

# Women's Roles and Reproduction: The Changing Picture in Canada in the 1980's

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## ABSTRACT

The social roles of women have always been affected by their reproductive roles. Recently in Canada, as well as elsewhere, several challenges to traditional thinking about women's roles and reproduction have emerged. These challenges have called into question the models typically used to analyze women's roles as well as the very ways women are defined. Four of these challenges are discussed here including the shift in control over reproduction, childbearing as work, the changing traditional family and the appearance of new reproductive technologies. In each area, the traditional sociological approach is contrasted with the feminist perspective.

## RÉSUMÉ

Toujours les rôles social de la femme a été affecté par leur rôles de reproduction. Récemment au Canada, tout comme ailleurs, plusieurs défis à la pensée traditionnelle concernant les rôles de la femme et celui de la reproduction ont émergés. Ces défis ont remis en question les modèles typiquement utilisés pour analyser les rôles de la femme aussi bien que les différentes faons dont la femme est déterminée. Ici quatre de ces défis sont discuté incluant le changement dans le contrôle de la reproduction, la grossesse come travail, la famille traditionnelle en transformation, et l'apparition de nouvelles techniques de reproduction. Dans chaque domaine, l'approach sociologique traditionnelle fait contraste avec la perspective féministe.

Of all the explanations offered for women's secondary social status, among the most universally cited is their reproductive role. In many societies, including Canada, women's reproductive roles are seen to include primary responsibility for child care and rearing as well as child-bearing. Whether broadly or narrowly defined, the public perception of reproduction, more often than not, has profound implications for women's participation in society. Women's reproductive role is seen as essential for the continuation of human life. Reproduction is also seen as women's essential social role. These two forces interact in such a way that women's place in society is determined, in large part, by their reproductive role which is perceived as both naturally and socially preeminent.

The intertwining of women's social roles with reproduction occurs in several ways and on several levels. Because most (but never all) women biologically give birth, women are identified in the public mind as mothers by nature. Domesticity is seen as their special sphere because of the association of home work with childbirth and childcare. Domesticity is seen as precluding or limiting women's participation in the paid work force both because this is perceived as work for which they are not naturally suited, and because it may detract from what is seen as woman's primary social role as mother.

Women come to be seen as mothers first and workers second, thereby justifying their secondary status in the work force. The motherhood role is so inextricably bound together with the role of woman that all women tend to be seen as maternal, providing mothercare not only to their children and other people's children but to husbands, elderly parents, and even to bosses. The social status of mother is seen as the natural accompaniment of the status of adult woman when it is presumed that women are generally mothers, that they must want children to be complete as women, that they will be good mothers and that women who are not mothers are frustrated and ill-adjusted misfits. Rainwater, for example, reports from his research that:

feelings about the woman who wants only one child are very negative, while feelings about the woman who wants a large number of children are evaluated much more favourably. Particularly among a sample of people from the lower economic strata, the woman who wants only one child is viewed as selfish, sick, neurotic and cold. In contrast, the woman who wants three children is viewed as an average, good and loving person, while the woman who wants seven children is thought of as a good woman,

patient, kindhearted and sweet. (Rainwater as reported in Kammeyer, 1971:112)

Veevers finds that given a basically pronatalist society, [voluntarily childless] couples were aware that most persons would consider their world view to be morally offensive and would strongly disapprove of their rejection of parenthood. (Veevers, 1980:109).

Women are seen to serve the economy as mothers by not only perpetuating the species and the labour force, but by moulding their children into the contributing workers of tomorrow. Should this process not be entirely effective, however, the responsibility is placed squarely on the shoulders of mothers who are seen to have failed to provide adequate maternal care (Penfold, 1986). Women, in many ways, are seen as holding up the private sphere and thereby, through their reproduction, contributing to social order.

The public perception of the link between women's reproductive and social roles is reflected and reinforced by the conceptualizations of reproduction and family life by social scientists. In psychology, for example, it has long been believed that women's vocation is to bear and rear children and that women are guided in this natural vocation by maternal instinct (Balint, 1961; Benedek, 1949). Childbearing has been defined for women by psychologists and in childcare books (British Medical Association, undated; Bowlby, 1953; Spock, 1946; Winnicott, 1964), as the essence of womanhood and her ultimate fulfillment. The most recent reincarnation of the concept of maternal instinct is found in the sociobiology literature in the notions of reproductive success and investment strategies (Wilson, 1975; Rossi, 1977; Crawford and Gladikas, 1986). Theories of maternal deprivation (Rutter, 1976) in psychology, repackaged in the 1980s as bonding, have reinforced the notion that babies need mother love as much as they need food (Scarr, 1984). One of the strongest statements about women's reproductive roles appears in the psychiatric theory of maternal destructiveness (Rheingold, 1964), which holds that mothers, out of fear of accepting their femininity, negatively influence the personality development of their children.

