period, the only representations of ‘family’ were notably not nuclear families, consisting instead of single parents with a single child. This image, while concerned with the concept of family, is
nonetheless consistent with the larger representation of the condominium apartment as an alternative with a distinct target market to the single-family house rather than a direct competitor.

The articles in Condo Living, conversely, demonstrate one of the most powerful mechanisms of the branding paradigm: the use of affective ‘arguments’ that give the appearance of addressing an issue directly while implicitly promoting the brand image. This is true for the issue of families in condominiums and the issue of condominium size. In each case, the issue is personalized through testimonials written by owners, or accounts that revolve around owners. The uniform message that emerges from these articles is that the particular issue is a challenge (rather than an obstacle), and that the challenge can be overcome, and, most importantly, that the rewards that accompany overcoming the challenge far outweigh the effort involved. These articles rely on readers identifying with reference group members, and the perceived objectivity of testimonials to make their argument, along with direct emotional appeals.

Regarding perceptions that condominium apartments are small, another strategy can be observed. Developer advertisements in the recent study period uniformly reframe the issue as one of design, configuration and style, arguing implicitly that the size of a dwelling is irrelevant and simultaneously representing the high-rise condominium apartment as the only dwelling that is characterized by its attention to design. Again, this represents a departure in image management from previous eras, when developers did attempt to compete directly with the detached house by emphasizing the size of their largest units. This recent approach, which is more subtle and carefully considered, is also evident concerning security, where the issue is similarly reframed as one of luxury, with the present-day concierge standing in for the uniformed security guards who appeared in previous era advertisements.

What is striking about the recent era, Toronto high-rise condominium apartment is the coherence exhibited in its representation in the articles and advertisements published in Condo Living. Coherence is integral to conventional branding strategies, both in the associations and applications of the brand. In promoting a distinct identity for the condominium, Condo Living presented a complex but coherent public image based on design and urbanity, produced for a predominantly female market. Design and urbanity of course interact with one another, with city centres closely being associated with the production and consumption of upscale design at a small scale (e.g. fashion and furniture) and a large scale (e.g. spectacular architecture).
design and urbanity as attributes allowed the ads and articles in Condo Living to create a ‘discourse of design’ around the high-rise condominium. As a result, any aspirational or legitimated instance of design or urban consumption could be linked to the condo, resulting in a conflation of the two. This gave the opportunity for developers to promote individual projects as being connected to specific cultural events like the Toronto International Film Festival, or prominent entertainment sites such as the Air Canada Centre, or trendy concepts like the ‘boutique hotel’ while still operating firmly within—and contributing to—the urban/design associations with the condo. Articles in Condo Living naturalized and legitimated this link by literally surrounding advertisements with articles about design and style.

Also notable in the presentation of urbanity is its reliance on the existence of widely shared, positive perceptions of downtown Toronto. A great many advertisements invoke streets, intersections and neighbourhoods in the city centre, and a large number of these make no further claims: they simply assume that the appeals of those places is so widely known, and so generally positive, that they will act as strong marketing features. It is telling that developers felt little need to educate potential customers about the appeals of urban living in Toronto. It suggests the existence of a specific understanding of urban Toronto that may in some way explain the disproportionate condominium demand the city has experienced. The implication is that during the recent era, there was a pre-existing but unserved population who perceived high-rise living in downtown Toronto as an attractive idea. The importance of place is considered in the next chapter in greater detail, but here I would again emphasize that what is most remarkable in the representations of urbanity and lifestyle in Condo Living is their coherence as a whole, but also between competing developers. The branding paradigm may partly account for this.

One of the foundational tenets of this research is that people will tend to evaluate information using the lens of branding and from this perspective, the public image of the condo articulated by the advertisements and articles in Condo Living is clearly defined, credible, and linked with societally legitimated culture and entertainment as well as a lifestyle that is personally and socially rewarding. This is quite a powerful image, and although it may initially seem unlikely to have emerged as the result of an explicit strategy, it can be more easily understood as a product of the larger branding paradigm; it is not only the consumers of information who will tend to interpret their experience using a branding-informed framework: so to will the producers of information, in this case the developers and the marketing firms they hire, but also the writers,
editors, photographers and layout people responsible for Condo Living. If the branding paradigm truly has become pervasive and internalized, these people *inevitably* produced condominium-related information in the branded form we see in Condo Living.
Chapter 6
Design and the Toronto condominium

As outlined in the previous chapter, many discrete but related processes have been involved in the rebranding of the condominium. This chapter explores what may have been the most crucial aspect of this rebranding: the positioning of the condominium as a design-led dwelling type, that is, similar to Apple and BMW—or more accurately, Prada and Chanel—in having as its primary association the concept of design. The recent-era condominium is continually linked with avant-garde architecture and leading edge interior design, decoration and furniture in advertisements and articles in Condo Living. This repositioning has placed the condominium squarely in the realm of style and fashion brands—an unprecedented destination for a dwelling type.

A constellation of positive effects has accompanied this process. The most important may be that it positioned the condominium as a much more accessible dwelling for women, simply because commodified style and design—in the form of apparel, fragrances, and personal care products—are strongly female-coded. Even where certain brands, or certain aesthetics such as high-modernism have masculine associations, the spaces that these participate in, such as interior decoration, are coded female at the societal level. This holds even when leading practitioners are male: that celebrity chefs are predominantly male does not alter the societal perception that cooking is a female activity; that celebrity clothing designers are often male does not result in haute couture being male-coded. The discourse of design that surrounds the recent-era condominium invokes the sensibility of these products, from the visual style of advertisements to the use (and creation) of celebrity designers. This profound repositioning of the condominium reflects current branding practices that promote brand associations rather than product specifics, and that increasingly emphasize design in all forms (Moor, 2007).

At the broadest level, then, the positioning of the condo as design-led is significant on its own due to its implications in differentiating it from other dwelling types and making it more accessible to women. Equally important, the rebranding effort was accompanied by material changes in the product, adding credibility to design-centric representations. In many other cases, rebranding efforts involve marketing an unchanged product to a new market: Jack Daniel’s whisky, for example, was marketed as an upscale, genteel product for urban sophisticates. Subsequently, the identical product was marketing using an image based on frontier-inspired
machismo (Holt, 2006a). This is not the case with the recent-era condominium, in which a new marketing strategy consistent with those of other design-centred brands was accompanied by a complete reworking of condominium architecture, suite configuration, and interior decoration. What made this strategy particularly brand-like is that these physical changes all reflected the same modernist-inspired design sensibility that was burgeoning in the early 1990s and continues as the dominant design aesthetic today. As a result, this design-led rebranding exhibited the kind of internal coherence that actual brands strive to achieve.

This chapter explores the link between design and the Toronto condominium in two different ways. In the first section, I examine condominium architecture, suite configuration and interior decoration in order to illustrate the nature of the contemporary design aesthetic. Having its origins in high modernism, and informed by mid-century modernism, the contemporary aesthetic is proposed here as a reworked, ‘softer’ form of modernism that is accessible and well-suited to condominiums. After defining the contemporary aesthetic, I explore its diffusion and evolution in Toronto from early loft conversion projects like Candy Factory Lofts and Merchandise Building to mid-rise and finally mainstream projects. As well as emphasizing the influence of true lofts on condominiums, I focus on ways in which modernism was made progressively ‘safer’ for women as the design formula evolved over time.

The second section of the chapter explores the broad concept of design, and how a generalized discourse of design came to surround the condominium. This is reflected both in an array of diverse, design-focused articles that appeared over the entire run of Condo Living, and in ‘celebrification’ of a small group of Toronto architects and designers intimately involved with the condo industry. This section therefore illustrates the remarkably coherent set of representations of the high-rise condominium published in Condo Living, with the hundreds of design-related articles legitimating the design-based attributes of the recent-era condominium that developers were attempting to promote in their marketing. At the same time, the section illustrates how completely, and how remarkably easy the entire system of meaning that revolves around style, design and fashion could be overlaid on the high-rise Toronto condominium. Both of these circumstances indicate the degree to which the branding paradigm has become internalized.
Finally, the chapter as a whole introduces the idea that a relatively small group of actors—developers, interior design firms, architects, real estate brokers and marketing companies—worked together in shaping the condo’s public image discussed throughout this research. How intentional this process was is up for discussion, but it is clear that a very few firms were responsible for much of the high-profile condominium development that took place in recent era Toronto, and all of these firms articulated a vision for the condo that has diffused from its niche market origins to the mainstream. Every city has developers and architects, but it remains a possibility that Toronto may have been quite unusual in possessing such a group of talented and competent firms that remained in the city from the mid 1990s onward. Along with other local circumstances such as the opening up of industrial lands for residential development, this may help understand what led to the disproportionate demand for condominiums that Toronto experienced.

6.1 The ‘contemporary’ design aesthetic

In the course of multiple rounds of coding condominium advertisements, and reading the entire corpus of Condo Living articles, it became apparent that a single design aesthetic informed the public image of the high-rise condominium, including its architecture, configuration and interior decoration. This aesthetic, which has high modernism as its foundation, I will refer to as ‘contemporary’. It is probably useful to emphasize once again that this research concerns the public image of the condominium and not the form that condominium projects took in reality. By extension, it should be understood that not every condominium project employed a contemporary aesthetic. Scores of projects conceived to compete primarily on price, for example, employed very conventional design that departs little from that used twenty years earlier. Conversely, upscale projects employed ‘historical’ cues to varying extents. But the projects garnering the greatest notoriety in site profiles and related articles, are those that exhibit the contemporary design aesthetic, and it is these projects that most strongly inform the resulting public image. ‘Contemporary’ style is a reworking of high modernism, a philosophical reaction against Victorianism and its ‘feminine’ design sensibility that was intended to produce designs that were rational, functional, and capable of being mass-produced in order to increase the well-being of all levels of society (Sparke, 1995). In privileging rationality and functionality, eschewing any form of decoration, and using black or white, high modernist designs were often stark and severe although beautifully proportioned and creative. The Wassily chair by Marcel Breuer (Figure 21)
is an excellent manifestation of the high modernist sensibility: constructed with common steel tubing, seven bands of leather, and a handful of screws, the chair was inexpensive to produce, easy to assemble, yet achieves a spare elegance.

This chair and several others by high modernist designers are now seen as design classics, but the contemporary form of modernism rejects or simply ignores some of the more dogmatic aspects of high modernism such as its insistence on rationality and functionality. Indeed, today’s designers are not the first to do so.

Midcentury American and Scandinavian designers rejected high modernism’s stance that colour was decorative and therefore needless. Mid-century modernists were also willing to incorporate non-rectilinear forms into their designs and produced work that exhibits emotion rather than rationality while operating within a modernist framework. Present-day designers have continued this process, using both high modernism and mid-century modernism for inspiration in creating designs that are made accessible by their use of colour, form and texture while still adhering to modernism through the use of ‘clean’ lines, a preference for glass, steel and concrete, and a tendency toward low visual mass. This aesthetic has diffused across the entire universe of design over the past fifteen years, although most notably in spaces of domestic consumption such as furniture (Leslie, 2003), decorative items and, as I will outline here, residential architecture. The argument I make is that modernist-inspired ‘contemporary’ design happened to involve a range of material changes that differentiated the recent-era condo from those of previous generations and, crucially, provided meaningful and functional benefits regarding space and the perception of it for condo owners, adding credibility to the public image of this dwelling type.

The next three sections illustrate these ideas through an examination of condominium architecture, unit configuration and interior decoration, with the objective of defining the
contemporary aesthetic as it is applied to condominiums, and highlighting where it conforms to, or departs from high modernism, how strongly it is informed by mid-century modernism. The larger goal of these sections is to argue that the contemporary aesthetic subverts the stereotypically masculine tendencies of high modernism and produces a style that is much more accessible to women while retaining the cachet value of modernism as a culturally legitimated design movement. Both of these factors are important in the positioning of the Toronto condominium as a design-led dwelling type.

6.1.1 Contemporary exteriors

That contemporary design has its origins in high modernism is probably most obvious in condominium architecture. Like the ‘International Style’ buildings of the 1950s and 1960s (Figure 22), contemporary architecture tends to rely strongly on rectilinear forms, and eschews decorative or historical components like pillars or porticos. However, while the modernist buildings of decades past were often numbingly bland in their pursuit of ‘pure’, functional form, contemporary structures are typically much more visually interesting due to interruptions or displacements of building form, and the use of colour and surface textures.

Figure 23 below, for example, illustrates how contemporary architecture often uses irregular forms for the sake of visual and spatial interest. The nominal ‘rationality’ that informed every aspect of modernist and International Style structures is absent here, yet these structures retain a modernist-inspired, unornamented rectilinearity: while the overall shapes are complex, they are nonetheless composed of cubic shapes and straight lines that conform to high-modernist tenets.

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7 Iconic, spectacular architecture like Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is a second form of contemporary architecture but one that is numerically negligible compared to the modernist-inspired version currently dominant in residential and institutional architecture.
As buildings increase in size, the departure from high modernist architecture is less extreme but typically employs the same formula that seeks to avoid the monolithic forms of classical modernism. Two mid-rise condominiums in Toronto illustrate this point in Figure 24. Overall, both buildings are rectangular boxes, but their surfaces are interrupted by balconies, windows and other structural elements, or in the case of the building on the left, by making the top three floors smaller in overall dimensions from those below. Again, these strategies add visual interest while adhering modernist tenets.
The tallest condominiums offer fewer possibilities to interrupt form than smaller buildings, but similarly rely on modified versions of classical modernism. One version adheres to rectilinearity but updates classical modernist design through the modulation of surface details, or the addition of terraces, balconies, and roof elements to add visual interest. Many of these strategies can be seen in Figure 25, for example:

Figure 22: Mid-rise projects use various strategies to create visual interest
Source (both images): www.context.ca
Not all high-rise projects take this approach. Non-rectilinear forms are also found in mainstream projects, most notably in one of the phases of the Absolute project in Mississauga, shown in Figure 26, colloquially known as the Marilyn Monroe building. Yet even these buildings are modernist in their inspiration, displaying a high degree of regularity and tension, and relying on form rather than ornamentation; there is no invocation of other design aesthetics, something that characterized post-modern architecture.

**Figure 23: Contemporary high-design, high-rise towers**
Source (both images): www.greatgulfhomes.com

**Figure 24: Non-rectilinear contemporary tower**
Source: www.absolutecondos.com
In all of the projects shown above, contemporary architecture attempts to address one of the perceived shortcomings of classical modernism: that it produced unimaginative, monolithic projects that were boring at best, and dehumanizing and deadening at worst. This charge is debatable: certain classical modernist buildings like the TD Centre by Mies van der Rohe remain striking and vibrant (Figure 27).

Yet the relative paucity of equally interesting modernist buildings indicates the great difficulty involved in perfecting ‘pure’ forms: ‘Such spare geometries are not easy to copy well…but they are remarkably easy to mimic in some less than perfect manner’ (Relph, 1987, p. 116). Conversely, contemporary architecture offers the possibility of interrupting pure forms, and the possibility to use different forms of ornamentation in order to buildings less clinical and severe, and more visually interesting.

Such ornamentation may be structural, but it can also involve material finishes and colour. The building shown in Figure 28 is something of an extreme but is nonetheless fairly representative of how different materials are combined in contemporary architecture. It uses oxidized steel, stainless steel, brick, clear glass, opaque glass and natural stone in close proximity. As with the other forms of contemporary ornamentation, these are strongly rectilinear both as individual components (i.e. bricks, tiles, panes of glass) and in the larges
Colour too, is relatively common in contemporary architecture. Although difficult to discern in black and white reproductions, the buildings in Figures 29, 30, and 31 all use coloured panels to ornament otherwise subdued exteriors. The building in Figure 29, for example, has seven bright red panels interrupting its surface, while the building in Figure 30 has yellow, grey and white panels in the lower part of its structure, and blue panels of two different hues in the upper mass. The building in Figure 31, meanwhile, uses panels in a regular-irregular pattern along with awning windows to add texture to a structure that have been much more uniform in previous eras. (Note as well how this building also employs the interplay of multiple rectilinear masses to create interest).
Figure 28: Windows and panels used for facade detail
(Source: author)

Figure 29: White, yellow, and blue panels used extensively
(Source: author)
These approaches represent a dramatic departure from high modernism, which was characterized as much by its uniformly white surfaces as its lack of surface ornamentation, and from International Style architecture in which buildings were typically monotone. For modernists, ‘white was not simply a colour scheme: it was an embodiment of the ethical, political, and moral substance of modernism’ (Jacobs & Cairns, 2007, p. 575). In abandoning white, contemporary architecture, is more closely related to later—and specifically, midcentury—interpretations of modernism. The use of coloured panels, for example, is one of the characteristic features of one of the “Eames House” (Figure 32), or “Case Study House #8” as it is officially designated.

Similarly, the decorative use of different materials and finishes that is so common in contemporary architecture has its origins in the geographic variations of modernism that arose in the 1940s and 1950s. During this era, modernist structures often departed from whitewashed concrete by using local, traditional materials such as brick in Great Britain, tile in Italy, and wood in the United States, Sweden and Denmark (Jackson, 1994, p. 36). Present-day architects have an even greater variety of materials from which to choose, which is useful in differentiating projects that will almost certainly exhibit a contemporary design aesthetic.

There is no mistaking the success of the architectural formula that includes using colour, form and texture within a modernist-inspired sensibility. Architects around the world have adopted this approach, to the point that a book reviewing significant residential projects notes that 'the houses portrayed here document an ever-increasing commonality in residential architecture worldwide wherein a triumphant renaissance of the ideals of Modernist architecture serves as a common denominator in the creation of new house solutions' (Matthewson, 2007, p. 6).
Babak Eslahjou, a partner in Toronto’s CORE Architects, responsible for many of the high-style midrise condominiums in the city’s downtown core, sees contemporary architecture as a reworking of previous versions of modernism: ‘I think that what you see now is architects kind of getting self-confidence that the modern solutions were the right ones, and we’ve learned how to repeat the good stuff and not repeat the bad stuff’ (personal interview, 2009). A compelling case can be made that the ‘bad stuff’ was a product of a strategy by early modernists to counter the influence of women on public and private spaces (Sparke, 1995). Contemporary exteriors, while hardly feminine, nonetheless use various forms of ornamentation to reflect a notably different sensibility than the one that characterizes the masculinist structures of Modernism and the International Style.

More important than the details is that the use of highly-style contemporary architecture indicates to consumers that that the condominium is conceptually related to design-led brands, and such brands are typically female-coded. The condo gains credibility because the contemporary architecture employed in Toronto even for relatively inexpensive projects is quite evidently the same style of architecture used around the world for much more expensive projects. The implication: not only is the condo linked to design, it is linked to leading-edge design. Apart from its ability to differentiate the condo from other dwelling types, the ubiquity of this design sensibility performs a further role in suggesting that all the diverse projects that share this style are products of what is essentially a single type. Contemporary architecture therefore allows the condominium to duplicate the design consistency that automobile and electronics brands, for example, strive to achieve across their range of products.

6.1.2 Interior configuration

The configuration of condominium interiors has undergone a transformation similar to the exterior changes described above, with the recent-era condos widely adopting a highly-styled layout that at once signals the design-led nature of the condominium and differentiates it from other dwelling types of the past and present. The recent changes in configuration are geared toward improving the quality of interior space by using very large windows—often floor to ceiling—to bring in more natural light, and using an open concept floorplan and tall ceilings to impart a sense of spaciousness. Although these changes were at least partly motivated by the diminishing size of condominium units, they nonetheless participate in a leading-edge design
trend with origins in high modernism, just as the exterior changes described above do. Commenting on the appearance of this formula around the world, one author concludes that it "is tempting to conclude that the ubiquity of these elements--the open-plan living areas, the great facades of glass, the crisp white walls--signal the globalization of the architectural styles first proposed by the early twentieth-century Modern Movement" (Strongman, 2009, p. 9).

There are differences, however, between contemporary interior spaces and those of high modernism, which were created as ‘machines for living’ with functionality the foremost concern. The contemporary interior, conversely, is configured with aesthetic, or experiential concerns uppermost in mind. As with exterior architecture, the sensibility of the contemporary interior is most closely aligned with local, midcentury reworkings of modernism rather than high modernism. Lesley Jackson argues that the ‘most distinctive and remarkable quality of [midcentury] “Contemporary” architecture was its treatment of interior space’ (Jackson, 1994, p. 79). Open and airy, even in small houses, ‘it was the sheer quantity of natural light within in the ‘Contemporary’ house that transformed the character of the interior’ (ibid., p. 94). In some cases, however, architects in their zeal took the concept too far as ‘they attempted to eliminate the “room” altogether as an outdated architectural unit of enclosure that defined the house plan according to an unquestioned social hierarchy’ (Attfield, 1999, p. 77). Interestingly, present-day architects initially repeated this mistake before settling on the less radical configuration currently in place.

The configuration of contemporary interiors is clearly related to exterior form, regardless the use of the building. The main floor of the building pictured in Figure 33 illustrates the fundamental components of contemporary interior configuration: unusually high ceilings, floor to ceiling
windows, and an open concept layout using few walls.\(^8\)

![Figure 31: Tall ceilings, full-height glazing and open spaces, seen in a contemporary structure](source: author)

In residential settings, this configuration entails the creation of a single, large, area uninterrupted by walls that accommodates kitchen, dining area, and family/living room. Bedrooms and bathrooms remain discrete spaces, although these will ideally be located to obviate the need for hallways. The configuration of the contemporary interior therefore presents architects with less flexibility than they have with exteriors: their mandate is to maximize the amount of natural light in the structure, and to create a feeling of spaciousness.

The artist’s rendering of a high-end project (Figure 34) is an extreme example, but it conveys how profoundly configuration affects perceptions of space, as well as how greatly it differs from

\(^8\) Also note the departures from high modernism and ‘International Style’ including the quite obvious front entrance that is nearly at grade level, the variation in overall form, the use of soft landscaping, and the largely decorative awning structure that emphasizes the building’s main floor and acknowledges its connection with the sidewalk and street.
the configuration of previous generation condos. Had this project been built in, it would likely have had 8 foot ceilings instead of the 12 foot ceilings in this image, solid exterior walls with much smaller windows cut into them, and likely a wall to divide the space. The interior configuration of condominiums was effectively no different from that used in rental buildings, or in single-family homes for that matter. This is no longer the case.