In sociology as well, theory and research have reinforced the prevalent idea that women's essential role is that of mother. In empirical research, assumptions about the nature of family life have led analysts to exclude women who are not wives and mothers from consideration (Wilson, 1982:32; Eichler, 1983), to view the traditional division of labour by sex both within and outside the family

as natural (Eichler, 1983:31-64), to see working women as having their first priority at home (Wilson, 1982:32), to dismiss changes in the family as ephemeral rather than fundamental and lasting (Eichler, 1983:2), and to overlook the family roles of men (Wilson, 1982:32). The dominant theoretical perspective in mainstream sociology, functionalism, has viewed the smooth operation of society as contingent on specialization of role by gender both in the family and in society. Much psychological and sociological research has fed into common beliefs about what women can and cannot do and be.

This paper examines some of the complexities in the relationship between reproduction and women's social roles in focussing on four themes. By examining four recent and far-reaching changes in reproductive roles, the assumptions and biases of the traditional sociological approaches to reproduction and women's roles are highlighted. These are contrasted with the feminist perspective, an approach which is rapidly gaining in popularity in Canadian sociology (Eichler, 1985). The four themes to be examined here are: reproductive control, childbearing as work, the changing traditional family and the advent of technological reproduction. Although other topics could have been included, these serve as good illustrations of the complex issues involved in the sociology of reproduction as well as the wide-sweeping changes which are occurring in reproduction and reproductive roles of women. The focus throughout is on Canadian trends and data.

### **Reproductive Control**

The changes in reproductive control in the past few decades, in Canada and elsewhere, have been dramatic enough for sociologists and media pundits alike to herald a reproductive revolution. The revolution, of course, is the availability to large numbers of women of sufficiently reliable contraception as to enable effective choice in childbearing. Nationwide data on contraceptive use in Canada is scarce, although a Canada fertility survey has now been completed and data are being analyzed. It is clear, however, from available data (Statistics Canada, 1984:42) that contraceptive use among Canadians is very high, with 30-43 percent of all women of reproductive age on the pill alone. This is comparable but somewhat lower, than use among American women (Bachrach, 1984).

Sociologists have characterized the increased use of contraception as a shift from a fate to a control orientation, which can be seen as a trend in human society since the middle ages. The development of new forms of contraception has been accompanied by the increasingly popular

choice of sterilization for both men and women who have completed their families—estimated to be almost 60 percent among married couples using contraception (Statistics Canada, 1984:43-47; Healthsharing, 1986:4). These changes indicate a strong motivation to control childbearing which has resulted in a significant change in the pace of childbearing as well as in completed family size.

The reproductive revolution has produced a comparable shift in the sociological approach to the analysis of childbearing. Previously, fertility was seen, for the most part, as a direct and largely unquestioned outcome of membership in ethnic, religious, class and other groups. Childbearing, although defined as a social process, was analyzed by sociologists in terms of structural differentials. Once childbearing is viewed as a controlled outcome, where family size and birth timing are determined by deliberate choices made by couples, the structural framework becomes obsolete, or certainly capable of explaining less and less. The focus of attention has shifted to micro-level considerations borrowed from consumer economics, social psychology and psychology, as attempts are made to sort out the nature of choices involved and the processes by which couples make choices (Balakrishnan et al., 1975; McDaniel, 1984).

The very consciousness of fertility decision-making has converted it into a negotiation process between many couples: Okay, if you really want another child, then you'll have to travel less for the next few years, because I have my own career to think of, too.(Scrimshaw, 1981:261)

Changes in reproductive control have opened the possibility at least, for women deliberately to choose or not choose motherhood and to balance maternal responsibilities with other roles (Ryder, 1979; Westoff, 1983).

What is new is that with reliable contraceptives backed by access to legal abortion women can, for the first time, control the timing and pattern of their work and childbearing careers with confidence. This marks a revolutionary change in women's lives.(Scrimshaw, 1981:261)

The conjunction of improved control of reproduction with extended life expectancy has resulted in a shortened period of women's lives being devoted to childbearing and childrearing. Control over reproduction has had the additional consequence of making parenthood a less popular choice (Statistics Canada, 1984:32-35). This has meant a precipitous decline in fertility in Canada as is shown in

Table 1. Paradoxically, this dramatic decline, in which Canadian fertility was halved in just over a quarter of a century, occurring at a time during which the numbers of women of childbearing age increased dramatically, as is also shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Live Births, Children 0-4 and Women in  
Primary Reproductive Ages  
Canada 1961, 1971, 1981

	1961	1971	1981	Percent Change 1961-1981
Live Births	475,700	362,187	370,336	-22.4%
Children 0-4	2,256,401	1,816,155	1,783,375	-21.0%
Women 15-34	2,522,834	3,415,500	4,412,695	+74.9%

Source: 1961 Census of Canada, Vol. I, Part 2, Bulletin 2, "Age Groups," Statistics Canada, Ottawa; 1971 Census of Canada, Vol. I, Part 2, Bulletin 4, "Single Years of Age;" 1981 Principal Vital Statistics by Local Areas, "General Summary of Vital Statistics for counties," Census of Canada, Vol. I, Population, "Age, Sex and Marital Status."

Although the reproductive revolution is real and the accompanying shift in conceptual frameworks within social science to the analysis of choices seems appropriate in light of this altered reality, an impression is fostered that motherhood now is a clear and deliberate choice for all women. It is easily overlooked that some women, most notably the poor, the unwed, the physically and mentally abused (both within and outside of marriage), and adolescents may not have access to effective contraception (Statistics Canada, 1981). The question of whether childbearing choices are actually made by women becomes eclipsed in the social science quest to discover how choices are made. The appropriate research question has become, what is the process by which childbearing decisions take place, rather than whether they are actually made at all.

The implications of this shift in research perspective are enormous for women. If it is assumed that women deliberately choose motherhood, it might be further assumed that they are reinforcing, not by rational choice, motherhood as woman's primary role. It may be assumed further, that women are accepting, by the presumed rationality of their childbearing choices, that they have a secondary status in the work force because they have opted by deliberate decision, for motherhood. Had they not been willing to accept

a secondary place in the work force, so the logic of the choice model goes, they should not have chosen to become mothers in the first place. The idea here (and it is widely disseminated) is that children are no longer the inevitable outcome of marriage or sexual activity, so women who have them must recognize that this choice can have its liabilities for their lives and careers. A variation on this theme would be the inclusion of questions on childbearing intentions, sometimes including methods of birth control and/or sterilization experiences, in interviews of women for executive positions.

In a choice framework it may be assumed further, that women choosing to become mothers accept full responsibility for their children until they are grown. After all, it is a women's choice to have them. In some sense, the childbearing-as-choice model may be seen to involve a self-selection process such that only those who will be good mothers will decide to have children. Potentially poor mothers are expected to choose to remain childless. The social forces impinging on childbearing and the elements of non-choice involved in the process tend to be overlooked in both social science analyses and in popular views of childbearing as choice.

Despite the compelling appeal of the childbearing-as-choice framework and its applicability in many instances, numerous contradictions and fallacies are apparent in it. In sharp contradiction, for example, to journal articles and newspaper stories on childbearing as choice, the numbers of teenage pregnancies and unwanted births to women of all ages continue to be high, although teenage pregnancies have declined slightly in recent years (Statistics Canada, 1984:38). Despite media descriptions of couples agonizing over whether or not to have a child as the woman's biological time-clock ticks toward 30, 35 or 40, untold numbers of women are bearing children unintentionally. This occurs in poverty, isolation, abuse and violence, and among women with little access to contraception, as well as among women who are defined or define themselves as fulfilling their natural destiny. "Woman have traditionally offered childbearing and domestic services in exchange for the protection, security and status deriving from men's economic position" (Westoff, 1983: 102). There is little doubt but that this trade-off continues today.

Although a decrease in unwanted and unplanned pregnancies accounts in part for the dramatic reduction in fertility over the past few decades in North America, there can be little doubt that unwanted pregnancies continue to

occur. The abortion rate of 149 per 1,000 known pregnancies in Canada in 1981 (McDaniel, 1985), while not high, attests to the level of unwanted pregnancies. A fertility survey in Toronto in 1968 found that 16 percent of couples had not intended to have their last child (Balakrishnan et al., 1971). The proportion of children that were unwanted in Quebec in 1971 was 11 percent (Henripin and Lapierre-Adamcyk, 1974).

The feminist perspective on reproductive control takes the view that the reproductive revolution has only begun (Scrimshaw, 1981). Control over reproduction is seen by feminists as a basic human right but one which is not yet equally available to all women. The childbearing-as-choice framework is most appropriate in analyzing the reproductive processes of middle or upper class women who can and sometimes do, weigh alternatives to childbearing. For many poor, working-class or minority women, these choices simply do not exist. For them, argue feminists, the process is one of motherhood by coercion rather than by choice. In some instances, coercion takes the form of lack of access to contraception or abortion. In other cases, having children is the only defence of the family and caring in an alien and hostile world. Children can provide a reassurance of security, survival and hope for the future to those enduring the bleak world of poverty or life in the ghetto or on the reserve. Defining married women as the property of their husbands, or as caught in a division of labour within marriage by which reproduction is traded for economic support argue feminists, renders the sociological reproductive choice framework inappropriate. This is raised by Westoff (1983:101-102) when he states, "If one imagines a future society with genuine economic equality of the sexes, it raises some fundamental questions about the nature of the family and its reproductive function." Evidence of the degree to which legally sanctioned sexual coercion still exists is provided by the legal inadmissibility of rape of a wife by her husband until very recently in Canada.