Figure 32: A view from the contemporary interior
Source: www.livingshangri-latoronto.com

As with contemporary architecture, therefore, the significance of recent-era configuration changes and their widespread implementation is in linking the condominium with leading-edge design, achieving a brand-like design consistency across nearly the entire range of condominium projects, and differentiating this round of development from previous eras.

6.1.3 Contemporary interior decoration

That the contemporary design aesthetic is a reworking of previous versions of modernism is most evident in interior decoration. While architects, for example, may include elements in buildings that merely allude to the work of other architects, interior designers can use the actual work of other designers in their projects, which in this case are model suites and sales centres. In these spaces, it is common to find a mixture of high modernist, mid-century modern and present day
design that together produce the desired impression of sleek but accessible high-style. In this section, I identify some of the components of previous eras that have been incorporated into the contemporary design aesthetic and how they align with and depart from high modernism in order to characterize the sensibility that informs the contemporary interiors.

The high modern interior to which the contemporary aesthetic is clearly related was famously spare and masculine in its quest for rationality and function, sometimes resulting in a structure like the venerated (by architects) 1929 Barcelona Pavilion of Mies van der Rohe, a building “so rational that, apart from aesthetic contemplation, it scarcely tolerated human use at all” (Relph, 1987, p. 116). This minimalist style has retained its currency, particularly through coverage of Manhattan lofts in design publications and mass media since the 1970s. This ‘art gallery’ aesthetic of SoHo lofts has undoubtedly had a strong influence on the contemporary interior, from New York to Toronto loft conversions of the 1990s to the mainstream high-rise condominium of today. While the contemporary interior emphasizes clean lines and low visual mass, it remains much less severe than the minimalist interiors of the high-modernism or New York lofts. As is the case with contemporary exteriors, colour and decorative materials are used in contemporary interiors to a far greater degree than a minimalist aesthetic would tolerate. Furniture, lighting, and decorative elements too, while modernist in inspiration, depart from minimalism through their use of colour and shape in ways that, if not contradicting the ethic of ‘form follows function’, certainly challenge it.

Rather than high modernism or its rejuvenation in SoHo, it is the ‘Contemporary’ modernism of the 1950s to which the present-day, contemporary interior aesthetic is most closely related. Just as current design has ‘softened’ the SoHo aesthetic, ‘Contemporary’ modernism of the 1950s similarly responded to high-modern minimalism by adopting its clean lines and low visual mass but by rejecting its clinical, purely functional decoration. The use of colour was the most visible break with high modernism. Across the full range of residential settings, from architect-designed spaces like the Eames house to assembly-line houses in Levittowns, colour and pattern were used quite liberally in the 1950s. In terms of colour at least, the Contemporary aesthetic of the 1950s was the polar opposite of high modernism, relying on an ‘apparently outrageous and radical use of colour’ (Jackson, 1994, p. 114).
While the present-day interior generally avoids ‘outrageous’ colours—there are exceptions, of course—it has adopted without change much of the high-design furniture and decorative items of the 1950s. Incorporating midcentury designs from the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Japan, a range of chairs, clocks, tables, flatware and lamps that achieved great popularity in the 1950s for their striking ‘modern’ design have now been consecrated as design classics. The list of consecrated items is lengthy, but it is worth examining a few of them to illustrate how the contemporary interior combines aspects of Bauhaus-style high modernism and midcentury ‘Contemporary’ modernism(s).

The Barcelona Chair (Figure 35) may be the most widely used piece of furniture in contemporary interior design. This is a somewhat unlikely situation, given the ubiquity of this and related designs in institutional settings in the 1960s and 1970s. Its low visual mass (compared to a stuffed armchair, for example) makes it ideal for contemporary spaces and its elegant frame saves it from appearing merely utilitarian, its midlife episode in bank lobbies and airports notwithstanding. Both the visual message and the text of the advertisement are evidence of the Barcelona chair’s ascension to the status of aspirational design icon, as well as the perceived marketability of modern design to sell condominiums.

Figure 33: Barcelona Chair  
Source: www.knoll.com
Figure 34: Eames Lounge Chair; Egg Chair. Midcentury modern classics

Sources: www.hermanmiller.com; author

Figure 36 shows two 1950s interpretations of casual seating that frequently appear in contemporary interiors. The Eames lounger on the left is the more ‘modern’ of the two, employing modest materials and functional in form—although the function is to provide comfort and relaxation. The Egg Chair, often upholstered in bright colours, is a midcentury update of the Victorian wing chair that, for all its extravagance, is a very ‘clean’ design but one that is far less serious than the sober Barcelona chair, for example.

The significance of these chairs is their repudiation of the privileged positioned accorded to rationality by high modernism and their acknowledgement of style and ornamentation. From an intellectual perspective, this is especially important if one accepts the interpretation of Sparke (1995, 2008) and others of design modernism as a masculine project whose goal was to regain the socio-cultural power women were perceived to have been wielding disproportionately since the Victorian era. The acknowledgement of style that is evident in the Egg Chair and many other midcentury ‘classics’—and more importantly, in contemporary design—therefore reconstitutes modernism as an aesthetic that has a place for women, or, more specifically, a place for design characteristics that have traditionally been coded female.
Figure 35: Egg Chair used to signify condominium's design philosophy

Source: www.icecondos.com

It is difficult to know how well this theoretically profound circumstance translates into practice. The Egg Chair, for all its curves, remains a ‘modern’ piece that it is not particularly ‘feminine’ compared to laced-draped Victorian furniture; it may appear only somewhat less cold and masculine, but essentially similar to the Barcelona chair with its black-leather-and-chrome construction. The present-day shopper will almost certainly be oblivious to the ideological significance proposed here, which suggests that the posited ‘feminization of modernism’ might be purely an academic victory. Nonetheless, I think it is certainly possible that the Egg Chair and the many midcentury and present day equivalents displaying extravagant colours or shapes will be perceived as a ‘softened’ modernism that is applicable in settings other than the bachelor pad and the avant-garde art gallery.
If this is the case, it is likely due to the sensibility that some of these items exude, which can range from comfort as seen above, to somewhat whimsical elegance as in the case of the Egg Chair, to exuberance as in the Coconut Chair (Figure 38). In each case, it is emotion rather than rationality that is being appealed to, which turns design modernism on its head. The inclusion of such items in contemporary design positions it as much less a masculine aesthetic than high modernism, opening the door to a much higher level of general acceptance. Not coincidentally, even the most modest midcentury iconic designs achieve this goal. The kitchen chairs of the Arne Jacobsen shown in Figure 39—also the designer of the Egg Chair—are clearly modernist in their unadorned surface, lack of decoration, modest materials, and their functionality—they are remarkably comfortable chairs. Yet their ‘needlessly’ curvy shapes subvert the joyless rationality associated with high modernism. Other midcentury chairs that have become part of the canon for contemporary designers for similar reasons are shown in Figure 40.
It is at least as important, however, that the products of this design aesthetic are—purely by happenstance—perfectly suited to both the classic, minimalist SoHo loft that occupies an entire floor of a former factory and the 500 square foot mainstream Toronto condominium. In the former—as in Mies’ Barcelona Pavilion—the low visual mass of the furniture renders it nearly invisible, and thus calls attention to the vast open space that surrounds it. In the latter, low visual minimizes the effects of the condominium’s lack of space. At the same time, in each environment, products like these add visual interest of their own, particularly since they...
introduce curves into spaces that are predominantly rectilinear, and colour into spaces that tend to be painted white or muted colours.

Decorative items like clocks and lights are products of the same aesthetic as the products discussed above, and play a similar role of bringing emotion into otherwise rational spaces. Figure 41 shows a range of clocks and a table lamp, all by the American designer George Nelson. Consistent with ‘Contemporary’ style, the clocks have clean lines and are not fussy, but they are more highly styled that is strictly rational, and some are painted with quite bold colours. The lamp, conversely, is a very pure modernist, minimalist design despite its origins in the 1950s. While relying on pure geometry for its appeal, it manages to be both subtle and dramatic at the same time.

These and many other midcentury items that have been elevated to iconic status in contemporary interior design are united by their ostentatious design sensibility; all are clearly highly styled pieces that rely on shape, line and colour rather than pattern, ornamentation or craftsmanship—or rationality, for that matter. These pieces are all quite clearly modern items, but equally obvious is that each embodies an idiosyncratic interpretation of modernism. This design catholicism—at least regarding ‘modern’ design’—may be one of contemporary design’s greatest strengths. Penny Sparke notes that the current version of modernism is not motivated by the altruistic ideology of the original (Sparke, 2008). But it is also true that contemporary design lacks many

**Figure 39: Highly styled midcentury clocks and lamps**

Source (both images): author
of the attributes of high modernism that have rightly drawn criticism (e.g. ‘form over function’, its insistence that it did not constitute a style, its privileging of masculine rationality), and which prevented that aesthetic from ever achieving mainstream appeal.

The result is that while contemporary interior design makes liberal use of canonical items, it is not limited to using these items. It is not, therefore, a ‘retro’ style, in other words; there is ample room for designers to produce items in the contemporary style that are obviously products of the present day but share an aesthetic with iconic midcentury items. Figure 42 contains objects produced by a company called Umbra. The links between the side table, the clock and some of the midcentury design classics is clear, but the scotch tape dispenser an original that would look at home in any modern interior of the past fifty years.

![Figure 40: Present day items show influence of modernism](source: www.umbra.com)

Another Canadian company, Gus Modern, similarly produces high-design items that subtly rework previous interpretations of modernism, but like many other companies today, they also produce items that look like they were created half a century previous. The chairs in Figure 43, for example, look like products of the Bauhaus.
Figure 41: Updated high modernism
Source: www.gusmodern.com

Typical of contemporary design, the same company also produces the sofa seen in Figure 44, which is inspired by a very different aesthetic.

Contemporary design therefore possess attributes that make it particularly well-suited to mainstream condominiums: its low visual mass maximizes the often minimal amount of space and light in small condominium units; its ostentatious style and colour adds visual interest to spaces like model suites that tend to be uncluttered, again in the interest of maximizing space; it addresses (stereotypically) women by using design to appeal to emotion rather than intellect; at the same time, it casts a range of high modern and midcentury items as design classics in order to trade on this newly constructed legitimacy. The latter point is abundantly clear in an advertisement that describes the Barcelona chair as a ‘masterpiece of the modernism movement’ and claims a ‘similar destiny’ for the

Figure 42: Updated midcentury modernism
Source: www.gusmodern.com
condominium project being advertised (Figure 45).

**Figure 43:** Barcelona chair invoked as a masterpiece of modernism
(Source: *Toronto Star* 19 July 2003, P3)

Although the classic designs of high modernism or mid-century modernism inform the sensibility of the contemporary interior, they tend to be used judiciously in condominium model suites, and in many cases, the furnishings are entirely present-day products. The model suite in Figure 46, for example, has a curvy, bright red occasional chair; in the background is a dining table consisting of a glass sheet atop a pair of wooden struts. In each case, the designs are quite
The model suite in Figure 47, for example shows its modernist origins in its use of rectilinear forms and white walls but moderates it with simple but elegant chairs that recall their midcentury counterparts, and through wooden cabinet doors that are a warm orange shade. The strong
pattern of the stone countertop also makes the space less severe than it would have been had a less ‘decorative’ material been used. The wall and bulkhead surrounding the cabinets is particularly noteworthy, first for elegantly demarcating the kitchen from the rest of the unit, and second for illustrating the degree to which the contemporary design sensibility is shared among the different elements of condominiums: as seen earlier, architects use precisely this kind of strategy to add interest to the shapes and surfaces of contemporary structures.

The contemporary design aesthetic therefore possessed a number of attributes that made it ideal for use in recent-era condominiums. Most importantly, it provided a coherent sensibility that could be applied the entirety of condo projects: exterior, configuration and interior; without this, it would not have been possible to position the condominium as being design-led. Due to its roots in high modernism, contemporary design came with a built-in pedigree, adding credibility to the public image that was further enhanced by the adoption of this design aesthetic around the world. Contemporary design’s emphasis on simplicity of line and low visual mass, and on natural light and open-concept floor plans were perfectly suited to address the constraints imposed by condominium units that have continually shrunk during the recent era. And to reiterate this section’s main points, contemporary design differentiated the condominium from its predecessors of previous eras, and from other dwelling types while providing a high-style aesthetic that could be marketed to women.

Although the combination of contemporary design and the condominium seems inevitable—and perhaps it was—the next section illustrates that implementation of contemporary design took place in evolutionary stages, starting with loft conversion projects in Toronto in the late 1990s, then the high-design midrise projects that began to appear shortly thereafter, and finally to the mainstream projects of the largest developers.

6.2 Implementing contemporary design

The process of implementing contemporary design has it origins in the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s that presented developers with the opportunity to rebrand the condominium. Following a peak in 1989, condominium prices experienced a sharp ‘correction’ that left many speculative condominium owners deep in a negative equity situation. Developers, on the other hand, were left with unsold inventory in their completed projects along with the prospect of buyers refusing to take possession of projects not yet completed. Combined with the
other, more general effects of the recession that dampened consumer spending, the condominium market in the early 1990s was stagnant. Very few new projects were announced, and some projects under construction ground to a halt as developers turned to dramatic price-discounting to sell unsold units. Across all price ranges, projects exhibited a sense of desperation (Figure 48).

Advertisements like these promise great value but they also implicitly position the products as undesirable, having little to offer other than low prices. With condominiums now considered to be volatile, unreliable investments, metaphorically positioning them alongside leftover automobiles from last year and scratch-and-dent appliances hardly burnished the public image. Rebranding of the condominium was therefore necessary.

Providing further impetus for a rebranding was the rezoning of unused industrial land in Toronto’s core to allow for residential uses. The large condominium development

**Figure 46: Recession-induced panic advertising**
companies showed little interest, likely because building in these areas would diverge substantially from their successful formula generally based on greenfield development in suburban areas and Toronto’s affluent midtown. Smaller developers saw possibilities in developing residential property in unconventional areas, however, and since the mid 1990s have dominated condominium development in the centrally located, downtown land surrounding King and Queen Streets on both sides of Yonge Street.

One of the highest profile developments in the mid and late 1990s was a project called the Candy Factory, a loft conversion. Although significant for many reasons, this project is important here for its introduction of modernist-inspired design into the mainstream condominium market. Although a novel dwelling type for Toronto, the loft conversion had long been associated with a particular aesthetic as a result of thousands of portrayals of SoHo lofts in the mainstream media and design books and magazines. The aesthetic is immediately familiar: industrial minimalism that combines exposed infrastructure (plumbing, electrical, structural) with professional grade appliances, white walls, an open concept configuration and a few well chosen pieces of furniture and art. All of this, and the loft conversion’s associations with (and pretensions to) art, artists, industrial design and austerity have been explained in Zukin’s compelling account (Zukin, 1982). The relevance here is that the Candy Factory had a ready-made aesthetic it could implement, and advertisements reveal that in the last iteration of a project that was reworked several times, the SoHo style was adopted.
Figure 47: Raw industrial elements are emphasized in early ‘hard loft’ marketing
(Source: Toronto Star, 18 April 1998, P8)

The dominant aspect of the image in Figure 49 is the open space, which recalls the classic SoHo artist’s loft that occupied an entire floor of a building. It trades on the industrial past of the building by emphasizing its structural components. The inset photograph is a more recognizably residential space, but the presence of a very conventional sofa and a chandelier do little to alter the industrial feel of the space. The developers are relying on people being attracted to the novelty of living in a former industrial space, making authenticity the characteristic that is emphasized here, rather than aesthetics. The original floors, ceilings and pillars—all no doubt showing signs of their age and conspicuously left in that condition—are celebrated here, and reject the conventions of residential spaces. It is thus a quite masculine sensibility, privileging the raw and unrefined functionalism of the space and casting the decorative and ornamental aspects unimportant and implicitly unnecessary.

A second advertisement (Figure 50) takes an entirely different approach and is makes one of the earliest links between design and the condominium. Most obviously, this advertisement promises
‘Stylish loft living’ using a photograph of a more conventionally domestic setting. Where structure and space were privileged in the previous advertisement, here the emphasis is on the experience of space. Following the SoHo example, the advertisement promises large windows, original beams, high ceilings, ‘ultra contemporary kitchens with oversized islands and granite counters’, and ‘designer bathrooms’. Some of these things had been offered by projects previously, but Candy Factory was the most visible project to offer high design in a mainstream condominium project.

While such features were ahead of their time, some of the design decisions made at Candy Factory and other loft projects of the time never gained mainstream acceptance, and even disappeared from later loft conversions. One of the many Condo Living articles about Candy Factory, for example, notes that ‘sleeping areas are on a raised platform and surrounded by a half wall’ (Hurley, 1997) and that ‘bands of fabric stretch from floor to ceiling, giving the living room a slightly separated feeling’ (ibid). What seems clear is that designers were attempting to recreate the stereotypical SoHo loft—niche market, multi-million dollar spaces by the late 1990s—in a mainstream project in Toronto. Part of this was based on an assumption that people wanted to live a different way: that they were not interested in bourgeois concepts like privacy, and that they desired live/work spaces that could be reconfigured through the use of sliding screens and similar techniques. This may have been the case for famous New York artists of the 1960s but much less likely appropriate for a late 1990s Torontonian buying a $170,000 loft. Another loft conversion, Merchandise Building, implemented a much more practical and accessible interpretation of SoHo minimalism.

**Figure 48: Design, comfort are emphasized**
(Source: Toronto Star, 21 March 1998, P4)
6.2.1 The Merchandise Building and the contemporary interior

"Layouts had not changed in years, but lofts changed all that." – Interior designer Elaine Cecconi (Gibney, 2001)

The Merchandise Building’s promotional approach in the late 1990s is particularly notable for basing much of its advertising on the concept of design and space while de-emphasizing the structure of the building. A huge, four-phase project, Merchandise Building was marketed using a series of advertisements that would not look out of place in fashion or dwelling magazines. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this move for its implications on condominium marketing because it simultaneously aligns the condominium with fashion, design and style and (necessarily) positions the condominium as a dwelling that is particularly suited to women.

The reproductions of advertisements in Figure 51 (from 1996 and 1997, respectively) are unfortunately of low quality, but the ads’ sensibility is apparent, as is the stark contrast they present in comparison to the Candy Factory advertisements. Where the latter celebrates its rough, unfinished surfaces and relies on novelty and size for appeal, the Merchandise Building advertisements promise sophisticated, polished space and a romantic urban lifestyle by referencing New York via a ‘I heart M.B. Lofts’ caption. Rather than authenticity, these ads privilege the stereotypically female-coded concepts of emotion and aesthetics, indicating that the ads were formulated with a female clientele in mind.

The Merchandise Building’s marketing campaign is therefore notable for linking condominiums, design and women. This occurred through advertisements like those above, and more obviously in others (including radio advertisements) that prominently featured Toronto designers Elaine Cecconi and Anna Simone, among others. Before these advertisements appeared, designers were identified only in articles that reviewed model suites of niche market projects. Articles about mainstream projects, by contrast, rarely mentioned designers or architects in any context. The prominence given to designers in the Merchandise Building advertisements was unprecedented, and was also quite high-profile: ‘They had interviews on tv, they ran ads on CityTV, we were on the subways. I felt sorry for our staff—they had to look at us on the way to work!’ (Elaine Cecconi, personal interview, 2009).
Design, women and condominiums are linked in multiple ways in this campaign. The link is made explicit by foregrounding design in promotional materials. An implicit link is made by adopting the visual conventions of fashion and dwelling magazines, perceived to have a predominantly female readership. These links are in turn supported by the promotion of the project’s interior designers, which similarly aligns the condominium with other products that also are associated with designers, such as upscale apparel and jewelery. What is crucial about this strategy is that it instantly positions the condominium as belonging to a known, legitimated and aspirational category of consumer goods. People use categories to ‘make sense of the myriad new and existing products and services in the marketplace…’ (Loken et al., 2008, p. 133). When people ‘assign a particular product or service to a consumer category…they can understand and draw inferences about it’ (ibid.). Positioning the condominium as part of a known category therefore indicates to consumers how they should interact with the condo as a product, and what

Figure 49: Lifestyle and design elegance were prominent in Merchandise Building marketing
they should expect from it. It simultaneously offers reassurance for purchase decisions along with potential rewards to, or affirmations of, notions of self and identity.

The most important persuasive ‘work’ that these advertisements do may be normative in nature. Advertisers often attempt to influence decisions by suggesting their product is the only real choice. Sometimes this involves explicit claims (e.g. ‘More people use…’) but the more powerful approach is one that depicts people using the product in meaningful ways, implying that this product alone is suitable and that its suitability is beyond question. In the case of the Merchandise Building advertisements, the condominium is naturalized as a dwelling type that is not simply possible for women to own, but one that is particularly well-suited to women. As explored in other chapters, this message has come to characterize the marketing of condominiums in Toronto.

The Merchandise Building advertisements are also strongly normative in terms of contemporary design by employing a relatively minimalist, modernist aesthetic (commonly associated with masculinity) in a project positioned for women. This act of ‘making modernism safe for women’ so to speak, is fundamental for the recent era condominium, which needs to be associated with leading edge (i.e. modernist-inspired) design in order to retain credibility as a design-led dwelling type. The contemporary formula for condominium interiors that began to evolve with projects like Merchandise Building is largely an update of the loft aesthetic that retains its flat unadorned surfaces but softens or domesticates them with colour, sparkle or reflectivity. The contemporary condominium kitchen or bath, for example, will use flat-panel cabinet doors that are sometimes glossy or have gleaming hardware; countertops are granite as they were in true lofts, but they will be half the thickness in at attempt to convey elegance rather than solidity. Mechanical fixtures, too, such as faucets, lights and appliances will typically attempt to convey female-coded elegance rather than male-coded industrial prowess. The result is an aesthetic that combines the stereotypically masculine minimalism of the industrial loft and stereotypically feminine elegance and glamour.

The Merchandise Building’s successful promotional campaign is notable for a number of reasons, not least of which being the message it sent to developers, who are unsurprisingly eager to devise reliable marketing formulas. Merchandise Building showed that design sells, and for more unexpectedly, that designers sell, and more broadly, the condo-as-design-product sells—
particularly to women. The formula has been refined over the subsequent years, but its elements remain the same.

After early projects like the Merchandise Building, the acceptance of contemporary design in recent era condominiums occurred rapidly, and quickly became part of the standard formula for mainstream projects, particularly those in urban settings. More conservative styles, although usually updated with touches of contemporary design, remained mostly in suburban projects, and in very expensive projects that targeted an older target market. This represents a dramatic change from previous eras when “traditional” was the dominant style, at all price points. Designer Elaine Cecconi notes, ‘Ten years ago, I always say to people, there’s ten [conservative] Gluckstein jobs for every [contemporary] Cecconi Simone job because that’s where the market was. Now I’d say the split is probably more even’ (personal interview, 2009). Echoing this observation, a Condo Living article profiling a builder of custom vanities notes, ‘Eighty percent of the units he creates are simple, clean and modern looking, and 20 per cent are more traditional. That's the reverse of what he was designing two years ago’ (Moorhouse, 2003).

A final implication of the Merchandise Building is that it decoupled design from structure. Candy Factory and other loft projects—including classic SoHo lofts—had set up an implicit loft/condo dichotomy in which great spaces were a function of industrial architecture, suggesting that only a ‘true’ loft could yield airy, open and spacious feeling apartments. Although the Merchandise Building was a warehouse conversion, by emphasizing what its designers did with the available space, as opposed to promoting the building’s exposed brick walls, for example, it illustrated that innovative, stylish spaces could be made; great spaces were not necessarily the sole preserve of industrial conversions but could be created in more mainstream places as well.

### 6.2.2 20 Niagara and the midrise soft loft

Although the Merchandise Building was a success, it could not be duplicated widely because the number of abandoned industrial buildings suitable for conversion to residential uses was limited. Developers realized, however, that they could create new buildings that used the physical configuration of true lofts as their inspiration. A six storey building (Figure 52) built in the late 1990s, 20 Niagara was the most visible application of thoroughly contemporary architecture and
loft-inspired unit configuration featuring open spaces, tall ceilings, floor to ceiling windows, and exposed infrastructure. Such new-build projects were given the label ‘soft loft’ to differentiate them from hard lofts (i.e. industrial or warehouse conversions) and perhaps more importantly, from conventional condominiums.9

Figure 50: 20 Niagara, an early high-profile 'soft loft'
(Source: author)

Its modest size undoubtedly precluded the possibility of a large-scale promotional campaign, but the project nonetheless achieved a high profile as a result of winning design awards and subsequently being lauded in Condo Living articles with titles like ‘Architects applaud 20 Niagara St’ (Anonymous, 1999). Important as awards are, it was likely two columns by Condo Living’s architecture critic Christopher Hume that cemented 20 Niagara’s position as a design

9 It is interesting to note that soft lofts were not stigmatized (as counterfeit or fake) in Toronto as Podmore (1998) suggests was the case in Montreal. Perhaps by the 1990s in Toronto, the kind of artist’s loft that Podmore describes—similar to the SoHo loft of the 1960s and 1970s—had effectively disappeared.
leader. In an article entitled ‘Futuristic building brings new residential life to industrial area’ appearing on the front page of the section, the usually acerbic Hume heaps praise on 20 Niagara:

‘Above all, the six-storey structure points the way to a new form of residential architecture that accommodates the needs of the individual within the context of a downtown setting. Like all examples of architectural excellence, 20 Niagara transcends itself’ (Hume, 1999).

Three years later, the project was the subject of another Hume article, this time as part of a very long-running series that evaluated condominium architecture. He bestows on the project a rarely-given grade of ‘A’ and notes that it set a standard that has not been surpassed (30 Mar 2002, p4).

Praise like this, and the highly favourable publicity 20 Niagara received in general were unlikely to influence many purchase decisions, particularly in a scenario involving radically new architecture and configuration in a project located in an otherwise non-residential location. Sales were “very, very slow” according to the broker handling sales (Brad J. Lamb, personal interview, 2009). The project may have lost money; the developer, when asked if high design helped make projects successful responded, ‘It depends where you’re coming from. You can have—and we’ve had them—design prize winners that lost money, so is that project a success?’ (Howard Cohen, personal interview, 2009). Nonetheless, developers pay close attention to what their competitors are doing, and the approach taken at 20 Niagara was soon repeated by the same developer and others. Execution varied from project to project, particularly in regard to how aggressively they used the more industrial, ‘masculine’ design elements such as exposed concrete floors, walls and ceilings, and exposed mechanical infrastructure. Exteriors too varied but nearly universally adhered to immediately identifiable ‘contemporary’ vernacular.
A 2003 project announcement from Condo Living (Figure 53) captures the formula perfectly with its title: loft-like but with refinement.

The formula is equally evident in an advertisement for a different mid-rise project (Figure 54) that claims to be ‘the modern interpretation of traditional loft design’. While the copy notes the project’s ‘soaring 10ft concrete ceilings and floor-to-ceiling glass, the ad’s primary graphic depicts a sleek Cecconi-Simone interior that resembles a boutique hotel much more than a hard loft conversion of a former industrial building.

Like 20 Niagara, the high-design mid-rise projects that followed it received a disproportionate amount of coverage in Condo Living given the number of residential units they produced. There are likely multiple factors that account for this, but the most obvious is that these projects presented writers and editors with an obvious way to create eye-catching articles by emphasizing the unconventional project exteriors and interiors. These projects also offered the possibility of personalizing stories by configuring them as profiles of the architects and/or the developer (Figure 55).

Figure 51: Article headline captures soft loft formula
(Source: Toronto Star, 27 September 2003, P4)

Figure 52: ‘the modern interpretation of traditional loft design’
(Source: Toronto Star, 29 May 2004, R2)

Sales office for the project called Five Nine opens this weekend. It has been designed by Toronto architect Charles Ware.

Using this approach also allowed Condo Living to present site profiles that did not appear to be
obviously promotional in nature, which reinforces the perceived credibility of the section and no doubt provided a welcome change of pace from site profiles for the conventional projects of larger developers. Apart from these pragmatic reasons for giving prominent coverage to mid-rise projects, these articles also conform to Condo Living’s implicit mandate to present condominiums in a favourable light. Beyond this, however, these articles also participate in a discourse of design that runs through Condo Living and is manifested in articles across a surprisingly broad range of topics. I will address this subject later in this chapter; the pertinent points here is that positive publicity—and of course the ability of developers to refine the formula and make it profitable—illustrated that high-design was viable beyond the loft conversion, and that it was not necessary to construct new buildings that gave the appearance of being loft conversions (as some developers did) to obtain the kinds of spaces for which true lofts were known. There is perhaps little better proof of this than a

Figure 53: High-design projects gained high visibility
(Source: Toronto Star, 12 June 1999, P1)
quote from a purchaser who was inspired by media imagery of true lofts but happily purchases a new build ‘soft loft’ at 20 Niagara: ‘When I saw Flashdance [partly filmed in an industrial loft conversion], I knew I had to live in a loft’ (MacKinnon, 1999).

While even the ‘commodity’ developers were relatively quick to adopt the interior design sensibility suggested by the Merchandise Building—to the point that the majority of condominiums differ only in the details of their implementation of contemporary interior design—the same is not the case for the contemporary architecture of 20 Niagara. Until quite recently, the large, long-time developers of high-rise condominiums in Toronto have been reluctant to fully engage with contemporary architecture even as they have been increasingly willing to build in the core of the city. Low-rise developers who have entered the market have decided to differentiate themselves from the incumbent commodity developers through the use of high design. These developers have produced projects that, as expected, were well publicized. However, it has probably been the success of Vancouver developer Concord-Adex’s brownfield CityPlace project south of Front Street that has done the most to bring high-design to the mainstream, high-rise condominium. Each of the buildings in this huge, multi-phase project is completely contemporary in design, and they have sold well despite a location that is undeniably central but equally undeniably unattractive. Interestingly, the developer has embarked on a project in suburban Toronto, to the likely dismay of mainstream competitors.

Exteriors exhibiting Contemporary design remain much less common than more conventionally designed exteriors, but the same is certainly not true of loft-inspired interior configurations. As early as 1999, a comparatively small developer of a new-build ‘soft loft’ was claiming, "You can't sell now unless you offer high ceilings, big windows, open concept, light reaching to the back, unique finishes and an urban location" (MacKinnon, 1999). Self-interest may have led this developer into something of an overstatement, but his claim—apart from the need for an urban location—has proved accurate over time. Regardless of their price, mainstream condominium interiors as seen in model suites are nearly universal in their use of contemporary design. There are differences in the quality of finishes and fixtures, but these differences are only in execution (i.e. the choice of colours, patterns, materials, furnishing).
6.2.3 Toronto’s Design Cartel?

In some ways, the relative uniformity of design seen even in ‘leading edge’ condominiums is to be expected. Developers are loath to deviate from successful formulas and will therefore demand contemporary interior design in their projects. More fundamentally, it would be challenging for designers to work outside of what is clearly the dominant aesthetic of the moment—and if they did, their work would likely have difficulty being accepted. Beyond this, however, is the possibility that some of the remarkable design coherence over time and between projects is due to the prominence of a very few design firms and very few architectural firms in Toronto. This idea arose as I read the thousands of site profiles and model suite evaluations in Condo Living, and it struck me that I was seeing the same names over and over again, particularly in the years from 1997 to 2002: designers Cecconi-Simone, Mike Niven, and Brian Gluckstein; architects Peter Clewes and CORE Architects; realtor and developer Brad Lamb; marketer Lawrence Ayliffe; and developer Context Developments. It seemed that this group was primarily—perhaps solely—responsible for the visibility of high design in Toronto condominium development.

I interviewed some of these people in order to ascertain their perceptions about the importance of design in the success of the recent era Toronto condominium. Brad Lamb happened to introduce the idea of a design cartel (although not using that term) before I had the chance to ask about this specifically: ‘[w]hat came first, the chicken or the egg, right? While we were all, this group of twenty people, pushing design, trying to get better things, caring about the city, trying to make housing better, the interesting thing is at the same time, the world was embracing design, right?’ (Personal interview, 2009). Asked specifically if there was in fact a group of people working to the same end—to promote design—Lamb answered in the affirmative:

‘So there was an active collaborative effort among all of us, so if you went into Core Architects and said “Who do you suggest we hire to sell this building?” they’re going to say “You’ve got to have Brad Lamb”. And if someone came to me and said, “Who do you want me to hire as an architect?” I’d say “You either hire one of the three guys at Core, or you hire Peter Clewes, that’s my choice, and if you want me to do the project, that’s who you hire.”’

‘So we started to be found by all the big developers, get hired by the big guys, whereas before, we all worked with the smaller ones. And so now what’s happened with our efforts is, we’ve not let it go and it’s now growing exponentially without any influence from us…it’s
just its own exponentially growing virus of modernity that’s taking place, and it’s reshaping Toronto, and it all came out of this crucible of about twenty people that pushed and referred, pushed and referred. We all built our businesses by helping each other’ (ibid.).

Lamb’s characteristically dramatic account is reflective of why he has been so successful selling people condominiums. Others involved, by contrast, tended to characterize the situation in more pragmatic terms when asked why they ended up working with the same firms on different projects. Elaine Cecconi: ‘Part of it is convenience, because when you work with a client and do a successful project, they sell at the rate they want to sell, they sell at the dollar values they want to sell, and there’s a comfort level working with that client’ (Personal interview, 2009).

Cecconi brought up a negative consequence of the situation as well: ‘Sometimes, the clients we’ve done four projects with say suddenly “You know what, I want to try a new team now” and we may not do their next couple of projects… There’s certainly some clients who want to mix things up. They want to bring in different designers for different projects, and you know what, we don’t begrudge them that’ (ibid.).

Howard Cohen of Context Developments, on being asked if the continual co-operation of a small number of firms might have pushed design in Toronto gave a similarly pragmatic response, this one based on the idea of success leading to emulation: ‘That’s interesting, I’ve never thought about it that way, but at Context, our favourite architect is obviously Peter Clewes, Lawrence Ayliffe’s done all of our marketing, Brad Lamb used to do all of our selling, so I think…other developers have glommed onto them’ (Personal interview, 2009).

Each of these interpretations sheds some light on the adoption of contemporary design by Toronto developers. Lamb’s account accurately characterizes recent era Toronto as a city with small group of developers, designers, architects, marketers and brokers that works well together in producing coherent, contemporary products. Cecconi raises the issue of convenience and familiarity, but also the implicit point that the people involved are competent and reliable, which is understandably important for developers. Cohen underscores how developers seek to reduce their risks by using proven quantities. A related point that none of the interviewees made is that Toronto’s astonishing demand for condominiums allowed all involved the chance to refine their approach many times. This research is not designed to answer a question like ‘Why Toronto?’ (in regard to its disproportionately large condominium market) but some of the points above may be
applicable; not all cities may have had the combination of talent, competence and stability of Toronto’s architects and designers, or the drive of its developers and brokers. More germane to this research, it is likely that in few cities did people receive the extensive newspaper coverage like this group did in Toronto from Condo Living.

6.3 Condo Living’s discourse of design

The previous sections have shown how the Toronto condominium came to be linked to a specific design aesthetic that helped define the condo as a design-led dwelling type. In this section, I explore two ways that the link between the design in general and the condominium was promoted. The following section examines the process of ‘celebrification’ of local designers and architects that was carried out in the pages of Condo Living. This process is understood to be an implication of positioning the condominium as design-led, a commodity type that is strongly associated with celebrity designers. This circumstance opened the door to the marketing not just design, but designers as well.

The second way that design in general came to be linked with condominium is subsequently explored through an examination of the many design-themed articles that were published in Condo Living. I argue that the variety of subject matter, the frequency with which design-themed articles appeared, and the articles’ mere presence in a real estate section dedicated exclusively to condominiums created a discourse that served to naturalize the link between design in all its forms and the condominium.

6.3.1 Celebrification, Design and Architecture

It seems clear why the small group of local designers, architects, realtors and developers identified above would come to be featured in articles in Condo Living: they presented an obvious way to ‘spin’ articles that otherwise are quite formulaic and repetitive in describing a new project or its model suite. Other factors surely affected the decision to use these people as well, including their ability and willingness to provide useful quotes, and not least, their continued presence in the city: most of the people Brad Lamb would include in the design-promoting group he speculated about have worked in Toronto since at least the mid-1990s—much longer for some—and have continued to do so. A less obvious side-effect that I will briefly
introduce here is the idea that the frequent appearances in Condo Living and in condominium marketing resulted in a group of people achieving ‘local celebrity’ status to a greater or lesser degree. This process almost certainly acted as a ‘virtuous cycle’ by implicitly representing designers as important (via articles and pictures), leading to an increased visibility among consumers and developers and a greater demand for their services…and more high profile articles in Condo Living.

The celebrity-building aspect of Condo Living is likely a minor component of the formulation of the condominium as a design-led dwelling type, but I think it is worth a brief discussion if only because ignoring this aspect would seem nearly indefensible given the concurrent rise of the condominium, design, and celebrity culture over the past fifteen years. It is not the condominium, of course, that has engendered research into celebrity; ‘reality television’ is a much more likely catalyst. Whatever the case, there has been speculation over past decade or so that ‘celebrity’ has supplanted the long-incumbent Enlightenment concept of ‘fame’ (Barry, 2008). There are gender implications, with fame being associated with stereotypically masculine achievements, and celebrity with more stereotypically passive feminine achievements but this shift may be most profound in its influence on praxis: ‘Our behaviour appears to be guided, then, not by social institutions or doctrines, but by the example of individuals who are seen as both like and magically unlike ourselves’ (ibid., p. 251).

Just as I have suggested that the prevalence of the branding paradigm has conditioned us to see branding even in the absence of a planned, coherent branding effort, it would seem that we are also primed to perceive celebrity under circumstances it did not exist in previously. This tendency to attach celebrity to all manner of events—‘celebrification’ as it has been called—is most obvious in the success of reality television shows, which create celebrities of ‘ordinary’ people (Turner, 2006). It is this same process that turns people (or their pets) into celebrities through websites such as YouTube. The circumstances regarding condominiums are different in a number of perhaps crucial ways, most notably the reach and format of the medium involved, but it remains possible for the real estate section to contribute to celebrity-building if it invokes some accepted aspect of celebrity.

In the case of the Toronto group, the Condo Living articles gain some of their credibility from the mode of representation (as has always been the case for newspapers) but also from the
remarkable rise of reality television shows dedicated to seemingly every aspect of acquiring, maintaining, renovating, decorating or selling a dwelling. These shows, originating from Canada, the United States, Australia and the UK have of course created celebrities, but they have also established and legitimated roles such as the ‘celebrity designer’ as cultural intermediaries with unprecedented salience and influence (Attwood, 2005). In Condo Living, interior designers, architects, realtors and developers are mentioned in hundred of articles, but the celebrity-making articles are those that specifically profile individuals and their firms. It is not simply the narrow focus of these articles that contributes to their power; it is also their positioning within the section, the space on the page they are accorded, and the imagery that accompanies them. Figure 56 below, for example, shows the entire front page of Condo Living given over to designers Brian Gluckstein, Anna Simone and Dan Menchions, while Figure 57 is another front page from 5 years earlier dedicated to Gluckstein alone.

Figure 54: Prominent coverage of local designers
(Source: Toronto Star, 9 November 2002, P1)
The images are notable for their informality; while the people portrayed are positioned as experts, they appear friendly and approachable, an effect partly achieved by the subjects’ bearing. Gluckstein in Figure 57, and Cecconi and Simone in Figure 58 (below) smile and are positioned in withdrawn, non-threatening poses. In many of the images, we literally look down on the subjects, reversing the power relation that sometimes characterizes the expert/amateur relationship. They are all (understandably) posed in interior, domestic spaces that enhance the overall effect. Interior designers especially are therefore positioned very much as people ‘both like and magically unlike ourselves’.
Designers to share their knowledge

A year ago, Toronto designers Elaine Cecconi and Anna Simone opened a store to showcase furniture designs they have created to meet the needs of the city’s condominium industry.

The furniture lines bear the names of some of the condo projects they’ve worked on, including the Waterloo, on Queen’s Quay, and Kings Court, at Shebourne and King St.

Working on condominium suite designs has given them “a very good insight into some of the difficulties of working with smaller spaces,” Cecconi said when the store was launched.

Next Thursday, they’ll start sharing that expertise with customers during a seminar at the store. Oui One, at 13335 Dundas St. W., west of Ossington Ave. The first session is titled “Understanding your space.”

The designing duo, who teamed up more than 20 years ago as Cecconi Simone Inc., plan to hold seminars on the last Thursday of every second month, looking at other aspects of furniture and design.

Oui One also offers accessories, such as tableware, vases, artwork, textiles and lighting. The furniture designs tend to feature sleek modern lines, with an Asian or Arts and Crafts flavour.

To attend the seminar, sign up at Oui One, visit www.oui-one.com, or contact Plans Crisp at 416-888-5900, ext. 259. The seminar starts at 7 p.m.

Elaine Cecconi, left, and Anna Simone will offer a seminar on space planning Thursday at their store on Dundas St. W. Above left, one of their more unusual lines of furniture was scaled down for pets.

Figure 56: Self-effacing poses encourage identification

(Source: Toronto Star, 20 September 2003, P8)

This sensibility takes a different form in a full-page advertisement (Figure 59), in which all of the designers save Ralph Lauren exhibit deference by looking away, looking down, refusing engagement. The local designers share space with the famous American but are not (yet) his equal. Despite this second-class status, it remains notable that local designers achieved a sufficient degree of celebrity to participate with Lauren as the sole focus of the marketing of a condominium. At a larger level, this advertisement is also notable for the prominence it accords to design in general: as at Merchandise Building, the developer here obviously felt that employing multiple designers, and promoting them would constitute an effective primary focus of a marketing strategy.
Architect Peter Clewes (Figure 60 below), by contrast, is posed outdoors and looks off into the middle distance in what is intended to be a heroic, visionary way. The laudatory text is virtually redundant at this point. As consumers of news media we are experts in its ‘codes of composition’ (Hartley, 1982); we know instantly from the pose, the position of the article and the
size of the article’s title that Clewes is important and worth attending to. Furthering this perception is the positioning of Clewes in close-up. It has been argued that we react to the size of people in images according to how this corresponds to real world social distance: partners, close friends and family members typically occupy much of our field of view since we often interact with them over short distances. The distance we maintain during social interaction increases as familiarity and trust decrease. Thus the close-up perceptually positions the subject as a trusted friend or loved one, while the medium shot suggests an acquaintance, and the long shot an unknown person with whom we have no connection (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Figure 58: 'Heroic' yet accessible portrait of the architect
(Source: Toronto Star, 6 May 2004, P1)
It is nonetheless characteristic of the recent-era condo public image that the portrayed importance of architects like Clewes in Condo Living articles is not mirrored in condominium advertisements. Apart from rare examples like the ad shown in Figure 61, architects are generally not identified in developer marketing. This is in striking contrast to the situation of interior designers, who, as documented above, have frequently been made central to advertising campaigns. This too is a complete overturning of the high modernist sensibility that privileged architects and engineers with traditionally masculine associations over interior decorators and designers with traditionally feminine associations and emphasizes that the current design sensibility is much more a reworking than a revisiting of modernism.

Where Condo Living seems most obviously associated with celebrity-building is with realtor Brad Lamb, who was the subject of no less than three separate “Condo People” profiles (see Figure 62). In all of these profiles, he challenges the camera directly, surrounded by wording that suggests achievement, aggression and lack of compromise. He is not sympathetic, but confident and competent.
Figure 60: Local celebrity, realtor Brad Lamb

(Source: Toronto Star, top to bottom: 7 March 1998, P4; 27 October 2001, P9; 8 January 2000, K11)
In only one image (Figure 63, left) is he photographed in a non-confrontational position, but here he becomes, like Clewes, the respected visionary, photographed from a position around the level of Lamb’s ankles. Needless to say, the inclusion of the CN Tower in the background of two of these images contributes to the overall effect of aggression and masculine achievement.