Reproductive control is clearly a changing and contentious issue for women in Canada in the 1980s. The widespread attention being given to the debate on abortion provides ample evidence that reproductive control is a hot political issue (McDaniel, 1985). At root in this debate is the question of women's appropriate social roles as reproducers. No matter how profound the change in contraception has been, women have not been freed totally to choose childbearing. Institutional constraints, bureaucratic and legal impediments, cultural socialization and patriarchy continue to reinforce the idea that women's primary responsibility is reproduction.

## Childbearing As Work

Exploration of the relation between childbearing and work reveals an enormously complex set of issues, many of which go to the very heart of the problem of women's social roles and reproduction. The sociological and feminist perspectives on women's reproductive roles are vividly contrasted here. The simplest comparison of the two perspectives holds that sociologists tend to view childbearing and work as alternatives which even though not mutually exclusive, are conceptually different activities. Feminists, by contrast, see childbearing as a form of work which can be exploited and alienating, and which exists outside most social science and even philosophical frameworks of analysis (O'Brien, 1981).

The roots of the traditional sociological separation of reproduction and work can be found in Weber and Durkheim's ideas of a well-ordered social system based on specialization of task. This view was developed further by Parsons' functionalism which sees complementarity of task within the economy and the family and specialization by men and by women in these separate realms as essential for the preservation of social order (McDaniel and Agger, 1982). With this heritage, it is not surprising that sociological enquiry today is guided by strong assumptions about work and reproduction. A myriad of studies have been guided by the assumption of work as man's primary social role and childbearing as women's. Some of the fictions behind this research are presented in Table 2, together with facts which undermine the myths. Underlying research on women's motivation to work outside the home being harmful to children, assumptions about the proper role of women and the preeminence of women's roles as mothers guide what is studied and how it is studied (Eichler, 1985). It is not surprising that sociological research, in large part, lends support to the commonly held belief that women are childbearers first and workers outside the home only second.

The more recently emergent childbearing-as-choice framework adds a new set of assumptions to the analysis of women's work roles and reproduction. If childbearing is a choice and children are increasingly to be valued as fewer of them are produced (economists term this a substitution of quality for quantity), then motherhood becomes redefined as a privilege for which a price can be extracted. The price, so this kind of thinking goes, is that women who make the deliberate choice for motherhood cannot expect equality with men in the work force. This logic is comparable to that which holds that women who do not choose to take mathematics and science while in school, cannot expect to compete equally with men later on for

high paying jobs. In both situations, socialization and social sanctions are discounted, as it is assumed that choice has both a price and penalty. Women, on the other hand, who want equality must pay the price of losing the satisfactions of motherhood and family. That this is no longer as true as it once was is demonstrated in Table 2. However, there may be some *ex post facto* truth in this assumption as career-oriented women, much more often than men, mortgage their family life for the sake of their careers. And women who choose childbearing, particularly early childbearing, pay the price in terms of enormous lost economic opportunities (Grindstaff, 1984a; 1986). What is overlooked here is the simultaneous involvement of men in both family life and work with little penalty and often considerable reward. A family man, unlike a family woman, is seen as a better employment prospect and more in need of promotions and raises (McDaniel, 1987a).

Historical analyses by feminist sociologists have revealed that the severance of mother and worker roles is relatively new, occurring with industrialization (Bernard, 1974:111; Eichler, 1983; Wilson, 1982). In preindustrial societies, the work done to earn money such as spinning, cooking, gardening and childcare were intertwined with motherwork. In a sense then, motherhood as an unpaid specialized activity, usually defined as non-work or labour of love, has only recently emerged. Women's work has become separated into gainful and unpaid work. Although the two types of work are not unrelated, with women who work outside the home often engaging in housework-like work, different issues are raised in the two types of work. The fact that motherwork is unpaid raises many questions about its social worth. Women are provided with reassurances that it is beyond payment or that it is done out of love alone, but its invisibility and low status call this into question.