Condo Living was far from the only media source to cover Lamb, but its high visibility was undoubtedly useful in making Lamb enough of a celebrity that he was the subject of a reality show that ran for three years. Certainly the most media-savvy of the people discussed here, Lamb is fully aware of what the coverage has done for him: ‘I think to a large degree, the media has enabled me to create my office as a brand for what we do in a certain part of the city’ (personal interview, 2009).

Although Condo Living is transparently not a ‘hard news’ section of the newspaper, its mimicking of the graphic layout of the rest of the newspaper results in the reader interpreting it using their well-practiced competence in decoding the conventions of news media. These articles position designers, architects and realtors as celebrities, or perhaps more accurately, ‘celebrity experts’ who belong to the class of cultural intermediaries that has become increasingly common on reality television shows. As on those shows, the people profiled here become meaningful because they affect our perceptions and decisions about ourselves and others: 'If lifestyle is manifested in the choices we make in relation to interior design or the food that we cook and serve and if such choices make statements...
concerning our sense of self and social positioning, then celebrity experts become important by providing, through the media, templates of possibilities' (Powell, 2010, p. 115).

For this research, the primary implication of the celebrity-building process is the strengthened bond between the condominium and design that results from having a small group of design-focused people uniquely associated with the condominium. This is the case even for Brad Lamb, whose comments in most Condo Living articles are divided equally between those that relate to design and those that relate to the buying and selling of condominiums. The existence of this unique group of design-focused celebrity experts—whether acting as a group or not—allowed the condominium to participate in the larger societal rise of ‘celebrification’, a circumstance that has undoubtedly been beneficial to the creation of meaning related to the condo.

6.3.2 Linking Design with the condo

Previous sections have illustrated the specifics of contemporary design and the various ways it has been linked to the condominium; this section takes a different tack by addressing the broader concept of design in arguing that in a range of articles, Condo Living created a discourse of design that naturalized a link with condominiums. This argument is partly based on the premise that Condo Living is much more than the sum of its parts, which are quite unprepossessing: a grouping of condominium advertisements surrounded by essentially promotional articles. Yet examining advertisements in isolation and ignoring articles entirely utterly forecloses the possibility of understanding the influence of the real estate section as an entity. Only by examining all of the components is it possible to assess their function as a whole. It is for this reason that I evaluated all of the articles in Condo Living, not simply those obviously linked to design, such as the hundreds of articles that evaluated model suites of new projects or the floorplans of existing units sent in by readers seeking ways to improve them. These articles certainly linked the condominium to a certain design aesthetic, but they may be no more important than the wide range of design-centric articles about local stores or trade shows in helping to create a discourse of design around condominiums. What I am suggesting is that these articles in their totality, their pervasiveness and particularly in their wide range of subject matter performed a normative function in naturalizing the link between design and the condominium.

The Condo Living section was, like all real estate sections, a construct designed to generate advertising revenue. Its appeal to developers was based on the newspaper’s high circulation and
the understood promise to surround the advertisements with articles that treated the events comprising the construction and marketing of condominiums as true news. Most of these articles, such as those that profile new projects in detail, and provide periodic updates on model suites, sales incentives, and construction progress are clearly promotional in nature. Many of them are cleverly formulated—as designer, developer or architect profiles, for example—and may foreground various aspects of design, but they remain promotional: all of them will note the number and price range of suites still available and include the address and phone number of the sales suite. This is the (usually) unspoken *quid pro quo* of the real estate section: developers who purchase advertising will be rewarded with favourable, promotional articles.

Condo Living published more than two hundred articles by Christopher Hume, for example, that were almost all focused on condominium architecture. In these pieces, Hume typically evaluated a recently built condominium according to its appearance, how well it integrated with its surroundings, and whether it contributed to or detracted from the site’s public space. The tone and content of these critiques departed from the usually sunny nature of real estate section articles: Hume was often quite sharp in his criticism, although the project in question was identified only by its address; neither its name nor its developer were ever mentioned. His critiques invoked architectural jargon (e.g. ‘volumes’, ‘massing’, how the structured ‘addressed’ the street) and dealt with abstract and somewhat complex concepts such as the notion that buildings do not exist in isolation but are part of the ‘urban fabric’ that affect not only occupants but also all who see the structure or walk past it. The articles were therefore relatively inaccessible, although this was balanced—brilliantly—by the simple device of giving each project a letter grade.

The relevance of Hume’s articles is not their role in educating people about the finer points of architecture and its evaluation; judging from the responses of readers—especially those of occupants of buildings that had been profiled by Hume—it is clear that many people felt Hume was commenting on whether the building was pleasant to live in. Instead, the relevance of these articles is their uniform positioning of condominium design as important in terms of both aesthetics and function. The single focus of these articles derives from an implicit assumption that every condominium should be evaluated according to its design, and this assumption is naturalized as much by as its tone as by the sheer number of such articles that were published over the years. Like many other aspects of Condo Living, these articles are therefore normative
in nature, linking design to the condominium. At the same time, they implicitly position design as profoundly important for the city and its residents rather than a trivial aesthetic concern. In turn, this positions the condominium as a crucial part of the city building process. To understand how sharply this differentiates the condominium from other dwelling types, it is only necessary to consider the implausibility of a comparable ‘Tract House Critic’ column evaluating examples of low-rise architecture or commenting on how one subdivision or another contributes to the urban fabric.

The Hume articles, and those that profile leading designers and architects doing work in condominiums obviously help link design and the condominium, but the taken-for-granted nature of this link is perhaps bolstered by the many articles published in Condo Living about design but not specifically related to condominiums. The section frequently published articles about leading edge design, most commonly related to events like the annual design show in Toronto and international exhibitions.
Competition fosters ‘Bolder’ approach

Builder is major sponsor of furniture design contest

Sasquatch leaves big footprint at show

Articles like these are notable for their focus on ‘contemporary’ design, whose low visual mass and ostentatious design is understood to be ideally suited to small spaces. This provides the motivation for including these articles in the Condo Living section, but the larger effect is the
naturalizing of the link between leading edge design and the condominium. This is achieved through the type of design (contemporary) and also by the event itself. The lower of the two articles in Figure 64, for example, concerns a furniture show in Milan, an event whose location has far different connotations (‘European’ sophistication and style) than, say, an event like the Toronto Home show, which is frequently publicized in low-rise real estate sections.

What is also notable is the emphasis in these and similar articles on Canadian design. An article about shopping for used furniture, for example, profiles Canadian designer Russell Spanner and some of his clearly modernist-inspired furniture (Figure 65).

Figure 63: Profile of midcentury Canadian designer Russell Spanner
(Source: Toronto Star 25 March 2000, P10)

Condo Living also published a series of vignettes called ‘Canadian Icons’ featuring furniture and appliances produced in Canada and/or by Canadian designers (Figure 66)
Figure 64: Short articles create a Canadian design heritage


The majority of the items illustrated conform perfectly to the contemporary design aesthetic of the recent-era condominium, with clean, geometric lines and a lack of surface ornamentation derived from high modernist principles but employing an ostentatious style and bold finishes (the chair above is bright yellow; the small radio is aquamarine). Articles like these perform a number...
of functions. They legitimate the current design aesthetic by suggesting an unbroken lineage with items that are elevated to the status of ‘icons’. They also link bold design with the condominium. And they suggest the existence of a strong national design legacy that will cast a positive light on present day designers.

Of the non-promotional design articles published by Condo Living, none emphasizes the link between design and the condominium better than a series of articles dealing with style and design in the movies. Each article examined various elements of style and design in a single movie, with the majority of movies dating from the 1950s and 1960s. The series served as an accessible history of twentieth century design, discussing how the characteristics of a particular aesthetic (e.g. Art Deco) were evident in the movie being examined.

Although quite accessible in tone, the articles were more than the frothy evaluations of costumes that might be expected. The article above, for example, (Figure 67) was written by a curator at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and at one point compares a chair in the film Cleopatra with a chair of the same era designed by Le Corbusier, one of the best-known modernist architects. Other articles in the series written by staff writers are more popular in their appeal but retain as
their goal the illustration of design history; in other words, these are not articles that, for example, discuss design in the film in order to provide readers ways to incorporate design cues from the movies into their dwellings. Subsequently, Condo Living organized a modest film festival at the ROM at which many of the films in the print series were shown and discussed by a panel of experts. As I have emphasized in this chapter, the relevance of the articles and the film festival is their attitude towards design, which is presented as ‘fun’ but also as a ‘serious’ subject with a history.

Overall, then, the discourse of design that pervades Condo Living is a function of the number of design-related articles it published, the diversity of subject matter of these articles, and the attitude toward design exhibited in them. Design featured prominently in articles detailing the architecture (and architects) of projects, as well as their model suites and designers, and in a range of articles that includes those concerning decorating, international design shows and competitions, shopping and design in film. These articles implicitly treat design as a subject of some import, most notably in Hume’s articles that ascribe metropolitan-level influence to the architecture of individual buildings. However, even the ‘Canadian Icon’ vignettes suggest that design is important: if it were not, it would be ludicrous to identify design ‘icons’.

All of these articles elevate the status of ‘design’, and work to create a sensibility in which the link between design and the condominium is natural, taken for granted. The branding implications are clear: advertising has long relied on crudely normative approaches (‘More and more people are using…’) but the discourse of design in Condo Living is much more effective due to its casual, taken for granted presentation; explicitly normative approaches rely on fears of being out of touch whereas implicit approaches allow a guilt- and fear-free adoption of the sensibility being offered. Instead of posing a threat to one’s self esteem, a brand’s use of an implicitly normative construction appears as an opportunity to affirm or raise one’s status. The design-related articles in Condo Living therefore constitute a particularly attractive vehicle for positioning the condominium as a design-led dwelling type.
6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the many events and circumstances that contributed to the rebranding of the condominium, the most remarkable of which is how perfectly suited contemporary design turned out to be for this purpose; a different design aesthetic could likely not have offered the benefits that contemporary design did. Visually and functionally, the low mass of contemporary design was ideal for use in the continually shrinking condominium, while the clean lines and surfaces of contemporary exteriors differentiated the recent era condominium from both its predecessors and the ‘historic’ style of the new single family house. More importantly, as a ‘softened’ reworking of Contemporary modernism of the 1950s—itself a reworking of the Bauhaus high modernism of the 1920s and 1930s—contemporary style allowed the condominium to be marketed to women. This process was seen in microcosm with the development and refinement of the condominium interior from the masculine, faux SoHo approach of Candy Factory to the sophisticated style of today that was presaged by Merchandise Building.

What is remarkable about the contemporary style and loft-inspired configuration described here is that while it aligned perfectly with the target market, it nonetheless retained enough of the high modernist and SoHo loft aesthetic that it did not alienate other potential markets. The continuing widespread use of design classics like Le Corbusier’s Barcelona Chair, for example, allows the condominium to appeal to men as well as women since modernism in general, and modernist furniture in particular are frequently coded as ‘masculine’ (Leslie & Reimer, 2003). As a result, the condominium can still profit from its links with the high-tech bachelor pad of the 1960s, which similarly relied on a modernist aesthetic to differentiate it from suburban, low-rise dwellings (Fraterrigo, 2008). The contemporary aesthetic therefore offers an unusual degree of flexibility by appealing to a mainstream market as well as markets that privilege design when making consumption decisions.

The Merchandise Building and subsequent projects showed that design and designers—not just the model suites they created—were marketable. Over time, a small group of designers, and to a lesser degree architects inevitably achieved local celebrity status that strengthened the perceptual link between condominiums, and affirmed their importance to developers. It also made designers and architects the frequent subject of articles in Condo Living by offering writers and editors an
easy opportunity to make their stories more compelling. For this reason, although the projects using ‘celebrity’ designers and architects comprised a small fraction of all condominium development in Toronto, they received a disproportionate amount of media coverage, adding fuel to the celebrity-building process.

What may be unusual about this process is the apparent competence, reliability and talent of the people involved, as well as their continued presence in Toronto from the mid-1990s to the present. This raises the interesting idea that this group, while not consciously working to a common purpose, may nonetheless have offered Toronto an advantage over other cities lacking these assets.

A final aspect of design that this chapter explored was the creation of a discourse of design by the non-promotional articles in Condo Living. These articles uniformly positioned design as a ‘serious’ subject that was ‘naturally’ integral to the condominium. In creating a design-based normative sensibility, Condo Living deployed an especially powerful branding mechanism that encouraged its active adoption by offering access rather reluctant adoption based on fear.

The result of all of these events and circumstances is the positioning of the condominium as design-led. This is crucial for a number of reasons, including the status that accrues from the purchase of high design products. Rather than having no clear identity, the condominium joined an immediately recognizable class of aspirational, socially legitimated items even though it is materially almost unrelated to them. It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of this point because it perfectly illustrates the profound power of affective persuasion. In this chapter, it has been shown that the public image of the Toronto condo was not innovative; rather, it simply adopted a pre-existing, complex system of meaning comprised of interactions between design, style, fashion, and celebrity, all of which are coded female. What is striking here is the sheer distance of meaning transfer. This is seen most clearly in the vast difference in material characteristics between the condominium apartment and commodities that have traditionally been associated with design, style and fashion, such as apparel and fragrances, whose inclusion in this category is more immediately obvious. What this illustrates, however, is that the material characteristics of goods are nearly irrelevant; any entity (or argument, position or policy) can be branded in any way. That is not to say that every branding campaign will succeed, or that it will be accepted intact by consumers; this is demonstrably not the case. But it
does suggest that a coherent and consistently applied branding campaign has the capability of attaching a particular set of associations and value to an entity even if the new ‘brand’ departs dramatically from the way that entity has traditionally been represented.

None of the links between the condo and design is based on logic and evidence. Instead, they rely on associations, expectations and aspirations. What I find particularly fascinating is that loft-inspired design and configuration changes do actually result in demonstrably more efficient and subjectively more pleasant interior spaces. Developers could, if they wanted to, base marketing campaigns around these more concrete aspects of design using a logic and evidence-based approach. Yet even given the opportunity to do so, they do not. They choose to market using affective approaches.

Figure 66: linking condo and design
(Source: Toronto Star 19 July 2003, P3)

There is perhaps no better example of this than the advertisement shown in Figure 68, in which an iconic design (Michael Graves’ Whistling Bird kettle) is literally equated with a condominium project. The ad tells us that the product does not matter, but the kind of product does. The act of persuasion that is taking place here is not based on logic. It makes only a single design-related claim (“Cecconi Simone designed amenities areas”) and invites the reader transfer meaning from the kettle to the condominium. Whether this particular advertisement is effective is secondary to the point that the approach it takes characterizes the way design has been linked to the Toronto condominium in the recent era. It also begins to signal some of the troubling implications of the
branding paradigm diffusing beyond directly commercial uses, particularly to areas like politics that have traditionally privileged, or at least, symbolically claimed to privilege logic and evidence-based approaches.
Chapter 7
Target marketing the condo

In this chapter, I directly address a theme that has appeared throughout the previous two chapters: is the condo female coded? Or, in branding terms, are women the primary target market of recent-era condominium developers, and if so, does this represent a change over time? In chapter 5, developers were shown to implement security features primarily in response to a perceive demand from female customers. In chapter 6, it was shown that recent era condominiums adopted a design aesthetic that could be characterized as a softened or feminized form of modernism, making the range of distinctively high-style condos accessible to women. Furthermore, adopting design as the defining characteristic of the condo necessarily aligned the condo with a range of fashion, fragrance and health care brands that are predominantly female-coded. Employing design as a brand value therefore implicitly coded the condo as female.

So far, then, this research affirms the link between women and condominiums that is apparent in the work of Costello, Fincher and Kern on recent-era condo development. Costello (2005) examines how perceptions of the high-rise as an inappropriate environment for children. Fincher (2004) argues that conventional gender stereotypes inform the attitudes of Melbourne developers, as shown by their hetero-normative assumptions regarding life stage, family configuration and gender. Developer comments suggest that the target markets in Melbourne are young couples and empty-nesters. Kern (2007) addresses gender directly, interviewing female condominium owners exclusively in order to discern their attitudes towards issues related to ‘urban citizenship’. Subsequent work (Kern, 2010) argues that the neoliberal strategy of condominium development relies on imagery of women that is either consumption-based or eroticized. None of this work, however, attempts to assess in a systematic way whether women are the primary target market. Kern (2010) comes closest, conventionally deconstructing a handful of outdoor advertisements, but this cannot identify whether women are the primary target market, or one of several. Similarly, it deals only with outdoor advertising, whose audience of passersby is perhaps profoundly different than the audience for print advertising in a real estate section, whose readers will be presumed to have a specific interest in condominiums.

In this chapter, I attempt to ascertain whether women are the target market for recent-era condominiums in two different ways. In the first section, I examine the entire corpus of condo
advertisements from Condo Living in order to capture the demographic characteristics of the people portrayed: gender, age, and family or relationship status. This combination of attributes will allow the various target markets to be identified at a relatively fine level of detail. From the results, it will be possible, for example, to compare how frequently young, single men are represented compared to young, single women. This will strongly indicate to what degree women are targeted by developers.

Beyond this, I subsequently recoded the advertisements in recognition of the fact that the presence of a young woman in an advertisement does not necessarily mean that young women are the target market. This is most obviously the case in which sexualized images of women are used in advertisements to sell products to men. To account for this, I analyzed the advertisements in two ways. The first captures the objective mode of portrayal, coding representations as ‘real’, ‘attractive’, ‘glamorous’ or ‘sex object’. The second approach uses a framework derived from the work of Erving Goffman that captures social meanings, such as those related to gender, that are encoded in the composition of advertising images. The goal of both of these approaches is to ascertain whether images of women, and specifically, images of individual women, are used in ways that indicate women (or men) are the target market.

The second section of the chapter examines the testimonial articles published in Condo Living. Usually first-person accounts and all written by women, these article describe the process of buying a condo or some aspect of daily life in a condo. They function as ‘demographic indicators’, describing the age, relationship status and economic circumstances of their author, which invites people of similar characteristics to identify with the author. Testimonial advertisements have existed for decades due to this mechanism, in which people respond most strongly to testimonials delivered by someone who appears to be like them (Martin, 2008). As a result, testimonials have the capacity to significantly influence the public image of the condo as expressed in Condo Living. Apart from indicating target markets, the testimonials also document the expectations and attitudes of their authors towards condominiums, and therefore illustrate how the public image of the condo has been received.

Together, the approaches to understanding condominium target markets outlined here capture the interaction between advertisements and articles in Condo Living in both interpreting and participating in the creation of meaning around the condo. Beyond this, the mechanisms used to
link women and the condominium perfectly illustrate the affective mode of persuasion. In advertisements that prominently or exclusively feature women, the mechanism is one of naturalization and identification. By seeing women with whom they identify in these ads, female readers will be able to imagine themselves as condominium owners and as part of a larger group of other, similar women. The testimonials written by women also rely on identification and naturalization, but on a profoundly deeper level since the texts involved are ‘objective’ documents written by peers for ostensibly informational purposes rather than images produced for commercial reasons. What unites the advertisements and the testimonials is that they make an implicit, non-verbal ‘argument’ that is simple and normative to female readers: women like you are condominium owners.

7.1 Targeting women?

The previous sections have demonstrated that the recent-era condominium has been configured by developers and represented in Condo Living as a dwelling type that is accessible to women. What is unclear so far, however, is the degree to which condominium marketing has been directed at women. In this section, I examine the prominence of women as a target market. Brand managers have long understood their total market to consist of multiple segments, each of which is a ‘target market’, or a group of people with similar needs (Smith, 1997). The process has been seen as unethical when used to market ‘sin’ products like alcohol, tobacco and lottery tickets to ‘vulnerable’ populations like women, minority, and low-income groups (Grier, 1999; Kilbourne, 1999). At the same time, target marketing has been seen as beneficial when marketing ‘benign’ products like education and health care to these same groups (Ringold, 1995). In this research, my concern is to determine whether women have become a primary target market of condominium marketing. Target marketing uses a range of strategies to allow the target group to identify with the advertisement’s message, including product naming, graphic style, and the tone and vocabulary of the included text and dialogue. In the case of condominiums, such indicators cannot be used to deduce target markets due to the nature of the product. While, for example, a few projects have been given names designed to appeal to women, such as the small, mid-rise projects called Phoebe, Sylvia and Charlotte that were marketed between 1998 and 2001, developers nearly always use gender-neutral project names to avoid unnecessarily limiting the pool of potential customers. To determine the prominence of
women as a target market, I use demographic indicators including the gender, family status, and age of models depicted in advertisements.

The method used to accumulate data was straightforward, consisting of coding the condominium advertisements published between 1968 and 2007 that portrayed people according to the number of people portrayed, their gender, age group, and family relationship. As I have done elsewhere in this research, I have arranged the results in three study periods: 1968 to 1984; 1985 to 1994; and 1995 to 2007. These roughly correspond to condominium development cycles in Toronto. The concept of tallying the appearance of a particular group in advertisements is not new; such ‘frequency counts’ have a long history of use in media studies to capture, for example, representations of women and minorities in television (Gill, 2007). These studies are typically longitudinal and attempt to assess changes in the frequency of representation over time, a goal identical to mine. Furthermore, frequency counts are well-suited for the task since in the vast majority of cases, women portrayed in condominium advertisements are primarily demographic indicators, intended to signal the age and status of the project’s expected target markets. This is in contrast to portrayals of women common in other forms or advertisements in ways that are narrative, fanciful or non-representative of potential purchasers. These may portray women as mythical characters like Mother Nature, as professional advisors like lawyers, or as celebrity endorsers. These kinds of portrayals are virtually non-existent in condominium marketing, which is generally quite cautious, making it ideal for this approach.

The analyses in this section are derived from only the condominium advertisements that portrayed people, 891 in total. Advertisements without people were excluded from this analysis because, unlike advertisements portraying people, they remained relatively constant in their content across all study periods. They typically consist of an illustration of the project exterior or interior along with the starting price, a prominent line of text to highlight the primary message (e.g. “Welcome to country club living”, “Luxury condominiums now on sale”) and a list of project amenities and unit features. While not purely informational, hyperbole is rare in the advertisements, and in many cases, it would be impossible to guess the era of these ads based solely on their text. “Be among the very first to discover the newest symbol of luxury. Private preview in Yorkville. Yorkville, it’s where you belong!” is the copy for an advertisement published in 2003 but sounds very much like advertisements published thirty years earlier. These advertisements may contribute in some manner to the condominium’s public image, for example,
linking condominiums to prevailing notions of urbanity, but I exclude them because they are essentially gender-neutral in their appeals, and likely far less influential than advertising imagery—whether it includes people or not—in identifying target markets.

7.1.1 Gender, relationship and age in condominium advertisements

The first method of capture gender frequency in advertisements involves classifying each drawing or photograph according to the people portrayed. Possible codes were male only, female only, or both male and female. The handful of advertisements featuring children only was excluded. The results in Table 4 show only modest changes between the early and middle study periods among the three attributes but a sharp break with the recent era. The proportion of female only advertisements nearly triples in the recent study period, from 15 percent to 43 per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n = 289)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=191)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=411)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male only</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female only</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male and female</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Representations of people by gender, grouping

The bulk of the gain in female only advertisements came at the expense of ‘male and female’ portrayals in absolute terms, which declined from 77 percent to just less than half of all advertisements, 49 percent. The comparison of frequencies of female-only to male-only advertisements is striking: there are more than five times as many female-only ads in the recent era than male only ads. By way of comparison, the proportion of female to male ads in the early study period was essentially identical. Men have long been associated with the urban bachelor pad (Cohan, 1996; Fraterrigo, 2008, 2009; Wagner, 1996) while women have not been associated with any particular dwelling type, leading one to expect that if anything, males would be equally represented in condominium marketing. This is certainly not reflected in the results; in fact, the opposite is true. The results indicate that women, and particularly single women, have
become a far more important target market in the recent-era than they were in the past. Table 4 in fact understates the results somewhat by suggesting that advertisements featuring both men and women are entirely geared toward toward both sexes. As I will argue below, however, a substantial proportion of these advertisements aimed at women by playing on stereotypically feminine themes such as romance and intimacy. This raises the importance of women to even higher levels.

A second round of coding was done in order to characterize the family relationships portrayed in condominium advertisements. I identified four categories of relationship through trial coding runs through portions of the database. Possible values were ‘group’, for portrayals of clusters of people with no clear partner-based relationship evident; ‘individual’ for unaccompanied people; ‘romantic partner’ when a male and female were portrayed participating in a conventionally ‘romantic’ moment like walking on the beach hand in hand, or sharing an intimate, candle-lit dinner; and ‘non-romantic partner’ when a male and female were portrayed together, obviously partners, but not engaged in an activity designed to evoke an emotional response: typically, this would involve the couple simply posing for the camera, acting primarily as demographic indicators. Examples of romantic and non-romantic partner images from each of the three eras are shown below in Figures 69 and 70.
Figure 67: Romantic partners in early, middle and recent study eras (clockwise from top left)
The findings, in Table 5, mirror the previous results, indicating a profound shift in frequency of representation of women in the recent era, when a full 55 per cent of representations are of individual women, rising from 32 percent in the middle era. (This number is higher than the ‘female only’ attribute above due to multiple representations of women in a single advertisement; an advertisement with three different portrayals of individual women was coded.
as a single instance of a ‘female only’ advertisement, while in this coding the result would be three instances of ‘individual’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n = 282)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=190)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=385)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic partner</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-romantic partner</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Portrayed family relationship of women

Illustrating something of a trend, the middle study period—perhaps as a function of its general coincidence with the Thatcher/Reagan/Bush era—appears to be the most conservative of the three, having the highest proportion of portrayals of women as romantic partners, and the lowest proportion of representations of women as either group members or individuals. Nonetheless, it is also fascinating to note that the proportion of representations of women as romantic partners increased since the earliest study period while representations of women as non-romantic partners plummeted precipitously. The result is a relatively polarized set of images, with non-stereotypical representations (i.e. of women as independent individuals, alone or in social groups) increasing and stereotypical representations increasing as well.

Although technically the target market indicated by both of the partner-based categories would be “couples”, it is interesting to consider the idea that the ‘romantic partner’ representations in particular are in fact designed primarily with women in mind. The particular scenarios employed in these advertisements have long been clichés due to decades of repetition in all forms of media from greeting cards and television dramas to romance novels, all of which are much more strongly associated with female audiences than male. The imagery, which privileges the emotional, the social, and the interpersonal, departs radically from conventional male stereotypes.
that celebrate independence, stoicism, physical exploits and competition. It seems likely that these advertisements too are meant to be consumed by female readers, and that developers expect women to play a leading role in the residential decision-making process.\textsuperscript{10}

A third demographic indicator, age, was captured by classifying all advertisements according to age (young, middle-aged, senior) and ‘family configuration’ (individual, couple, with children). These categories were the result of trial coding runs. Ascertaining the age of people in advertisements is an inexact process, but the trials indicated distinct groups of advertisements using people who seemed to be in their early to late twenties, another category of people who seemed to be in the 35-to-45 age range, and a third group of mid-50s and older empty nesters and active seniors. What age category people belonged to was generally clear; developers and their marketers want to indicate as clearly as possible who their market is. They therefore deploy many advertising conventions and societal stereotypes to indicate age, including hair style, attire and the kind of activity being shown. I used visual cues like these were used to assign age groups when there was any uncertainty.

As a result, depictions were coded ‘Young’ if the subjects were obviously in their twenties, or if they were presented engaging in stereotypically ‘youthful’ behavior, or if they lacked indicators of middle age. In practice, this category captured people represented to be in their mid twenties to late thirties. Depictions were coded as middle-aged when conventional indicators were present, or when the subjects were older but did not display the conventions associated with seniors (i.e. grey or absent hair). In all but one case, both people in couples belonged to the same age bracket; the exception is an advertisement portraying a man with textbook male pattern baldness who looks to be in his mid to late forties draping a fur coat over the shoulders of a simpering girl who appears to be in her early twenties. I excluded this from coding. The ‘senior’ category includes people who are retired, from empty-nesters in their late fifties to much older widows and widowers. All advertisements that depicted children were coded ‘family’. For this attribute, it was not necessary to code for age: all parents were young people, generally appearing to be in their mid thirties. Results appear in the Table 6.

\textsuperscript{10} Footnote: There were no clearly non-heterosexual representations of individuals or couples any advertisement; a very small number of representations could be read as gay or lesbian.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n = 273)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=151)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=405)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family with children</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple young</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple middle aged</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple senior</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male young</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male middle aged</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male senior</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female young</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female middle aged</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female senior</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Representations of all people by age, gender and family relationship

The overall tendency is for developers to portray people from a narrower set of demographics as time passes, with representations of families and seniors virtually disappearing over the full study period. Accounting for a combined 19 per cent of representations in the early study period, these two groups were present in less than 1 percent of advertisements in the recent study period. Representations of middle-aged couples dropped nearly as much, from 17 per cent of representations in the early study period to only 4 per cent in the recent. Conversely, representations of young males and young females increased dramatically, from 3 per cent in the early study period for young males to 13 per cent, and from 17 per cent to 46 percent for young females. Interestingly, representations of young couples spiked in the middle study period at 40 per cent, subsequently falling to 26 per cent in the recent period, essentially unchanged from the
early period. Young couples were identified by Melbourne developers as one of their two primary target markets (Fincher, 2004), and it appears this was the case in Toronto in the late 1980s, but the attempt was clearly abandoned in the round of condominium development that occurred after the recession of the early 1990s.

Table 7 clarifies the trend by grouping for age, illustrating the ‘youth movement’ in condominium marketing. In the early study period, 53 per cent of representations were of young people, either individually or as part of a couple or family. In the recent study period, this rises to 86 per cent, compared to only 12 per cent for middle-aged people and 1 per cent for seniors. As with other attributes, there is a sharp break between the recent study period and the two that preceded it, affirming the notion that the condominium was the subject of a rebranding process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle aged</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: People portrayed in advertisements, grouped by age

7.1.2 Mode of portrayal

The results above make clear that young people, and particularly young women have been represented with greatly increased frequency during the recent study period. This is not sufficient to claim that young women are a prominent target market, however, because it does not address the way that women are portrayed in these advertisements. More specifically, it does not address whether the images of young women are intended to act as demographic indicators for female readers, or as decorative ‘eye-candy’ for male readers. After having evaluated the advertisements in earlier rounds of coding, my impression was that demographic representations far outnumbered decorative ones, but it was nonetheless necessary to test this.
In trial runs, I observed four different modes of portrayal: glamorous, sex object, real/documentary, and advertising normal. The coding of each of these is discussed in order. Portrayals were deemed glamorous if they employed visual cues shared with advertisements typically found in fashion magazines and other media for decades, including the presence of jewellery (especially pearls and diamonds), formal or designer clothing, high heels, hats, elaborate makeup and hair, and of course, young women who are at the peak of attractiveness within the advertising universe. Coding the glamorous choice presented few ambiguous situations since, as mentioned, these (and the vast majority of other) representations rely on widely accepted and internalized conventions in order to quickly and clearly identify the target market and the theme being emphasized.

The ‘sex object’ choice was similarly unambiguous, for similar reasons: marketers employ well-known cues to establish an ad’s theme quickly. Most frequently, this involves portraying women with little or no clothing. The results for this category are crucial in determining whether young women are in fact a prominent target market in the recent era: if a substantial proportion of the representations of young women fall into the sex object category, it would be impossible to claim that young women had become a target market.

The third choice, real/documentary, captures depictions of actual condominium owners. The practice of using existing owners in testimonial-style advertisements peaking in the 1970s, but instances remain in later years. This code was also attached to staged advertisements that employed visual conventions to mimic testimonial advertisements and create a sense of credibility. These conventions include the appearance and presentation of the model, the setting, lighting and composition of the image, as well as the overall theme of the advertisement. The goal is usually give the viewer the impression that they are seeing a candid snapshot of the condominium owner’s existence rather than a staged portrait of models pretending to be condominium owners. These images do not stand up well to close scrutiny, but few people closely scrutinize advertisements; we still have, after all, advertisements featuring actors in lab coats portraying dentists, doctors and ‘scientists’. The more important point is that depictions of actual owners, and staged documentary-style depictions act as demographic indicators that define a particular target market. The glamorous and sex object categories, by contrast, are primarily affective in nature rather than demographic. Examples of the real/documentary category for each of the study periods are shown below in Figure 71.
Figure 69: Real/documentary representations from early, middle, and recent study periods (clockwise from top left)

(Source: Toronto Star (clockwise from top left): 4 December 1971, 29; 27 January 1990, A18; 6 September 2003, P5)
The fourth and final coding choice, ‘advertising normal’, captures the representations excluded by the previous choices. As always, advertising conventions were used to identify advertisements falling into this category. A representation was coded with this choice if it portrayed a woman engaged in an everyday activity in logical settings and attired appropriately for these settings; the intent of advertisers in producing these images is clearly to allow a large group of readers to identify with the people portrayed. While the portrayals can therefore be deemed ‘normal’, I have instead used the term ‘advertising normal’ to acknowledge what might be seen as a conceptual flaw in this coding scheme: namely, that the great majority of representations being classified as normal employ models who are uniformly, conventionally attractive, and far from ‘normal’. They are all slender, able-bodied, clear-skinned white women with well cared-for long hair; as a group, they utterly fail to represent in any accurate way the demographic diversity of Toronto. Yet because these women are ‘normally’ attired and made-up (in contrast to the women in ads coded ‘glamorous’ or ‘sex

Figure 70: 'Advertising normal' representations from the early, middle and recent study periods (clockwise from top left) (Source: Toronto Star (clockwise from top left) 14 June 1975, E5; 13 August 1988, E16; 29 July 2006, P3)
object’) I could see no alternative to defining the images with a single code. This is clearly a highly subjective classificatory scheme, although I found that other researchers had evolved relatively similar coding. A study of representations of beauty in magazines published in the U.S., Singapore and Taiwan employs categories labeled ‘Classic’, ‘Sensual/sex kitten’, ‘Cute/Girl next door’, and ‘Trendy’ (Frith, Shaw and Cheng, 2005). The Classic and Trendy categories correspond to the ‘glamorous’ category in this research, and obviously the sex object categories correspond directly. The ‘Cute/Girl next door’ is the analog to the ‘advertising normal’ category used here.

Looking first the results for the sex object category, Table 8 indicates that representations of women as sex objects actually declined in the recent study period to only 8 per cent, down from 16 percent in the middle study period and 11 per cent in the early. This shows that the vast majority of representations of women in the recent era function as demographic indicators, strongly supporting the idea that young women have become a primary target market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n=148)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=127)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=304)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glamorous</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex object</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real/documentary</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising normal</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8: Mode of portrayal summary**

The proportion of representations belonging to the other non-demographic category, glamorous, rose dramatically, however, from 11 per cent in the early study period to 29 per cent in the most recent. Nonetheless, this is a lower proportion than is suggested in the literature. Fincher (2004), for example, mentions only glamorous representations in relation to the Melbourne high-rise marketing, and three of the five images Kern (2010) uses to characterize Toronto condominium marketing of the glamorous kind.
Real/documentary depictions have declined markedly. The latter may be due to a change in the manner of marketing projects geared to seniors: in the 1970s, several developments used photographs of unit owners in their advertisements, a strategy that would simultaneously attract the appropriate age group and discourage unwanted groups such as younger people and children. Subsequently, senior-oriented projects have typically been marketed as a peaceful reward for active empty-nesters, often portraying senior couples as romantic partners. Legitimation, the primary function of testimonial advertising, is no longer seen as being necessary and therefore documentary representations have disappeared, but the demographic message remains the same.

‘Advertising normal’ depictions increased by nearly a third, comprising just more than half of all depictions in the recent era. Combined with real/documentary advertisements, which perform the same demographic identification task, these sorts of portrayals account for nearly two-thirds of all depictions of women in recent era condominium advertisements.

It may be that the relatively affordable nature of Toronto condominiums is reflected in these distributions. For a number of reasons, developers have been able to build condominium towers in prime locations that have been affordable for middle-class singles and couples. Conversely, new condominium towers in cities like Vancouver, Hong Kong, New York and London are marketed to more affluent markets. If this scenario held true in Toronto as well, it is possible that the proportion of ‘advertising normal’ depictions would have been markedly lower, and glamorous depictions emphasizing luxury much higher. Comparative work on other cities would be beneficial, but it does not exist at this point. Nonetheless, the results provide support for the idea that developers in the recent era have marketed the condominium as a product for middle-class women by making demographic appeals via ‘advertising normal’ and ‘real/documentary’ imagery to a much greater degree than they have used ‘glamorous’ imagery to make broad appeals based on upscale luxury to a far less well-defined group of female (and male) consumers.

### 7.1.3 Comparisons with other media analyses

I have characterized the condominium marketing as conservative and straightforward, and primarily employing images of women as demographic indicators rather than in more metaphorical, affective or decorative roles. There exist many gender-related media studies that can be used to test this claim, including Frith, Shaw and Cheng’s (2005), who analyze representations of women in fashion and beauty magazines. Table 9 compares their results from
American magazines and those from recent-era condominium ads in Toronto. Classification methods were not identical, but comparable, with the three most closely aligned attributes being shown in the table.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, classic or glamorous representations predominate in fashion and beauty magazines at 46%, a number far in excess of the 29% in condominium ads. A greater disparity is seen in representations of women as sex objects, which comprised 32% of the magazine sample, but only 8% of the condominium advertisements. Conversely, ‘cute/girl next door’ portrayals were relatively rare in magazines at 15% but the most frequent type 53% in condo ads. Even allowing for inevitable differences in coding, this comparison suggests that women are portrayed as glamorous or as sex objects far less frequently in condominium advertisements than in mainstream fashion and beauty magazine advertisements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fashion and beauty ads (Frith et al.)</th>
<th>Condominium ads (1995 – 2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classic (Glamorous)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensual/sex kitten (sex object)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cute/girl next door (advertising normal)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Mode of portrayal comparison between fashion/beauty and condo ads

These results and those described earlier indicate that recent era portrayal differ from both condominium advertisements of previous eras, and from advertisements in fashion and beauty magazines. However, what the results cannot comment on is whether the representations of women in condominium advertisements differ mainly in frequency, or does a different sensibility accompany the unprecedented targeting of women as the primary market for a dwelling type? To capture this more subtle aspect of representations, I adopted a method of media analysis based on the work of Erving Goffman that has been used in several longitudinal studies of gender...
representations (Belknap & Leonard, 1991; Doring & Poschl, 2001; First, 1998; Hovland, McMahan et al, 2005; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004; Stankiewicz & Rossell, 2007). In *Gender Advertisements* (1979) Goffman uses scores of print advertisements to illustrate the many ways in which patriarchy is embodied and reproduced in social circumstances through bodily carriage, position of interaction, and stylized behaviors, all of them being the product of socialization. To illustrate these observations, Goffman used advertisements because he felt they captured highly distilled ‘social moments’. As such, *Gender Advertisements* is much more a work of theoretical sociology than an exhaustive analysis of advertisements. Nonetheless, Goffman identifies a number of tangible manifestations of embodied patriarchy that prove to be a useful framework for evaluating the degree to which advertising imagery adheres to conventional gender stereotypes. Studies using this framework generally employ most or all of these categories defined by Goffman:

- ‘Feminine touch’, or the delicate use of hands to touch, hold, caress or indicate.

- ‘Subordination’, which involves taking a pose, action or position that naturalizes having women in inferior positions. Goffman gives many examples, including the obvious, such as a portrayal of a model lying down, or sitting in a low position, but less obvious instances as well: a woman being clasped around the shoulders by a male; the tilting of the head to one side, or bending one knee while standing; holding hands with the male hand dominant; playing mock assault games; acting in a ‘puckish’ or childlike/infantilized way.

- ‘Withdrawal’, in which a woman is portrayed as symbolically trying to avoid the reality of a situation by shielding herself behind her hands, a hat, a person, or a structure, based on the premise that women need to be protected from reality.

- ‘Function ranking’, related to the implicit imbalance in authority that is often present when men and women are depicted together in advertisements, typified by showing the male as the workplace boss and the woman as secretary.

- ‘Relative size’, related to both the size and position of women in relation to men in depictions, with males typically being more prominent and positioned higher than females.
• ‘Family’, in which father-son relationships illustrate (and reproduce) stereotypical masculinity and mother-daughter relationships do the same for stereotypical femininity

The studies using these categories as their evaluative framework have covered a wide variety of products and media, suggesting Goffman’s framework has considerable flexibility, but I needed to adapt it for use in the analysis of condominium advertisements. Most obviously, Goffman’s ‘Family’ component is essentially inapplicable due to the paucity of condominium advertisements depicting family scenes. The ‘Function Ranking’ component was of similarly limited utility, since the narrative, authority-based scenarios described by Goffman involving depictions of doctors, lawyers, and the workplace are nearly absent from condominium advertisements. This, and the ‘Relative Size’ component also suffer to some degree since portrayals of men and women together in condominium advertisements are also in the minority.

Goffman’s descriptions and examples of each of the categories described above were quite detailed, and in general, these were used in establishing coding rules. Some modification was required, however. Where Goffman’s Function Ranking primarily concerned employment and authority, I coded the attribute based on the idea of control when a male and female were portrayed interacting. If, for example, the male in an advertisement is shown driving a car, and the female is a passenger, I coded this ‘male dominant’. Regarding Goffman’s Relative Size attribute, I coded representations as ‘male taller’ when it was judged that the male was unnecessarily taller than would be accounted for by natural statistical differences in height; photographers can, of course, avoid this imbalance in any number of ways, suggesting any imbalance was intentional. The ‘Family’ attribute was simply excluded from coding. The remaining attributes, Feminine Touch, Subordination and Withdrawal were coded according to Goffman’s descriptions.

Since Goffman’s categories were not intended to be exhaustive, some studies have added variables where necessary. I added a variable used in Doring & Poschl (2006) to characterize how women were dressed, with choices being ‘Fully’, ‘Lightly’ (as if for some mildly vigorous activity in summer), ‘Sparsely’ (very little clothing, or a bathing suit), and ‘Unclothed’.

Three of the variables are binary, either being present or not. The results for these variables are shown summarized in Table 10. In all cases, the proportion of stereotypically feminine actions and behaviors is much greater in the latter two study periods than in the earliest. Unusual in this
research, however, is that the most notable change occurs between the earliest and the middle study periods. This distribution was not observed in either the frequency of portrayal nor the mode of portrayal analyses carried out earlier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n=140)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=125)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=311)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminine touch</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordination</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 10: Goffman feminine touch, subordination and withdrawal summary**

Table 11 below displays the results of examinations of portrayals of males and females together in order to capture which is taller or more prominent. Over time, representations of equality and near equality (i.e. the ‘male somewhat taller’ and ‘equal size’ choices) declined from 70 per cent in the early study period to only 46 per cent in the latest study period. As was the case for the first three attributes, the results for the latter two study periods are quite similar to one another but markedly different than those from the early study period. Again, this suggests that the recent-era condominium advertisements differ only in frequency from those of earlier eras rather than in the social messages they embody.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n=89)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=94)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=128)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male taller</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female taller</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male somewhat taller</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal size</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11: Goffman size/prominence comparison**
Table 12, conversely, reveals roughly similar results across all study periods related to dominance in images with both males and females present. The greatest proportion of depictions in all study periods shows neither the male nor the female dominant. Of the remaining depictions, males are consistently portrayed in the dominant role; i.e. as being in control of the situation. For these variables in particular it is worth noting once again that the condominium advertisements are quite traditional and conventional, making coding relatively straightforward. This would not be the case for more adventurous advertisements, like those that promise female empowerment by depicting women occupying what seem to be positions of power regarding their relationship with men but on closer reading can be seen to reaffirm rather than overturn the existing gender hierarchy (Lazar, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n=89)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=94)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=128)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male dominant</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female dominant</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither dominant</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 12: Goffman dominance summary**

Results for the ‘Display’ attribute (not one of Goffman’s) are summarized in Table 13, and generally repeat what was seen in the previous attribute: relative stasis over the entire study period. The nearly complete absence of change over forty years is somewhat unexpected and perhaps disappointing from a feminist perspective, but in terms of characterizing the nature of representations of women in condominium advertisements, the results mirror previous findings that only a small fraction of depictions show women sparsely clothed or unclothed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1968 to 1984 (n=140)</th>
<th>1985 to 1994 (n=125)</th>
<th>1995 to 2007 (n=311)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fully clothed</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightly clothed</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparsely clothed</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclothed</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face/head only shown</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 13: Display summary**

The results obtained using a Goffman-style framework indicate that where the mode of portrayal of women has changed, it has generally been in the direction of increasing conformity with gender stereotypes, although little or no change was observed for many attributes. In particular, the findings indicate no change in the manner women were represented in the recent study period other than in frequency and mode of portrayal. The minimal change observed in the condominium advertisements mirrors the results of other gender-based media studies, which overwhelmingly also find few signs of change in the ways women have been represented in advertisements over the past several decades (Belknap & Leonard, 1991; First, 1998; Doring & Poschl, 2006; Hovland, McMahan et al., 2005; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004).