The wages for housework movement (Wilson, 1982:62-64) has raised a number of compelling issues relevant to childbearing at work. Among them are the notion that women's unpaid labour and lower pay when they work outside the home, for example, subsidized the economy to such an extent that the total GNP in Canada would increase by 30-40 percent if women were paid market value for the work they do (Proulx, 1978:40). Another issue raised is that women's domestic work should perhaps be paid by husbands as a salary (Wilson, 1982:63). Or, given that women's work at home, including childbearing, so benefits the economy that the husband's employer could possibly pay the wife a salary in recognition of her services in maintaining the husband at home thus enabling him to be a better, and less distracted worker. Although the active political movement to gain economic reward for house-

Table 2  
Fictions and Facts About Women and Work in Canada

Fiction	Fact
Women work because they want to, men because they have to.	1. Over 40 percent of married women in the labour force in 1978 had husbands who earned less than \$15,000 a year. Thirty-nine percent of working women in Ontario are unmarried—supporting themselves and often dependents as well.
Work within the household should be specialized with women who are not in the paid labour force taking central responsibility for housework and childcare.	2. Central responsibility for housework and childcare rests with the woman not only when she doesn't work outside the home but also when she does.
Women are less committed to career or lifetime work than men.	3. Women increasingly work outside the home in Canada once they marry and have children. The more educated a woman is, the more likely she will be in the labour force, regardless of marital status or family size.
When both members of a couple work, it is still the wife's central responsibility to care for the children and the house.	4. According to a recent Canadian survey, when both spouses work, housework and childcare should be equally divided.
The outcomes which befall women in the occupational realm result from personal choice.	5. Because of the prevalence of traditional beliefs that women belong in the home, men and women are not treated the same way in the work force resulting in diminished experience, fewer promotions, etc. for women.
Women do not plan as carefully for a career as men.	6. Because women sometimes get pregnant against their preferences and because they are thought to defer to the needs of others, choices are not as clearly possible at times.
Women's frequent part-time work is evidence that their first commitment is to family and home.	7. Women often work part time out of financial need and part-time work is all that is available to them.
Childcare and housework are not real work.	8. Although they are not paid, Canadian housewives are estimated to spend an average of 49 hours a week in housework. It has been estimated that 35-40 percent of the GNP is comprised of women's unpaid work.
Working mothers do harm to children	9. Many studies in Canada and elsewhere have shown that there are no differences between children of women who work and those who do not. In fact, a number of studies have found that substitute childcare has a beneficial effect on children.

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wives is no longer strong (except in the attempt to recognize the work of housewives with pensions), the movement was successful in pointing out the important contributions made by housewives to the economy. The relegation to women of central responsibility for children and the home, and the low status accorded this work seems in sharp contradiction to the high value society claims to place on its next generation.

Many modern feminist thinkers have pointed out that the important questions of how society's reproductive work gets done have not yet been addressed (Lange, 1976:132; O'Brien, 1981; Levine and Estable, 1981). A theory of reproduction as comprehensive and wide-reaching as Marx's theory of production remains to be developed. Democratizing the means of reproduction has not been seen to be as pressing as the need to democratize the means of production. Some feminist analysts see the difference in terms of women's compulsory reproductive labour. The compulsion stems less from whips and chains (but this too occurs) than the fact that women's best economic option still remains in marriage and motherhood (Blake, 1973; Levine and Estable, 1981). The form that reproductive labour takes is filtered through social class and historical period. Differences across groups and over time suggest that reproduction is not only biological but distinctly social and economic, and thus subject to change (O'Brien, 1981). What is needed is a feminist view of reproduction as a social process. Gloria Steinem remarked recently that the burning question for women remains how to combine a career and a family. For men, no matter how involved they are in the family, this seldom emerges as an issue, or at least as the basic issue. Women's social roles continue to remain constrained by reproduction to a very large degree.

### **The Changing Traditional Family**

Much of the lore surrounding the relationship between reproduction and women's primary roles as mothers is premised on an outmoded model of the family (McDaniel, 1987a). This model sees first marriages lasting until death, maintenance of sufficiently low prices for necessities so that a family could be supported by one worker, strict division of labour by gender within the family, agreement on the desirability of having children, the long-term presence of both biological parents in the family and effective socialization of children to adult roles consonant with this model. That this model no longer holds true in Canadian society has had several consequences for sociological analysis of reproduction. One is to bemoan the passing of the traditional family. Anxious questions are raised about the family becoming an endangered species (Sussman, 1978); about the lessening of the family (Westhues, 1982),

and even about the death of the family (Canada, 1971). This concern on the part of sociologists, as suggested by Eichler (1983:25-26), has the effect of down-playing beneficial changes that have occurred in the Canadian family as the old values are implicitly seen as superior. The consequences for insightful analysis of reproduction and women's roles of reliance on this approach are that women who do not conform to the traditional model tend to be seen as deviant and new family patterns with profound implications for reproduction, such as one-parent or reconstituted families, are overlooked, under estimated or discounted as deviations in both research and data collection (Eichler, 1983).