Overall, the various analyses summarized in this section make clear that developers in the recent era have directed a great deal of their promotional efforts at young, single women. More than 40 per cent of images of people in recent-era condominium advertisements were of individual women, predominantly portrayed in a relatively realistic manner in order to act as demographic indicators. The Goffman analysis showed that these representations of women are essentially unchanged over time regarding the social order they reflect. This is consonant with the notion that condominium marketing is essentially conservative; rather adopt seemingly radical promises of empowerment, for example, that other brands have used to attract female customers, condominium developers chose to simply portray single, young women more frequently.
the simplicity of this strategy, it dovetailed perfectly with the female-coded concept of design in rebranding the recent-era condominium.

7.2 Owner testimonials

One of the premises of this research is that the advertisements and articles in Condo Living contribute to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is based on the idea that context in which these texts appear is meaningful, first in the sense that articles and advertisements literally surround one another and therefore interact, and second as a function of the nature of the entity in which they appear: a major newspaper. In the previous chapters, it has been illustrated how Condo Living articles and condominium advertisements participate in branding processes, albeit through very different means. What characterized much of this interaction is the tendency of Condo Living articles to directly address issues that were left unspoken in advertisements, for example regarding security and the appropriateness of families in high-rise apartments. The same dynamic is apparent regarding the connection between young women and condominiums, with advertisements suggesting that young women are the target market by increasing the frequency of their portrayal while Condo Living published a series of testimonial articles by female condominium that make the link explicit. What is surprising, however, is that while the majority of the authors are young women, a substantial number are middle-aged or seniors, two demographic groups that are essentially unrepresented in condominium advertisements. Their condominium experiences, while vastly different from those of their younger counterparts, nonetheless position the condominium as a dwelling type well suited to women.

The following sections will explore how the testimonial articles in Condo Living present themes related to economics, lifecycle, lifestyle and community that serve to legitimate and naturalize the link between condominiums and women that characterizes recent-era advertisements.
7.2.1 Me and My Condo Generation

Over its ten year run, Condo Living published more than seventy articles that detailed various aspects related to acquiring and living in a condominium. Some of these appeared as individual articles, but many were part of two lengthy series: one called Me and My Condo that published accounts written by a diverse group of condominium owners; and a second series near the end of the section’s run called Condo Generation, whose explicit mandate was to publish accounts of young condominium owners.

While these articles comprise a tiny percentage of the articles to appear in Condo Living, they are worth considering in some detail, for a number of reasons. The articles were often given very prominent position on the first page of the section, accompanied by a large picture. According to the conventions of the newspaper business, the most important stories appear on the front page, with the lead story being positioned ‘above the fold’ to ensure maximum visibility. The prominent placement of testimonial articles lends them weight and greatly increases the likelihood they will be read.

A second reason is that their presence as ‘objective’ or disinterested texts, written by condominium owners adds to the perceived authority of the section. Unlike profiles of new developments, and descriptions of model suites, which often read like promotional material for developments that are, unsurprisingly, featured in accompanying advertisements, testimonials by owners suggest that Condo Living provides a voice for consumers as well as for developers, and that it plays a useful, educational role for anyone looking to buy real estate.

Thirdly, the testimonial has long been used by advertisers to seek legitimacy for their product, and to give consumers the impression that they are getting valuable inside information rather than marketing hyperbole—particularly in the many cases in which the condominium units being discussed are in projects that have already been completed, which reduces suspicions about the articles’ motives.

A fourth reason for evaluating testimonials is the potentially profound impact they have as a branding mechanism. The power of testimonials is a function of their ability to elicit a sense of identification in readers based on their shared characteristics. When this process of identification occurs, the authors of testimonials are perceived as peers. Peer groups have been shown to be
influential in brand and product purchase decisions since 'individuals appear to act in a manner that is consistent with the social group in which they identify' (Childers, 1992, p. 198). Peers therefore act as a ‘reference group’—others include family, teachers and celebrities—that influence purchase decisions to a greater or lesser extent. Reference groups are strongly normative:

One way to persuade people to change is to show that what they believe or the way they act is not in line with reference group norms. A person who arrives at some conclusion (for example, which car is the best buy) which no one else in his or her social milieu accepts will have little confidence in its validity. By acting in a socially inappropriate way, he or she invites social disapproval or at least signs of non-approval. It is difficult to persuade people to change their behaviour if to do so conflicts with reference group norms (Shaughnessy, 2004, p. 11)

The obverse situation is clearly true as well: that people will feel pressure to adopt attitudes and behaviors that conform to reference group norms, and it is for this reason that ‘reference groups can be a critical source of brand meaning’ (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Of particular note is that peer groups have been shown to be highly influential in shaping and brand and product purchase decisions related to luxury items (Childers, 1992). From this perspective, the testimonials in Condo Living written by women about their experiences have the ability to naturalize the link between women and condos for their peer groups by repeatedly presenting women as condominium owners. At the same time, the testimonials firmly attach meanings to the condo that are strongly positive.

One reason the Condo Living testimonials may have been particularly influential is their concentration on the emotional and cognitive experiences of authors, which makes these accounts much more compelling than they otherwise might have been. The implication is that readers are likely to be drawn into these narratives and identify with the authors, strengthening the already powerful testimonial mechanism. One of the most prominent attitude-related themes to emerge in the testimonials by young women is the situation in which buying a condominium has become a liminal experience that demarcates youth from adulthood. Two articles in
particular foreground this theme. In an article titled “A place of my own” (Quinn, 2002) the author, a 29 year old woman, relates that she did not expect to be able to become a condominium owner due to her financial circumstances:

Figure 71: Typically prominent owner testimonial
(Source: Toronto Star 16 February 2002, P1)

‘At the outset, I figured I’d never find a place. After all, I was a single 29-year-old with no money—at least none I could see—who specialized in being shockingly irresponsible with
credit cards. And while I didn’t understand much about mortgages and deposits and the like, I knew one thing: they don’t take Visa’ (Quinn, 2002, P1).

Nonetheless, a bank pre-approved her for a mortgage, and within a few weeks she purchased a condominium. After having spent a year in her condo, she notes that “ownership has made me a different person” (ibid.): she has begun to do small DIY projects, likes power tools, and says “I’m as happy in Home Depot as I am in Holt Renfrew” and that “I can whine about mortgage payments, just like a real grown-up” (ibid.). The focus in these articles is therefore on how living in a condominium has affected the authors, rather than any particular attributes of the condominium. In this case, the author is simultaneously eager and hesitant to become a ‘different person’. This mirrors affective of emotional advertising strategies, which similarly concentrate on the experience rather than the product. What is fascinating about these accounts that it is purchasing a condominium—not moving away from the childhood home, or living alone in a rented apartment, or having been employed full-time for a number of years—that represents the boundary between youth and adulthood. All of these themes are re-iterated in the article’s conclusion: ‘So while I may still feel like I’m 16, I have a debt that proves I’m 30. I have a balcony, and a Starbucks where they know what I want before I ask for it. Most importantly, I’ve got something to call my own. And I love it’ (ibid.).

For readers the message here, as with many of the other testimonial articles, is that a young woman of no great wealth although gainfully employed can buy a condominium, maintain and improve it herself, and enjoy it greatly. This is a strong message, particularly when delivered by a peer, whose influence is evident in many of these accounts. In another testimonial article, also appearing on the front page of the section, a 27 year-old woman attributes her purchase to her peers: ‘Twenty somethings can’t go to a party or out for dinner anymore without hearing conversations that begin with “We’ve locked into a mortgage of …” or “Look at my paint chips. We are going with smokestack gray and honey-mustard yellow.” Ugh. The message was clear: “Get a mortgage, everybody is doing it.” The peer pressure was killing me’ (Harding, 2002b, P1).

Both the idea of self-esteem and the role of peers are explicit in a testimonial article titled “Making the ownership leap” (Molina, 2001), shown in Figure 74.
The author, also a 29 year-old woman, finds that her friends agree that ‘those of us who had purchased our own condos (we all live downtown) felt more together and successful and had greater self-esteem than those of us who were still trying to scrape together for a down payment’ (Molina, 2001, P1). In this case, however, the difference in self-esteem is implicitly attributed to economic aspects, and not maintenance: ‘The idea of paying into your own investment—instead of sending money to your landlord—makes you feel smarter, stronger and more independent’
The author goes on to outline that she has moved back in with her parents in Guelph in order to save money for the downpayment needed for the condominium she purchased from plans, and much of the remainder of the article offers pointers to women in similar circumstances. The message, again, is that condominium ownership is feasible, even for single women without high incomes: ‘If there’s a partner involved, that’s fantastic: you have two incomes to put into the equation. But if you’re on your own, like me, you can still get into the housing market. I don’t make a mint, and I now have substantial—though diminishing—debt. Yet, in the near future, I will own my first home, right where I want it’ (Molina, 2001, P9).

These accounts, which are essentially repackaged “buying advice” columns of traditional real estate sections, align perfectly with the goals of the section, and developers, more importantly. The article just discussed is explicit: ‘If you can afford to buy, my advice is not to wait’ (ibid.). The less obvious function of the testimonials is to reshape women’s expectations regarding home ownership. What unifies the testimonials written by young women is the sense that they were quite surprised that they could be homeowners. There is a sense of shock, of having arrived in a situation for which they were unprepared. The attitude changes outlined in the testimonials therefore act as guides for other young women, playing the same role as newspaper and magazine articles of the 1950s that explained the new concept of suburban home ownership to people, and let them know what shopping malls offered, and instructed them on how to properly apply Saran Wrap or close a Tupperware container. This circumstance explains the content of the testimonials; if home ownership by young women was common, there would be little need repeatedly outline its emotional and cognitive repercussions. At the same time, the unconventionality of the situation, and the author’s success in dealing with it explains the positive impact on self-esteem that are mentioned frequently in these testimonials.

It would be missing the point to consider these articles purely as marketing, because for the authors of testimonials as well as the readers who identify with them, home ownership is much more than an economic transaction. In these stories at least, home ownership is linked to changes in self-image that are perceived to be overwhelmingly positive by the people experiencing them, in no small part because the very act of home ownership was previously unthinkable due to conventional gender and lifecycle expectations. This is surely part of the reason why the authors of these stories embraced the concept of home ownership once they discovered it was possible:
in doing so, they find they can participate in a highly symbolic cultural rite they implicitly felt locked out of, or one that, for other reasons, was simply not viable or even ‘proper’ for them.

In an article entitled ‘Living the dream’ (Figure 75) that was the first of the Condo Generation series devoted to young condo owners’ experiences, the author notes that she had never considered a condominium before ‘perhaps because they didn’t figure prominently in childhood storybook’ (Mattos, 2006, P1) and because she had ‘always equated condos with yuppies and, by extension, pure evil’ (ibid, P6).

Needless to say, she overcomes her disinclination and buys a condominium with her partner: ‘But suddenly a condo appeared to be the most viable option, making it possible to build a homestead in the downtown core, walking distance from my job, my friends, and my favourite haunts. (Um, does this make me a yuppie? Crap.)’ (ibid.).

The superficial messages of the article are far from subtle. Home ownership is clearly positioned as an aspirational ‘dream’ in the title, while rental tenure is explicitly disparaged: the subhead reads, ‘Tired of paying a landlord’s mortgage, renting couple decides to take the home ownership plunge’. The series name suggests that an entire generation can accurately be characterized as “Condo Generation”. At a less obvious level, the article suggests that simply acknowledging the ‘yuppie’ association with condominiums is enough to justify purchasing one. The author is not stereotypically feminine, and her unconventional appearance and her language add a level of street credibility that legitimates the idea of condominium ownership even for those have ethical and/or social misgivings.
Echoing a previous testimonial, the author of a subsequent article in the Condo Generation series notes that she was caught by surprise ‘when home ownership completely changed my life in a matter of months.’ (Mattos, 2006, P11). Just as the author of the earlier article found that she became interested in maximizing her satisfaction with her surroundings, so too does the author here, who ‘became obsessed with housewares’ (ibid). When her partner cautiously suggests that a tiled backsplash would ‘look sharp and be good for resale’ (ibid), she is thrilled: ‘I don’t think I’ve ever been so in love’ (ibid). Summing up one of the prominent themes related to representations of young women as condominium owners in Condo Living articles, the author concludes: ‘I suppose what it all boils down to is that I’ve become an adult. On paper, that happened years ago, but for me, home ownership is what really sealed the deal’ (ibid).

These and other testimonial or lived experience articles work in concert with the condominium advertisements in Condo Living to sharply define young women as a target market by associating home ownership with concepts and feelings that may be perceived as profoundly meaningful. In particular, condominium ownership is presented by young female authors to their peers as a highly rewarding step to take, economically and, more importantly, on a personal level in terms of self-esteem. These rewards are presented as flowing equally from the acquisition and the maintenance of a condominium, both processes that stereotypically require the involvement of a male partner. Not only do these articles tell young women that these things are possible, they promise that it is the right thing to do, and that it is enjoyable.

At the same time, the articles present condominium ownership as being instrumental in reaching adulthood for a group of young women who are experiencing a world of changed expectations regarding careers and work, and gender role expectations regarding family formation. As presented, the transformation is somewhat bittersweet, with the relatively carefree, post-university experience contrasted with the realities and responsibilities of ownership. This is of course merely a new iteration of the idea of ‘settling down’, but in most of these testimonial articles—unlike the settling down stories of the past—it involves neither a husband nor children. While it is certainly possible to debate whether this represents positive change for women, I think it is undeniable that the promises made by testimonial arguments would be perceived as highly meaningful for many young, middle-class women.
7.2.2 Seniors

One of the most unexpected things that emerged from this research was the prominence of women in their late 50s and older in the Condo Living articles. Hundreds of articles related to gardening, storage, decorating and downsizing were published with older women in mind, along with a number of testimonials. What surprised me is not that older women were living in condominiums, since this is a trend that has existed for many years, but that so many articles featuring older women would appear in Condo Living when so few condo advertisements appealed to older buyers. The inclusion of these articles helps naturalize the link between women and condos, but it is probably more important in bolstering the credibility of the Condo Living section by suggesting a divide exists between its advertisements and articles; they send a message that the articles are not simply disguised promotional material from developers.

If testimonial articles written by young women rely on appeals to profoundly meaningful sentiments related to identity and lifecycle, the same is true for the testimonials written by women in their late forties and older. Although for both groups, moving to a condominium usually entails a move away from the family home, for older women the process can be traumatic on a number of levels. Most obviously, a move to a condominium is often motivated by painful events or circumstances, such as the death of a partner or diminishing physical abilities. Beyond the circumstances, the process of moving can be difficult, since it frequently involves parting with a lifetime’s accumulation of material goods, many of them linked to loved family members.

A number of articles and lived experience articles in Condo Living explore these themes, and in doing so, they play a number of roles. Most obviously, they create a connection with a specific demographic by addressing their concerns directly and acknowledging them as serious issues. Since all of these accounts have positive endings, the articles legitimate the condominium as a viable dwelling type. At the same time, they provide the Condo Living section with credibility because the majority of these accounts relate to resale condominiums, not new projects that are being advertised. Further credibility may result from the willingness to discuss negative aspects of moving to a condominium, such as the emotional hardship that many people experience during the ‘downsizing’ process (Condo Living published eighteen articles to the subject). Finally, these articles suggest to anyone scanning them that the condominium is above all
flexible if such different groups of people can find happiness in them, providing further validation for anyone considering purchasing one.

The most detailed account of moving from a house to a condominium is multi-part series written by writer and activist Sheila Kieran, who describes every step of the process from the time she decides she can no longer maintain a house on her own to how she looks back on her decision to move after having lived in her condominium for a year. The series is essentially a diary, allowing Kieran to describe what she has recently experienced. The diary format, consisting of a series of pieces written shortly after they events they describe have occurred, is ideal because it captures the various phases in the kind of detail that might be missed if written long after the fact, and because it lends an immediacy to the account that readers might find compelling. In one column, for example, she describes her shifting attitude toward her house, in which she is still living but which has been sold: ‘It’s as if I were living with someone I used to love, long after the end of the affair’ (Kieran, 2000a, P4). Noticing flaws with her house, she concludes, ‘I recognize this process of withdrawing my pleasure in my home as a necessary part of letting go, but that doesn’t make it any easier’ (ibid.).

A column appearing one week later introduces some of the difficulties of downsizing. In Kieran’s case the plans to pare down significantly go awry during implementation: she finds she can discard only two of more than 3,000 books (Kieran, 2000b). Decisions about other items are more affecting, such as Kieran’s unexpected discovery of a sheaf of recipes, handwritten by her daughter who died years earlier. In these and other observations that focus on the social aspects of moving, Kieran acknowledges and legitimates the fears and anxieties of women in similar circumstances while implicitly positioning the condominium as a viable solution for them and younger women as well.

In the episodes that Kieran devotes to adjusting to life in her new apartment, the most prominent theme to emerge is that of community. Although Kieran talks about the renovation and configuration of her apartment, it is the social circumstances she describes that seem to characterize her new residence. In addition to describing her interactions with onsite staff, Kieran, for example, devotes a column to the protocols and conventions associated with her building’s movie night. Additional columns describe how, in some buildings, groups of women rely upon one another. One member of such a group says, ‘We have a lot in common: we stay
active and, in the past, we’ve been involved in such issues as anti-war campaigns. We feel safe: if I need someone to help, I know I have friends. There’s a real sense of camaraderie—it’s like a little community’ (Kieran, 2001a, P2)

Not all is rosy: in various columns, Kieran mentions her displeasure at noise from elevators and nearby train tracks, talks about mediating disputes that can arise between condominium owners, and outlines the problems she had with contractors. Like the rest of the series, these articles legitimate condominium living despite their apparently negative content, because the recurring theme across all of the testimonial and lived experience articles is that there are challenges to living in a condominium regardless one’s circumstances but that it can be done, and in the end it is all worth it. Kieran sums up her own experience by saying that she is happy with her move because it has allowed her to discover ‘ways of living…that I’d never thought of before’ (Kieran, 2001b, R2).

In other testimonials and articles appearing in Condo Living, the message is often more explicit. One woman who moved to a condominium with her elderly husband explains: “Charlie always said that we’d be going from (the house) to the cemetery, and now I think, 'thank God we’re not going to the cemetery’,” says Ethel. “We’ve got a new life starting, and I’m enjoying it” (Hurley, 1998, P2). ‘When I look at where I am now, I wish I had moved sooner’ (Adair, 2002a, P8) says another woman who moved into a condominium after having lived in the same house for 45 years. Another says her only regret is that ‘I should have done this 10 years ago’ (Laporte, 2004, P16). The experience of yet another senior is equally positive: ‘Despite her initial uncertainty, Rose has come to love condo living. “I have a lot of friends here. And it’s very private. If you want to be busy, you can be busy. If you don’t want to, you don’t have to mingle with anybody. I’ve adjusted really well’” (Bent, 2003, P16).

Overall, the testimonials by seniors mirror those written by younger women. In each case, authors outline how their lives have changed as a result of their move to a condominium, literally presenting their move as a life-changing event. These highly personal accounts make for compelling reading and constitute a powerful branding mechanism that links positive life events with the condominium as well as identifying target markets.
7.2.3 Discussion

The advertisements and articles considered here suggest that Condo Living may have been particular efficacious in defining young, single women as the primary target market for Toronto condominiums. The advertisements in the recent era establish the condominium as a dwelling for young women through sheer repetition of imagery. The testimonial and lived experience articles affirm what the advertisements seem to promise: that ownership is possible and fun for middle-class women; although there are obstacles, they can be overcome. The two sets of representations mutually reinforce one another, but perhaps more importantly, the articles may be perceived as being particularly meaningful because they were written by peers, giving them credibility that would be absent under other circumstances. Additional credibility is derived from the ostensible motives of the article: to provide advice and guidance, rather than to promote one particular condominium project.

The close linkage between advertisements and articles geared toward young, middle-class women is not surprising in the Toronto context. This research was initially motivated by an anecdotal observation that recent condominium projects seemed to be exclusively marketed using images of women. The situation is different regarding older women, who, as mentioned, appear rarely in recent era condominium advertisements, and always with a partner. Yet older women, most often single, feature prominently in the articles published in Condo Living. Given existing stereotypes, it is surprising, for example, that there are almost no testimonial or lived experience articles from the perspective of the empty-nesters, whose kids have just moved out and who exchange their house for a condominium in order to enjoy a carefree, turnkey, urban existence. Instead, there are many articles dealing with aging, reduced capabilities and mortality, in which the move to a condominium is seen—initially at least—as an undesirable reduction in quality of life that is necessarily difficult to accept for what it symbolizes.