Another consequence of adherence to an outdated model of the traditional Canadian family is biased research in family sociology. Most notably, biases are revealed in research on women as wives and mothers, and men as workers (Wilson, 1982:32). Women's primary roles are defined as home-bound and reproductive, while men's are productive. Childless or working women are defined analytically as deviant, despite their prevalence in contemporary Canadian society (shown in Table 3). The apparent naturalness of the traditional division of labour in the family and in society is thus underlined by sociologists (Eichler, 1983:65-66). In both sociological and demographic research, this bias is demonstrated most apparently in the long-standing tradition of asking only women who are wives and mothers about family life or reproduction (Eichler, 1983:66-67; McDaniel, 1984). Similarly, it is imagined that only women experience role conflict between home work and paid work (Eichler, 1983:67-68; Greenglass, 1983). If sociologists look for, and expect to find, role conflicts among women, it is not surprising that these conflicts are found more often than among men. Research such as this feeds into the public consciousness and can result in guilt and actual or aggravated role conflict among women, once the experience of the conflict becomes defined as legitimate.

A third consequence of adherence in sociology to an outdated model of family is one increasingly cited by feminists in Canada as well as in the United States and elsewhere. This is affixing blame or responsibility, depending on one's predilection, for the demise of the family squarely on women, in particular on working women or feminist women. Imbedded in these accusations is the notion that reproductive work is women's responsibility and that any variation from the traditional pattern threatens the place of privilege women have been said to be accorded, the existing social structure and even the future of the species and the planet. To some extent, placing blame for the perceived demise of the family on women

**Table 3**  
**Fictions and Facts About Women in the Canadian Family**

Fiction	Fact
Women's place is in the home, particularly when she has small children.	1. Canadian Census data reveal that between 1971 and 1976 the labour force participation rate for women with children increased more sharply than the rate for women with no children. Over 51 percent of women in Ontario with children under six were in the labour force in 1980.
Most of women's lives are spent in childbearing and childrearing.	2. Longer life expectancy (62.1 in 1931 for women, 76.9 in 1976) combined with fewer children per family (3.9 in 1960, 1.7 in 1980) means fewer years of a woman's life are devoted to childbearing and childrearing.
In most families, the husband is the bread winner while the wife is a full-time mother.	3. The majority of wives (51.3 percent of married women 20 to 64 in 1979) now work outside the home.  The increase in labour force participation of wives has been much more dramatic than for all women (3.5 percent of all women worked, by 1979, 48.9 percent of wives and 47.4 percent of all women worked).
The traditional family is the best arrangement for children and for women.	4. Seeing the traditional family as ideal leads to overlooking the abuse, violence and neglect that occurs in the family. (No Canadian data exists but Eichler estimated that 50 to 60 percent of Canadian families experience some form of familial violence.)
Women do not need to prepare for a career since they will be married.	5. The incidence of divorce is increasing in Canada (277.7 per/100,000 population in 1977) so women cannot depend on remaining married for life anymore. A Toronto study found that women were much more likely to experience lowered economic status as a consequence of divorce than men.
Women see themselves as wives and mothers rather than as workers.	6. A 1983-84 survey of female adolescents in Canada found that while a husband, home and children were important to young women a career was also very important to them, although few anticipated the problems of balancing both or of anything unexpected such as divorce or poverty happening to them.
Married women are happier than unmarried women.	7. Although marriage seems to benefit men (they are happier and healthier and live longer than unmarried men), married women are more likely to be depressed than unmarried women.
Married women with children tend to be happier.	8. Childless couples have been found to be happier and healthier than couples with children.
Marriage and parenthood go together.	9. In Canada in the immediate future it is predicted that 10 to 15 percent of all couples will be involuntarily childless with an additional 10 to 15 percent infertile.



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reveals that reproductive work occurs as a result of male dominance. The implication is that women, when they have a choice, do not engage in reproduction to the same extent as when they have no choice (Westoff, 1983). To feminist social analysts, what is revealed here is that reproduction, like production, is a social process determined by social structure and controlled by societal, largely male, needs (Lange, 1976:145; O'Brien, 1981; Levine and Estable, 1981). This realization can result in what feminists term reproductive consciousness on the part of women, a demystification of reproduction as a biological process and a recognition of the social component, comprised largely of the alienated labour of women (O'Brien, 1979:30).

A number of widely held beliefs about the family in Canadian society and women's place in it are examined in Table 3. It is clear that many, if not most, of the structures and beliefs on which the traditional family have rested have been transformed by modern changes in the Canadian family. The old family form has become myth, although it is still commonly cited by many people, including sociologists, as a vision that seems preferable to today's reality. It is seen that most mothers, even those with small children, no longer see themselves as mothers only but as workers too. Less time is spent in mothering over a woman's lifetime than even twenty years ago in Canadian society, leaving more time for other pursuits for which women must be prepared (Statistics Canada, 1984; Grindstaff, 1984b). Being married no longer equates with working only in the home, as evidenced by the enormous recent increase in work force participation among wives. Nor does marriage provide life-long economic security to women as the high rates of divorce with devastating economic consequences for women reveal (Eichler, 1983).

Young women's views of themselves include family as well as careers, a distinct change from the generation of, say, the 1950's in which women sought domesticity rather than careers (Baker, 1985). Marriage and the traditional family are not as happy as was once thought, with married women suffering more depression and illness than unmarried women (Radloff, 1975) and with common occurrences of abuse, violence and neglect. Destroying a commonly held belief that children represent happiness and fulfillment, particularly for women, it is discovered that childless couples tend to be happier than couples with children (Asling, 1986 citing unpublished research by Cassidy). Given this, it is not surprising that voluntary childlessness is predicted to be an increasingly popular choice among Canadian couples (Statistics Canada, 1984:34).

The actual picture of the Canadian family in the late 1970s and 1980s contrasts vividly with the mythological picture on which many sociological and demographic analyses of women's social and reproductive roles rest. What is suggested here is a need for a new analytical framework, one which more appropriately reflects the contemporary realities experienced by Canadian women. This new framework might see women's social roles as more diversified and less bound together with their reproductive roles than is thought at present. Research, for example, might investigate the ways in which women balance the roles of mother and of worker without implicitly or explicitly seeing one role as subordinate to the other and without assuming the existence of role conflict. The man's role in both the domestic arena and the work place could be examined more realistically if it were not assumed at the outset that he is only, or primarily, a breadwinner. The challenges to the traditional family might be analyzed, through the new framework, as advan-

tageous to many women but also men and children, as the carefully prescribed division of labour dissolves, enabling both women and men to do what they do best. In short, the changing traditional family requires a reappraisal of what was previously thought to be true about women's reproductive and social roles.

### Technological Reproduction

Technology, as we have seen earlier, has altered the social process of reproduction substantially, and may do so even more in the future (McDaniel, 1987b). The development of the birth control pill, the IUD, safe procedures for sterilization and abortion have transformed the process of reproduction, with both good and bad consequences for women. To argue that technology has had an impact is not to argue that science or technology is the root of reproductive change, but only to recognize that it might signal a new approach to reproduction. When motivation to limit family size is strong, as it was during the early stages of the industrial revolution, family size will be reduced even in the absence of contraceptive technology. Sociologists have argued that control over conception whether through abstinence, social norms, or contraceptive devices, permits social structure to influence reproduction (Blake, 1973; Kammeyer, 1971).

The potential for control of reproduction by women, however, has not been fully realized. In fact, it could easily be argued that many (if not most) of the efforts made by male-dominated society to control women's reproduction have had bad consequences for women. Almost everyone now knows of the health risk associated with use of IUD's (particularly the Dalkon shield) and longterm use of contraceptive pills. Now, technology is enabling some previously infertile couples to have children. For some small number of couples, improved understanding of reproductive physiology has enabled childbearing through artificial insemination, *in vitro* fertilization, embryo transplants and sex selection (Arditti, Klein and Minden, 1984). This may seem like a technological miracle by Canadians who watch the happiness brought to couples who thought they would not have their own children. It must be remembered, however, that these technologies are being developed by the same researchers and pharmaceutical interests that brought us high-risk birth control pills, the Dalkon shield, D.E.S. and Thalidomide.

The advent of the new reproductive technologies will not, of themselves, ensure wide-sweeping changes in reproductive behaviour or women's roles unless they are effectively harnessed by the social structure (Scrimshaw, 1981), and in particular by women themselves, for the

benefit of women. Many feminist critics of the new reproductive technologies argue that they may be used to subjugate further women's reproduction (Arditti, Klein and Minden, 1984; Corea, 1985; Lahey, 1985-86; McDaniel, 1987). In all of the new techniques, the control rests with medicine which, of course, is largely male dominated and has never been demonstrated as having the interests of women firmly in mind. The emergence of the new reproductive techniques reflects the interest of science, also patriarchal, in controlling women's reproduction for its own ends. Reproductive technology has become a research and medical specialty which gives the experts enhanced control over decisions affecting the patient, a woman, who does not have the expertise. Even more importantly perhaps, is that recent research has shown that decisions about acceptable risks, appropriate drug use and the crucial ones about who is eligible for these techniques, are being made by doctors, not women themselves (Williams, 1986). These decisions, often not made on medical grounds at all but social ones such as the women's marital status and lifestyle, are taken by doctors as medical decisions.