Yet, far from putting the condominium in a negative light, these articles do a great deal in legitimating the condo as a viable dwelling type by intertwining it with some of the most meaningful decisions that people have to make—and of course, by suggesting that the result may be an unexpected increase in quality of life, rather than a decrease. It is clear that our societal residential aspirations focus on achieving ownership of detached, single-family house; there is, as yet, no hint that moving to a suitable condominium after house ownership is about to be added
to these aspirations. However, the articles in Condo Living at least bring the condominium into the conversation, and they operate on the same basis as the articles geared to young women: they address meaningful issues, they similarly present the condominium as something that is difficult to acquire but rewarding in the end, and they do so using the words of peers.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this mechanism—advertisements and meaningful peer testimonials—from a branding perspective. Brands succeed when they can implicitly reassure a consumer that the purchase and ownership of a particular product is prudent and acceptable, and perhaps even desirable. While advertisements alone can partly achieve this goal, it is usually third party affirmation that cements it, with none being more influential than friends and peers. The articles, and particularly the testimonials, in Condo Living fill the latter role by dealing with the challenges and difficulties of condominium ownership rather than just the positive aspects. By doing so, they ground the happy advertising images in reality, but most importantly, despite dealing with ‘negative’ or pragmatic issues, the articles in no way contradict the advertisements; instead, they suggest that moving to a condominium is the prudent thing to do, that the obstacles can be overcome, and that it is worth the difficulties involved. This is a very strong and complex image, centred as it is on some of life’s most meaningful moments. The advertisements and articles in Condo Living can therefore be seen as being much greater than the sum of their parts in the way that they reinforce each other in representing the condominium as a viable dwelling type for the markets on which they focus.

One of the principle themes in this work is the internalization of the branding paradigm or an ‘affective mode of persuasion’. The approaches taken by both developers in their advertisements and Condo Living in its testimonials provide an excellent example. In advertisements, the mechanism is particularly straightforward: in order to attract women as condominium buyers, it is necessary only to produce advertisements in which women are prominently featured in a way that allows them to act as demographic indicators (and not as sex objects, for example). The testimonials rely on their ostensible objectivity and, more importantly, on narratives that outline important moments in the lives of the writers to once again frame the condominium as a ‘natural’ dwelling for women.

Neither the advertisements nor the articles in Condo Living use a logic-and-evidence based approach to naturalize the link between women and condominiums. Sporadically, an article
would appear, noting that women were becoming more influential in some aspect of the condominium development process. Yet the suitability of condominium ownership for women never became an explicit discourse in Condo Living, nor did an explicit discourse develop concerning the advantages of condominiums for women compared to the single-family house. Instead, these messages were delivered indirectly and affectively, meaning that explicit logic-and-evidence based approaches were either not considered or discarded in favour of affective approaches considered to be more compelling and meaningful to readers. In either case, it illustrates the appeal affective approaches have for those who want to produce persuasive information in any form. At the same time, it illustrates why the branding paradigm has diffused so rapidly and been internalized: people continually encounter affective approaches of persuasion as both producers and consumers of ‘information’ in their work and home lives. In addition to leading to the internalization of these approaches, constant participation in them, and their use for purposes that are not directly commercial, has removed any stigma of manipulation that accompanies advertising. The result is the perception that affective approaches that characterized the expansion of branding are increasingly seen as effective, compelling and ethically unproblematic for any task of persuasion.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

8.1 Overview

The previous chapters document the increasingly specific manner in which condominium apartments and their owners were represented in the pages of the real estate section of the Toronto Star and in its Condo Living section between 1967 and 2007. The process closely resembled a conventional branding campaign in its coherence and consistency despite the absence of a purposive campaign to achieve this goal. Like any brand that accumulates negative associations over time, the condominium was rebranded in order to counter negative connotations including those related to their security, suitability for families, small size, and their previous incarnation as social housing towers. In this rebranding, the security guard of the past was replaced with the concierge in order to link the condominium with luxury hotels. Articles in Condo Living promised prospective owners that it was possible and to raise children and to have a garden in a condominium with careful planning. Similarly, the testimonial, a long-standing promotional approach, was employed to suggest that the perceived shortcomings of the core area condominium, and the perceived advantages of the suburban detached house were social constructions.

Differentiating the condominium from its competitors was a second phase of the process that involved linking the condo with leading-edge design and urbanity through high-profile cultural and entertainment events and facilities. At the same time, the condo implicitly played on aspirations of exurban living by highlighting extravagant amenities like multi-million dollar gymnasiums, screening rooms with stadium seating and indoor basketball courts that would be unusual even in the largest of private estates. Together, these characteristics were part of what was marketed as a particular lifestyle predicated on social interaction in the condo and in the city that was available only in a condominium. What is notable about this differentiation approach is that it represents a break with previous promotional attempts, which played down the differences between the condo and the single-family house and instead sought to compete on value. A problem with this approach from a branding perspective is that it implicitly acknowledges the leading brand—in this case the single-family house—as being the best and most desirable; the condo, by extension, is acknowledged as a lesser version with some mitigating characteristic,
such as price. Conversely, the recent rebranding of the condominium is solely concerned with promoting the condo as a distinct dwelling type. The single-family house and suburban living when acknowledged at all are denigrated rather than celebrated. As a result, the high-rise condominium is positioned as an unapologetic polar opposite to the single-family house: leading-edge where the single-family house is traditional, urban and central where the single is suburban and sprawling, urbane and social where the single is conformist and inwardly focused.

The most profound aspect of the condo’s rebranding, however, is the nearly singular focus in advertisements on one particular target submarket: young women. From the mid-1990s onward, almost half (43%) of all condo advertisements portraying people used images of women only, tripling the frequency of previous eras. The increase was almost entirely offset by a decrease in frequency of images of men and women, which fell from 75% to 49%. Along with this shift, the age of women portrayed dropped, resulting in the vast majority of representations (86%) being those of young women. Condo Living participated in this process by publishing scores of articles by and about young women, usually single, and their experiences acquiring and living in condominiums. Often taking the form of first-person testimonials, these ‘lived experience’ articles typically related the author’s moment of discovery—that she could become a homeowner, despite her youth and relatively modest economic resources—and the subsequent flurry of activity related to finding and buying a condo. Other articles outlined daily life in condos as experienced by young women, and although the subject matter is different, the promise is the same: although living in a condominium involves compromise from conventional residential expectations, the obstacles can be overcome and condo ownership will be personally and financially rewarding. Taken together, the advertisements and articles constitute a powerful branding mechanism. Frequent depictions act as demographic indicators, naturalizing the idea of women as condo owners. Messages delivered by peer group members are highly influential, and the confluence of advertising and editorial messages within an authoritative and ‘objective’ source like a major newspaper legitimates the entire branding strategy.

Yet this strategy alone was insufficient to guarantee the success of the high-rise condominium in Toronto. Undertaking a rebranding campaign by addressing negative connotations, differentiating a brand from its competitors by concentrating on its characteristics rather than how it compares to the leading brand, and focusing on a particular target market will not automatically produce positive results; many rebranding efforts have failed. In the case of the
Toronto condo, it was the integration of concept of design that led to successful rebranding. One reason is that design was meaningfully integrated in the development process and produced meaningful and tangible differences in the appearance, configuration and decoration of condominiums. Just as important, the design-based changes created markedly more efficient and pleasant interior spaces as condominium units have continued to shrink since their inception through to the present. The scope and suitability of these changes added credibility to the rebranding process, affirming that condominiums—and not just their marketing—had been reinvented.

In representing the Toronto condo as design-led dwelling type, architects, interior designers and decorators employed the reigning design aesthetic, described here as ‘contemporary’, that is best understood as a reworking, integration and extension of several versions of mid-century modernism. With ‘historicist’ architecture becoming ever more entrenched in low-rise housing (Harris & Dostrovsky, 2008), the deployment of leading-edge design in condominiums is not surprising given the need for differentiation. The serendipitous and crucial aspect of these circumstances is that ‘contemporary’ design offers a softened, ‘feminized’ version of modernism that is far less unappealing to women than the minimalist, high-modern aesthetic associated both with denigrated ‘International School’ structures of the 1960s and aspirational loft conversions like those in SoHo. The contemporary aesthetic employs colours, textures and forms that would be anathema to high-modernists but adheres to the ‘clean’ lines and rectilinear forms that modernists advocated; architects and designers were able to ‘keep the good stuff’ of modernism, and reject the ‘bad’. The result was a form of modernism made ‘safe’ for women that dovetailed perfectly with the new female-coded condo.

Yet the most profound effect of adopting high-design as a core attribute is not the physical changes to condominium interiors and exteriors even when their role in differentiating the condo and defining its primary submarket is considered. Instead, the most important effect of adopting design is that it immediately positioned the condominium as a member of a group of aspirational brands that participate in the larger design market, including those in the fashion apparel, fragrance and personal care categories. By joining these brands, the condo gains instant access to the aspirational associations that were developed over the course of many decades. The mechanism is not complex, involving only the adoption of what have become recognized conventions for advertising products in these categories. Figure 76 below shows two pairs of...
advertisements that show that when developers do use ‘glamorous’ images, they do not simply imitate, they reproduce the visual language of fashion branding.

![Image of fashion and condominium advertisements]

**Figure 74: Shared visual syntax of fashion and condominium advertisements**

In Figure 76, the left image of each pair is the condominium ad, and while it may be possible to deduce this with a little scrutiny, the adoption of the well-established visual style of fashion brands is quite evident: each of the condominium ads could be used as is to market upscale attire, lipstick or mascara.

A fascinating side-effect of positioning the condo as design-led is that it made it possible and completely plausible the linking of the condominium and all aspects of the design industry. It is for this reason that Condo Living was able to run scores of articles related to design ranging from
design in 1930s movies to accounts of furniture exhibitions in Milan. Similarly, as a design-based brand, it was only ‘natural’ that the condo would have celebrity designers, and where they did not exist, they were created through continual attention in Condo Living; where there was no widely perceived design heritage in Canada, Condo Living suggested that one existed through a series of articles about iconic designs produced in Canada. The result is that a discourse of design surrounded the condo, which served to further bolster the brand credibility and help perform the various branding strategies described above.

Another potentially profound impact of presenting the condo as design-led is that it completed the process begun earlier of taking the condominium out of competition with the single-family house. The earlier, conventional approach was to highlight what were perceive to be the condominium’s unique assets rather than engaging in comparisons with the single-family house based on value or convenience. Aligning the condominium with fashion and design brands is a much more radical act because it relies on connotations and associations that are entirely unconnected with dwellings and residential decision-making. Apart from acting as a differentiator, this strategy removes the Toronto condominium from the socially constructed hierarchy of dwelling types that has the suburban, single-family house at its apex. As a result, the condominium appears as completely unique brand, with a distinctive set of attributes and characteristics. Not only does this establish the condominium as a viable dwelling type, it encourages comparison between condominium projects, not between the condo and the single-family house. At an even more fundamental level, the design-led condo ceases to occupy the same consumption space as other dwellings, aligned as it with relatively inexpensive commodity items that are purchased repeatedly as they are consumed or as fashion changes. Dwellings, conversely, are generally excluded from consideration as standard items of consumption not only due to their price, but also for the same reasons that account for the existence of real estate sections: dwellings are produced and consumed locally; national and international brands do not exist; and the finished products are unique in location and often constructed with input from owners. The gulf between the positioning of the condo and other dwelling types is therefore quite extreme.
8.2 The transferability of branded systems of meaning

In examining the transformations in the way the high-rise condominium has been represented, I have employed a ‘branding paradigm’ as the conceptual lens for understanding the larger processes of production and consumption outlined in this research. If continual participation in branding strategies has indeed resulted in internalization of the process—and subsequently a tendency to employ and expect such branding strategies—then it becomes far easier to imagine aspects of the rebranding of the Toronto condo that can initially seem puzzling. The coherence of the values promoted in the recent era makes sense if developers—and particularly the marketing firms they employ—are seen individually as producers and consumers of brand meanings in a consumption environment characterized by virtually unlimited media reach and extensive branding campaigns. In such an environment, brand-like meanings, including those presented in Condo Living, diffuse rapidly among both general consumers and the development and marketing spheres, where they are (re)interpreted and reworked in reaction to responses measured in page hits, sales centre attendance and unit sales. Given the scores of projects typically underway in Toronto at any one time, this ‘co-production’ of meaning involves thousands of people and operates with great rapidity. From this perspective, the emergence and widespread adoption of a specific public image seems inevitable rather than puzzling.

Perhaps a better illustration of the degree to which the branding paradigm has been internalized is the fact that it has clearly been possible to successfully market dwellings using strategies and imagery to those used to sell mascara, designer clothing and hair care products. The previous statement is not an exaggeration: it is important to emphasize that ‘glamorous’ images of women are often used as logos to define individual projects, and not simply as accompanying images to text describing the sophistication of a particular project. The last of the three images presented in Figure 76 above, for example, is taken from the main page of a website for a Toronto project (Figure 77, below). The composition of the image of the woman, and her appearance so thoroughly use the visual language of fashion and design that it is clear the role of the image is to alert readers what category this particular product belongs to. That the product is, materially, profoundly different from other products in the category is irrelevant.
This illustrates the power of both the specific fashion and design brand, and the strength of the branding paradigm as mechanism of persuasion. Because fashion brands have such a strong set of associations, it is enough to simply deploy its visual conventions—without making explicit claims to notions of sophistication, for example—based on the knowledge that consumers will be able to instantly and accurately identify the intended meaning. Whether they accept this meaning at face value (literally, in this case) is of course uncertain; how consumers precisely map the associations of fashion brands onto the condominium would make for fascinating research, although the complex manner in which design in general has been linked with the Toronto condominium suggests that the intended meaning is frequently taken.

### 8.3 The shift to affective persuasion

The consistency of the public image of the high-rise condo is a function of the repetition of similar images and the caution of developers, who are reluctant to stray from what is perceived to be a successful formula. Clearly, this image can be interrogated on a number of grounds,
including its nearly complete absence of representations of non-whites, which is startling in a city as ethnically diverse as Toronto. Regardless, the important point of the public image as it exists is that competing themes in condominium marketing, such as those based on affordability, have withered away almost entirely.

As well as reflecting the need for consistency, the refining of the condo’s public image described here reflects the perceived effectiveness of affective persuasion. Appeals to characteristics like affordability are based on logic and evidence. They try to convince readers that it makes sense—that it is logical—to purchase a particular condominium. They use evidence of various sorts to support their claims. These kinds of appeals declined dramatically as the public image of the condo became more closely defined. Prior to the recent round of condominium development, advertisements based on economic claims like value, affordability and investment potential comprised the largest category of condo ads (38%). During the recent era, however, lifestyle ads, which are inherently affective appeals, were the most numerous (48%) while ads making economic appeals fell to only 14%, a distant third place behind ads concentrating on design (21%), most of which are affective as well.

The shift away from ads based on financial concerns also illustrates a greater understanding of the ways meaning becomes attached to dwellings. Advertising a condominium based on its low price implicitly positions it as a discount product, and therefore of lower quality than competitors, or as a product whose chief and perhaps only advantage is its low price. This would likely represent a problem from a brand management perspective, and by extension, a problem in the marketplace since purchasing this kind of product would involve some measure of shame. Discount products and brands occupy the lowest level of aspiration. In a society where status and success are often measured by one’s ability to consume, purchasing a discount product signifies failure.

This single example illustrates several aspects of branding, including brand management, advertising strategies and the purchase process. What is most significant is that all revolve around the primacy of the idea that people experience reality and perform actions in a predominantly affective manner, and that, necessarily, logic and evidence interpretations or representations are less compelling and meaningful to people even if they more accurately represent the product or issue. (It is worth noting here that some of the most effective affective
techniques are those that masquerade as being logic and evidence-based. The cosmetics industry, for example, relies heavily on carefully couched pseudo-scientific claims in order to position their products as legitimate ‘medicine’ for ‘diseases’ like skin wrinkles or ‘conditions’ like ‘damaged’ hair. Such claims co-opt the socially constructed acceptance of logic and evidence as the ultimate arbiter of truth. That the marketing claims are without substance is irrelevant: they must simply give the impression of being ‘scientific’ in order to act as a rationale for acceptance and purchase. Similarly, any claim that appears to use logic and evidence (e.g. methodologically suspect statistics; arguments with elementary flaws of logic) can perform essentially the same task.)

Whether most people find affective approaches to be more meaningful and compelling than logic and evidence-based approaches is obviously open to question, but it seems clear that this perception underpins the expansion and transformation of commercial branding into the ‘branding paradigm’ I use in this research. Brand management is conceptually identical to public relations, ‘spin’ and propaganda in privileging the creation of positive brand perceptions over addressing the objective reality of a particular situation. What is unique about brand management, however, is that it is generally perceived to be an unproblematic mechanism if practiced indirectly for non-commercial purposes. An institution may send newsletters and updates to its employees that describe events and happenings that cast the institution in a uniformly positive light. These events may be objectively accurate. As a whole, however, they make indirect claims about the institution that will legitimate other, less frequent direct claims about its ‘commitment’ to some principle or goal. This mode of framing reality is not new. What is new is its pervasive and unproblematic use by a diverse range of institutions, some of which in the past may have—if only implicitly—claimed to privilege logic and evidence-based approaches, or ‘objectivity’ over partiality.

The newspaper is certainly one such institution that appears to have been strongly influenced by the expansion of affective persuasion. The Condo Living section exemplifies this trend. The section existed purely as a vehicle to attract and publish advertisements. Fundamentally, it performed the same function as the advertising flyers from grocery and furniture stores that also accompany the weekend paper. Yet Condo Living was made to look like a hard news section, even to the inclusion of stories about urban planning that might otherwise have appeared in the front or local section of the paper. This was very much an act of brand management, using visual
cues to suggest Condo Living adhered to the same code of objectivity that theoretically informed the hard news sections of the paper. It will come as no surprise, however, that the content of the articles, and in particular the profiles of new projects that represent the most frequent article type published in Condo Living, is characterized by its uniformly non-negative, uncritical portrayal of projects. These articles are much more than simple repackaging of developer press releases, however, which is in line with brand management goals, one of the most important of which is maintaining credibility. In order to maintain the illusion of objectivity, site profiles were spun into design or construction stories, for example, in which the site being profiled would only appear toward the end, as though by chance and because they were convenient and suitable projects to illustrate a particular point. This kind of misdirection, including the ‘hard news’ graphic layout of the story and its tone, is the essentially the same as is used in cosmetics advertisements: it suggests adherence to a framework that is not truly being used.

Like cosmetics ads, the articles in Condo Living and in fact the section as a whole are extremely well conceived for their purpose. Apart from illustrating how well people who are not professional brand managers can manage a brand, the form that Condo Living took makes clear that the Toronto Star saw no ethical concern, no conflict of interest in expending considerable effort over the course of more than a decade to make an advertising supplement appear to be a hard news section, or in producing content that had the appearance of objectivity but was instead motivated by a desire to appease existing advertisers and attract new ones. The paper similarly saw this course of action as representing no threat to the Star’s own larger brand or its claims to authority and legitimacy, which is somewhat remarkable given the sacred status that journalism as a whole attaches to the notion of ‘objectivity’.

The willingness of the Star to create and support the Condo Living section illustrates a fascinating aspect of the branding paradigm: not just that so many institutions have adopted it for so many reasons, but that its use appears to be widely perceived as unproblematic. For institutions like newspapers, political parties and universities for example, it seems that managing perceptions and image via affective techniques is acceptable when it is not directly manipulative or purposely misleading (as in the selective distribution of exclusively positive events in newsletters to employees) and not used for directly commercial purposes, as in Condo Living site profiles. Put another way, it appears that institutions of all kinds are now quite willing to employ affective persuasion in the name of a ‘good’ cause, even when doing so is logically
inconsistent with the institution’s implicit or explicit principles and values. It is apparent that for institutions as well as individuals, logic and evidence are less compelling than affect.

8.4 The role of Condo Living

The evolution and acceptance of the Toronto condominium as a design-centric dwelling type is evident in the pages of Condo Living, which undoubtedly participated in the process in numerous ways that have been highlighted in this research. A fundamental motivation for focusing this research on Condo Living is a belief that the context in which advertisements and articles appear is important, and that these ‘texts’ interact with one another. Neither the vehicle nor the placement of advertisements and articles are neutral. Advertisers, for example, ‘believe that much of an advertisement’s “credibility” comes from the “quality” of the editorial material that surrounds it.’ (Myers, 1986 in Moeran, 2008). Developer marketing, articles by Condo Living staff, and testimonial articles from readers worked together in a remarkably consistent manner to represent the Toronto condominium as a viable, desirable dwelling type. Real estate sections in general have seldom been recognized as influential cultural objects, but particularly in the case of Condo Living there are grounds for seeing at as such. Condo Living was distinctive, and perhaps unique in focusing solely on condominiums—a circumstance that elicited my interest initially. Beyond that, however, it published a range of articles, including some related to urban planning that would qualify as hard news, and others that were critical of condominium design, or made obvious that the legal structure of condominium tenure imposed certain obligations and constraints on owners. These articles added to the credibility of an already authoritative source, and were bolstered by the adoption of the layout rules used for the hard news sections of the paper. All of these circumstances led to Condo Living having the potential to be an influential branding mechanism. Its inclusion in a major newspaper, its graphic format and its occasionally critical articles lent it credibility and encouraged readers to consume it as objective information. The convergence of themes and values between advertisements and articles suggested that developer marketing had substance and were not simply typical advertising hyperbole. And the use of first person testimonials that outlined meaningful moments in the lives of their authors simultaneously allowed readers to identify with the authors (and see themselves as potential condominium owners) and reaffirmed the messages expressed in
advertisements and articles. Condo Living was therefore a relatively complex periodical that worked on multiple levels to establish and promote the Toronto condominium as design-led and particularly well-suited to young women.