At first glance, the availability of artificial insemination, for example, seems liberating for women who wish to become mothers but whose husbands or partners cannot biologically father their children. It could be used by single women or lesbian women who wish to have children and yet avoid legal or sexual entanglements with men, provided that these services were made available to unmarried women. Behind the new reproductive technologies, including artificial insemination (now defined as a *medical* procedure), lurks the belief that biological parenthood takes precedence over social parenthood. The Ontario Law Reform Commission Report (1985), for example, focussed on "gamete banks" and that technology allows us to have our *own* children. It is possible to imagine that artificial insemination donors and potential mothers might be selected in such a way as to enhance the probability of highly intelligent or highly athletic offspring. Women become the means by which male genes are given life. This is certainly the idea behind the Nobel Prize sperm bank in the U.S., from which the first baby was born in 1982.

Since there is as yet little legislation governing the practice of artificial insemination in either Canada or in the U.S. (Eichler, 1983:301-302; Lahey, 1985-86), many legal and social questions remain. Recommendations of the 1985 Ontario Law Reform (1985) on the new reproductive technologies reinforce male and medical control. All forms of artificial insemination, for example, are seen as medical procedures to be controlled by doctors. "Treatments" are to be confined to married women or heterosex-

ual women *with* partners. The rights of fathers take priority. This seemed certainly to be the situation in the Baby M case in New Jersey in which *both* mothers were overlooked as the father's right to reproduce "himself" was given priority by the judge. Certainly, many questions remain about the new reproductive technologies. It seems that their "star wars" image may be blinding us to what they may mean for women's social roles in the future. Margaret Atwood's Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* may not be so far-fetched after all. In that story women become reproductive robots as part of that repressive society's attempt to quell social unrest, women's demands for equality and to raise the declining birth rate.

### Conclusion and Discussion

Some of the complexities in the relationship between women's roles and reproduction have been explored here in the contemporary Canadian context. In contrasting the traditional sociological perspective on reproduction with the emerging feminist perspective in four areas of challenge, some ways in which the changing social process of reproduction have affected women's social roles have been examined. The traditional sociological framework could benefit from the insights possible through a feminist perspective. The reproductive control revolution, in particular, although enabling a shift from fate to choice for some women, has fostered the illusion that motherhood as destiny has been outgrown. Sociological research and theory on childbearing as work has been found to be biased toward the traditional division of labour by gender, both within and outside the family. Feminists, alternatively, have examined ways in which childbearing and motherwork have been incorrectly seen as outside the realm of productive activity. Analysis of the traditional family has revealed that many assumptions underlying sociological research on women's roles and reproduction are based on an outdated model of the family, one which encourages belief in reproduction as simply biological, overlooking its social components. In the discussion of technology and reproduction, it is seen that technological developments have the potential to produce greater freedom for women to control their reproduction, and to choose their preferred social roles, but it also has the potential of further control over women's reproduction by men and male-dominated society.

Three conclusions seem appropriate. First, reproduction as a socially mediated process in Canada is undergoing a dramatic transformation which will continue in the near future. This transformation extends from technological change and increased knowledge about reproduction to changed attitudes about the family and the roles of

women in society. Despite shifts in the framework used to analyze these changes sociologically, the lenses through which we view the reproduction transformation remain sufficiently distorted by biases and false assumptions that they do not permit clear understanding of what is happening. The need for continued attention to biases in sociological and demographic research and analysis and the need for an ongoing search for more appropriate frameworks for understanding these phenomena is underlined here.

Second, in spite of the altered reproductive realities for women in Canada in the 1980's, women's social and economic roles are, to a very large degree, still constrained by their relations to the means of reproduction. This manifests itself in the types of work women often do outside the home, in the lower pay they receive in the work place, in the widely held belief that women are or want to be mothers first and workers only second, and the fact that motherwork continues to be low-status and unpaid work.

A third conclusion emerging from this discussion is that the feminist perspective has a great deal to offer to those who seek to explain the relationship between reproduction and women's roles. By introducing a woman's viewpoint as well as an alternative epistemological framework, the processes by which biological reproduction links with social roles become clearer. Many of the unsupported assumptions on which previous analyses rest are called into question. In short, the feminist perspective enables exploration of fresh ways of seeing human reproductive behaviour and the ways in which this behaviour is constrained, controlled and enabled by social structure.

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