8.5 Local circumstances and condominium development

Both Condo Living and the representation of the high-rise condominium apartment it participated in shaping may have played a role in the disproportionate and continued demand for condominiums that Toronto has experienced since the mid-1990s. At the most basic level, the mere existence of a section of the nation’s largest circulation newspaper dedicated exclusively to the condominium is highly significant. Even had Condo Living been a superficial effort with random wire service articles filling the space between advertisements, it would still have helped legitimate the condominium apartment. That it was a carefully assembled periodical published weekly for more than a decade suggests its influence was much greater, through its participation in promoting a coherent and complex public image for the condo. Condo Living therefore accomplished two related but distinct tasks in first legitimating the condominium as a dwelling type, and second by representing it as design-led. Each of these is important from a consumption perspective. Purchase decisions are strongly informed by prevailing societal attitudes, meaning that any new product or service of any kind generally requires legitimation if it is to achieve widespread success. Where commodities are concerned, legitimacy can arise from a strong brand, advertisements using celebrity endorsers or testimonials from owners or other ‘experts’.11 Although Condo Living was clearly created as a revenue source for the Toronto Star it nonetheless helped to legitimate the high-rise condominium and recuperate its image over a number of years. In many other cities, no comparable circumstances existed.

What may also differentiate Toronto from cities with generally similar structural circumstances was the presence of a group of designers, architects, developers, real estate brokers and marketing firms whose high-design projects in the city’s core came to define the condo’s public image despite the relatively small fraction of the overall condominium market that they represented. Every city has people occupying these roles, of course, but what may be unique to

11 In the case of the testimonials, it is reflective of the strength of affective persuasion that even actors portraying experts (‘scientists’ or dentists, for example) are deemed to be effective in legitimating a product.
Toronto is that this group of firms in essence comprised one large, vertically integrated community that was capable of producing projects that aligned with their shared enthusiasm for contemporary design and exhibited a remarkable unity between exterior and interior design, configuration and finishes. The rise to prominence of this group, and more importantly for this research, the adoption of their general approach by mainstream condominium developers is the result of an unusual confluence of talent, competence, charisma and opportunity. Had this small community of development-related firms not existed or endured—or not been featured prominently in Condo Living and other media sources—it is likely that condominium development in Toronto would have taken a different strategy. It would likely have remained much closer to the trajectory set by the large mainstream developers who made their reputations and fortunes in the 1970s and 1980s building conservatively styled towers in the suburbs, with occasional forays into the wealthier areas of the city center, where they built structures with an equally conservative faux-historic style. As it happened, this group and its design-centric formula were frequently featured in Condo Living, lending these architects, designers and real estate brokers a level of celebrity that recursively affirmed the links between the condominium, design, high culture and entertainment. The diffusion of a design-based formula to mainstream developers and projects throughout the city, along with the media visibility and marketing campaigns that accompanied them, helped cement the specific public image of the condo described in this research. The ‘condo cartel’ of design-focused firms in Toronto may not have consciously been participating in an ambitious, visionary campaign to bring good condominium design to Toronto as realtor Brad Lamb suggests, but it seems likely that both the image and reality (and perhaps the sheer number) of high-rise condominiums would have been quite different in the absence of this group of firms.

As a result of local circumstances, then, the public image of the condo that emerged was unusually coherent and consistent. Coherence was achieved partly by adopting an existing system of meaning, in this case the constellation of associations surrounding the notions of style and design, which include urbanity and urban consumption, celebrity and fashion. At the same time, the claim to high design is visible in the appearance, configuration and materials of recent-era condominiums. The use of design, style and fashion may therefore be perceived as appropriate and substantive rather than superficial and manipulative, which would have been the case had the material reality of recent condominiums regularly failed to reflect the public image.
8.6 Residential development from a consumption perspective

This research examines the emergence of a set of associations, or more broadly, the ways in which a set of conceptually linked attributes was linked to a specific commodity. One of the motivations for using this approach is that it easily accommodates the notion that dwelling types have meaning for people, and that by extension, a hierarchy of dwelling type aspiration exists. The suburban house is the best example of this, having associations related to form, lifestyle, and location that are widely shared in the general population, and have been for decades. The detached, single-family house exists as an ideal, and like many ideals, it fails to accurately reflect reality but this failure does not tarnish the ‘brand’.

Other dwellings generally have a much less complex and clearly defined sets of associations. For the most part, what defines them is their shortcomings when compared to the single-family house ideal, with the result that a hierarchy of aspiration is constructed according to how far a particular dwelling type falls short of the ideal. The semi-detached house, for example, is less desirable than the detached house, and the row house less desirable than the semi-detached—hence the preference for ‘end unit’ row houses. What is more important, however, is that the semi-detached and the row house carry almost none of the symbolic freight that the detached suburban house does. They are not linked to a particular location in the city, nor particularly associated with peace, quiet, nature or nuclear families, for example. It would be difficult to consider them brands, and the same is true for low-rise forms of multiple family dwelling. Clearly less desirable than single-family dwellings, especially under rental tenure, they nonetheless have no unifying identity. Like the semi-detached or row house, they rarely appear as aspirational in media or other cultural objects that offer insights into societal values.

Until recently, the only mainstream dwelling other than the suburban house that could be said to have a clear public image was the high-rise apartment, which had associations related to form, location and lifestyle. In the case of the high-rise apartment, however, most of the associations were negative, which is not surprising given that the stereotypical (‘ideal’ seems inappropriate here) version was the polar opposite of the suburban house in all its characteristics and had the additional stigma of being associated with social housing. The introduction of condominium tenure and the subsequent appearance of high-end, luxury condos added positive connotations, but ownership tenure also brought speculator-fuelled boom/bust cycles and a reputation as a
risky investment. If the high-rise condominium apartment had a public image at all through the 1980s, it was contradictory and incoherent. It was this circumstance that makes the events of the mid-1990s forward notable, both in the form of unprecedented continuing demand for high-rise condominiums and the appearance of Condo Living.

This research illustrates how the advertisements and articles in Condo Living, along with its presentation as a hard news section helped articulate a coherent set of associations or public image for the high-rise condominium based on design and urbanity, intended to appeal primarily to young, single women. The result of this ongoing process is the emergence of the condo as a distinct dwelling type that effectively opts out of the hierarchy of residential aspiration through its alignment with design and fashion brands. As well as performing all of the general roles in consumption that all brands play, this positioning obscures the condo’s existence as a dwelling type and therefore precludes comparisons between it and the suburban house. As a result, the high-rise condominium is the first mainstream dwelling to have a set of associations uniquely its own rather than arising as a function of its deviation from those linked with the suburban house.

This is at present a primarily symbolic challenge to the socially constructed position of privilege accorded to the suburban house, but it is a challenge nonetheless. A relatively large number of people moving into high-rise condominiums will necessarily be forced to confront their pre-existing expectations of both multi-family dwellings and the suburban house. Of those, some people will find their expectations are met and will retain a conventional lifecycle and residence trajectory whose end point is ‘family’ life in the suburbs in a single-family house. But others, like Lilianne White, whose Condo Living testimonials were examined in Chapter 4, will discover to their surprise that a condominium actually suits them better than a suburban house would. At the very least, this change of sentiment by some part of the population aligns with a number of other circumstances such as increased commute times and expense, and environmental concerns in causing people to question their assumptions and aspirations related to dwelling types.

8.7 Parallels between condo and single-family house

This research has demonstrated how Condo Living, through its content, form and context participated in a process that attached meaning to a particular dwelling type. The details and circumstances of this process—one that took place in Toronto and affected the high-rise condominium apartment—are unique, but the process is not unprecedented. There are in fact
many parallels between the attachment of meaning to the post-recession condo and the attachment of meaning to the postwar single-family house. In each case, the concept of novelty plays an important role, with both the condo and the single-family house constituting a new dwelling configuration that involved architecture and design, location, class and lifestyle.

The ranch house, for example, was at the time a new type of house, however mundane it may seem sixty years later. While obviously not a radical departure from previous iterations of the single-family house, the ranch house nonetheless implemented a suite of innovations that positioned it as a distinct dwelling type. The most significant difference between the ranch house and its predecessors was its floor plan, which integrated living spaces—kitchen, dining and the new ‘family’ room. In houses of previous eras, rooms were typically separate, and even when adjoining, as was sometimes the case with a dining room and a parlor, the rooms were frequently divided by archways and doors.

It is tempting to conclude that the ranch house’s open concept and its acceptance in the marketplace was due simply to the pendulum swing in tastes that occurs when a newly styled product gains popularity not for any inherent benefits or improvements but simply because it is conspicuously different from the incumbent style. The ranch house’s open concept floor plan, however, was meaningful for more than its novelty and the degree to which it contrasted with previous configurations—although its novelty was undeniably part of its popularity during the early postwar years which prized novelty perhaps more than in any other period before or since. The most immediate benefit of the ranch house’s open concept floor plan was in the perception of space, making the house feel more spacious than it actually was. The single-story configuration of ranch houses aided this feeling because it gave the opportunity for long sight lines and a sense of flow that were not possible in two story designs of similar square footage. This was especially important for mainstream tract houses that were typically much smaller than the sprawling California ranch houses popularized in magazines.

Of course, the market had to be ready to accept a novel configuration, and this proved to be the case. The open concept signaled—perhaps enforced is a better word—a new social dynamic. By combining indoor living spaces, and providing easy access to the backyard, the open concept floor plan facilitated and naturalized the nuclear-family ethos being popularized at the time. Combined living space meant that families should carry out their activities as a unit, and not
pursue individual interests in separate spaces. It is not surprising that the term ‘togetherness’ was coined in 1954, by McCall’s magazine (Spigel, 1992, p. 37). The ranch house floor plan literally and symbolically turned its back to the civic area of the street, further elevating the family unit and, theoretically at least, promoting isolation from neighbours and society as a whole. Or as Richard Harris puts it, ‘The detached single-family home is seen to reflect a preferred, private, family-centred style of life. It allows for a public display of taste and wealth while encouraging an essential privacy’ (Harris, 2004, p. 25).

On all of these counts, there are parallels with the post-recession condominium apartment, which similarly relied on its open concept floor plan to differentiate it from previous generations. And as was the case with the ranch house, the open concept floor plan of the condo offered the advantage of making the space feel larger, something that is vitally important given the continually shrinking size of condominiums in the recent era. The perceptual effect of this kind of layout in recent era condos is similarly accentuated by the use of large windows, which provide light to interior spaces and blur the line between indoor and outdoor. If the picture window characterizes the postwar house, so do ‘floor-to-ceiling windows’ characterize the post-recession condo.

Along with its novel physical configuration, the postwar single-family house was associated with a specific location that was similarly novel: the suburbs. Location is always more than a backdrop against which life occurs. Its importance was particularly profound in postwar residential development. Most obviously, it demanded an individual and societal reliance on the automobile that is largely responsible for the configuration of the present-day suburban landscape. In return for the ‘elbow room’ it promised, the suburban location of the single-family house made commuting a necessity for the male breadwinner of the era and enforced isolation for ‘homemakers’ in single-vehicle households. Despite these and other implications of suburban location, the public image of the single-family house remained typically positive, concentrating on the positive aspects of its location, including its suitability as a place to raise children, its low density, its peace and quiet, its cleanliness, its safety, and the sense of space it offered in general and in large individual plots of land for homeowners.

The public image of the recent era condominium is similarly tied up with location, although in this case it is the city centre rather than the suburbs. As documented, notions of urbanity swirl
around the condo, manifested in links with ‘high’ culture and high-profile leisure consumption such as film festivals and theatre, as well as in more general representations of urban(e) activity. As I have also pointed out, a further point of divergence is the outward-directed public image of the condo in regard to social activity, which is in direct contrast to that of the postwar single-family house, which emphasized and valorized activities carried out within the nuclear family, in isolation from other nuclear families and society as a whole. The former is a function of the small size of recent era condominiums: developers have enough difficulty making a 525 square foot condo appear spacious without also having to depict it as an ideal place for socializing. As a result, what the public image of the condo promises is a wealth of possible activities to engage in, nearly all of them taking place outside of the dwelling. Only some of these are quasi-public, such as those related to the use of building amenities like pools and libraries. The majority are public activities like sporting events, festivals, exhibits at galleries or they take place in public places like parks, waterfront trails or the city streets.

Nonetheless, although the linking of the condo with urban social activities was partly driven by constraints inherent in marketing very small dwellings, location plays a key role in the public image of the recent era condo as it did and does in the public image of the single-family house. The systems of meaning that are associated with the respective locations are profoundly different—truly diametrically opposed—yet both serve the same purpose of linking dwelling to place, and necessarily informing activities or ‘lifestyle’. It has been noted that ‘the development and subsequent massive expansion of suburbia entailed the construction of not only a new kind of physical landscape, but new psychic and emotional landscapes as well’ (Beuka, 2004, p. 4). The same is also true of the massive expansion of condominium development, whose public image has, since the early 1980s, been strongly associated with the city centre and notions of urbanity.

The postwar single-family house and the recent-era condominium are linked by yet another instance of novelty, this time regarding the characteristics of their occupants, who were in each case a segment of the population new to home ownership. Although the suburbs have been traditionally associated with the middle-class, early postwar development was geared toward working class populations. The first Levittown, for example, was conceived and initially marketed as a rental project to low-income households (Kelly, 1993, p. 153). Even when Levitt moved his products to ownership tenure, the emphasis was on affordability, designed to appeal to
the substantial segment of the population that was newly capable of purchasing a house as a function partly because ‘…the flowering of a mass production economy raised the possibility of the good life, not only for the middle class but for the working class as well’ (Baxandall & Ewen, 2000, p. 14). More importantly, postwar consumers had access to unprecedented credit options thanks to federal initiative in Canada and the United States and related policy changes by lending institutions and insurance companies (Harris, 2004). Whether the directly affected population constituted a ‘new middle class’, remained ‘working class’ despite home ownership, or enlarged the existing middle class is up for debate, but what is certain is that they were a demographic group that previously played an insignificant role in home ownership but became a primary target market for postwar developers.

Although young, single women—the primary target market for post-recession condominium developers—did not experience the dramatically increased access to credit that their postwar counterparts did, they nonetheless constituted a segment of the population that was similarly new to home ownership. The family configuration of the two groups was obviously different, and their motivations and expectations as well: as I have documented in this research, the young women profiled in Condo Living did not purchase a condominium in order to fulfill an updated Canadian Dream. In fact, the majority of them felt initially that ownership was not an option for someone in their circumstances: young, single and female. Only when confronted with evidence that ownership was viable—often via interacting with an existing condo owner in their cohort—did they begin the purchase process.

Despite these differences, there are similarities that link the two groups of new homeowners. As well as being new to property ownership, young women in post-recession Toronto were purchasing a type of dwelling that was new to them and, in the specific form the post-recession condominium took, new in the residential marketplace. In both eras then, a new segment of the population was acquiring in large numbers a new dwelling type in what was, for at least some of post-recession purchasers, a new location as well. It would be incautious, I think, to take the comparison further, and to suggest, for example, that the two populations share a similar outlook; the kind of exhaustive and systematic research required to support such a position does not exist.

For the purposes of this research, the primary implication of the shared circumstances of postwar and post-recession home-buyers is the way their relationship to the media was structured. In each
case, the media took the opportunity to guide novice homeowners on all aspects of the new lifestyle they had embarked on. In the postwar era, this process took place in all of the major forms of media, especially the shelter magazines. George Marek published an extremely popular monthly column about classical music in *Good Housekeeping* magazine, for example, that ‘offered didactic how-to-listen lessons for millions of beneficiaries of the GI Bill and Fannie Mae home loans, whose working-class tastes were out of alignment with their newly established, middle-class economic status’ (Doane, 2009, p. 156). In Canada, Frank Moritsugu filled a similar role with articles in *Canadian Home and Garden* that discussed film, music and theatre although in a less didactic manner than Marek, and far less prominently than Marek, whose column was given prominent placement (ibid.). Commenting on the popularity of midcentury cultural intermediaries, Elaine Tyler May has remarked, ‘Whether or not all Americans read or believed the professionals, there can be little doubt that postwar America was the era of the expert. By articulating norms, they expressed as well as helped to shape American values’ (May, 1989, p. 155-6).

Post-recession condominium buyers had far fewer experts to whom they could turn to for advice, especially regarding the practical, nuts-and-bolts level of information that the postwar shelter magazines had provided to their readers. Condo Living stepped into this void like no other media entity, publishing articles on every conceivable aspect of acquiring and maintaining a condominium apartment from the expected buying advice and site profiles to condo gardening (189 articles) and condo law (650 articles). The range and number of articles, particularly in categories like the latter two, are what compelled me to consider Condo Living as a periodical in this research, and what link it to the early postwar shelter magazines: periodicals in each era provided guidance in such a range of practices that they were in effectively lifestyle manuals. Of the relationship between postwar shelter magazines and the ranch house, Stephen James argues that ‘no cultural institutions were better situated to build a popular consensus for a new type of domestic architecture than the home magazines, which featured the ranch house not as an object in itself, but as a logical answer to the problems of how to live a better life’ (James, 2009, p. 47).

In many ways, Condo Living performed a similar role by dealing with such a broad range of subject matter, and particularly by linking the high-rise apartment with both urbanity and design, two concepts that carry a heavy freight of pre-existing and often inter-connected associations with lifestyle. At the same time, Condo Living presented the high-rise apartment as a viable
dwelling type by dealing with the perceived shortcomings of the condominium on one hand, and providing guidance about the quotidian tasks related to condo ownership on the other. Condo Living also emulated its postwar predecessors in being directed toward a female readership, as seen most clearly in the increasing prominence of women in advertisements, as well as with the first person testimonials it published, nearly all of which were written by women.

The high-rise condominium has not, however, achieved anything resembling the salience that the single-family house did in the early postwar years, either as a media presence or at the societal level. The public image of the condo has none of the utopian aspects that characterized representations of single-family house, and has never been the dominant dwelling type in television shows or films. It has certainly has never been linked to national identity or national security. The increased number of single, young women owning homes represents some form of actual and symbolic change, but this is not part its public image and does not constitute a counterpart to the postwar valorization of the single-family house as the ideal context for the nuclear family. None of these circumstances, however, diminishes the complexity and durability of the condo’s public image or suggest that it is simply another failed, ephemeral alternative to the single-family house. The mainstream acceptance of the high-rise condominium in urban and suburban areas of the GTA argues that it has become entrenched in the housing market. Given the decades of peripheral development that have already taken place, there appears to be no reason that condominiums will not continue to capture the majority of new housing starts in the region: there is simply not enough land in proximity to the GTA to allow low-rise construction to approach the dominant levels of the past. As a result, there is reason to expect the public image of the high-rise condominium to become both more visible and complex over time as an increasingly large segment of the population experiences high-rise living and tells their stories, perhaps in television series and movies rather than real estate section testimonials. What I have documented in this research may therefore be most closely compared to the magazine articles and advertisements that appeared in the 1930s and early 1940s, preparing the ground for a lifestyle and residential model that would not become reality for another decade. A dramatically changed media landscape means we will not see condo-based, twenty-first century versions of Father Knows Best and Leave it to Beaver, but it will nonetheless be fascinating to observe how the public image of the high-rise condominium evolves in the coming years.
8.8 Future Research

A number of questions arise from this work that could be used to guide future. One of the most obvious is how prevalent is the notion of the condo as a design-led dwelling type? From the scant literature, it appears that locality may strongly inform the way that recent-era condominiums have been represented. In Sydney, high-rise apartments were marketed by relying heavily on New York-based imagery (Shaw, 2006), for example, while ideas of open space and views were prominent in Hong Kong marketing. It would be useful to establish how condominiums have been represented in Canadian and American cities, and whether a process of rebranding took place in these cities as it did in Toronto. One of the goals of such research would be to address the larger issue of societal perceptions of dwelling types, something that is of concern particularly in Canadian and American cities that are increasingly facing a need to intensify residential development but need to overcome what seems to be a profoundly entrenched aspiration to, and preference for, low-rise housing. At the same time, this research could address concerns raised by Fincher (2004), who is concerned that in Melbourne, developer focus on young couples and empty-nesters might prevent other groups equally or better suited to apartment living like single women from achieving ownership. Conversely, it would illustrate whether the public image of the Toronto condo, centred on young, single women has been more effective in housing suitable populations. The logical first step in exploring this issue would involve surveying a wide range of condominium owners in a systematic way in order to gain insight into their previous and future residential decisions.

A second line of future inquiry relates to the uniqueness of the Toronto experience. Condo development occurred rapidly in many cities from the mid-1990s onward, but disproportionately so in Toronto. It was not possible to explore the ‘Why Toronto’ question in this research due to its formulation as a media study, but certain characteristics that came to light that would provide useful starting points for this kind of inquiry. Most obviously, it would be helpful to know to what degree and using what methods local media participated in the presumed rebranding of condos: were the real estate sections in other cities as salient as Condo Living was in Toronto? The same applies for architects and designers: a number of highly competent design firms were present in Toronto from the mid-1990s onward and were able to participate (and often collaborate) in producing high-design condo interiors and exteriors. Similarly, several small developers and one very prominent real estate broker in Toronto were instrumental in bringing
high-profile loft conversions and mid-rise projects to market and making popular a design aesthetic to more mainstream projects. Were these circumstances different than those in other Canadian cities?

A third line of inquiry, involving a follow-up examination of condominium representations in real estate sections, has essentially been foreclosed by the radical remaking of newspapers that is currently underway. A relatively early symptom of the decline of newspaper was the elimination of the Condo Living section in 2007 as developers purchased fewer static display ads and instead concentrated their marketing efforts on their websites. Interestingly, the appearance and functionality of developer websites mirrors attitudes toward design ten years ago: smaller developers tend to have highly styled, highly interactive websites with a strong visual style while the larger developers tend to have very static and largely informational websites. It will be interesting to see if web design diffuses here as it did with condo design.

There are other areas of future research suggested by this work including the role of and place for masculinity in condo representations, the differences in design and configuration between urban and suburban condominium projects, and the experiences of a large but unacknowledged condo submarket: older women. All of this is valid work that needs to be done, but I would also like to emphasize a point that has recurred in this document: that the condominium, at least in Toronto, has become a distinct dwelling type, and as a result, the entire range of questions that academics have asked of other dwelling types—predominantly the single family home—can and should be asked of the condominium.
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