

Chapter 7

WHERE THE CONTRADICTIONS MEET: WOMEN AND FAMILY SECURITY IN CANADA IN THE 1990s

by
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Family and security are both contested ground in Canada in the 1990s. The family and family values are lauded sentimentally on both sides of the 49th parallel. Yet, more and more families, Canadian and American – families with children, aging couples and the working poor – are lining up at food banks. Security is also hotly debated. Politicians and accountants become passionate about debt, responsibility and competitiveness, particularly global competitiveness. At times, the contradictions between these views emerge vividly, as when politicians, every now and again, actually meet the poor and chant mantras about the goodness of life in Canada (according to the United Nations) and poverty as an unfortunate cost of global competitiveness, while the faces of hungry babies and children reveal hopelessness.³¹

Family is on the public agenda in Canada as never before. Myths about what family is, was, should be and might be, are at the heart of today's impassioned debate over family. Family is being reconstructed through misty nostalgia to be something it never was, with women's caring roles central in the reconstruction. The problem with families today (and consequently with Canada), spout the mythologists, is that women now are selfishly seeking work, neglecting



their children, husbands and chocolate chip cookie recipes to seek fame and fortune in the marketplace.

Women, too, are on the public agenda as never before. The issues, however, are less and less women's own issues, but the roles that women are expected to play in the social order, with family roles defined as pivotal. Women's choices are being increasingly constrained by diminishing opportunities, abetted by policy inertia and paralysis. If, for example, day care space is limited and difficult to obtain, can mothers with young children work outside the home as effectively as they might? If work and family conflicts occur and the workplace is not attentive to the conflicts, women bear the costs in terms of lost economic opportunities. If home-care supports are cut back, then women often take on the care of disabled or elderly family members themselves, sometimes quitting their jobs to do so. Women's opportunities for security are intimately and intricately interwoven with women's family responsibilities and the social positioning of women as carers of others.

Meanwhile, the brooms of family historians are industriously sweeping out the cobwebs of myth about what families, and women in families, were in the past. In her 1992 book, Stephanie Coontz sums up the tension between nostalgia and the realities of families of the past in her evocative title, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*.⁴ Examples of the new findings of family historians abound. Families of the past were seldom the large, loving, extended variety that become particularly popular at Christmas time in television commercials. Why? Essentially because people often did not survive long enough to live in three-generation families, and if they did survive, they were probably wealthy enough not to have to live together. Families of the past were neither so private nor so public as thought – the “exit” of women from the private sphere into the public never really occurred, since throughout most of human history, women, like men (and like children until well into this century) have worked.

Family is a hybrid of ideals, most of which never did and certainly do not now co-exist. Family is thought to be at once caring, nurturing and sheltering, and also empowering to individuals who are expected to compete aggressively in the risk-taking, entrepreneurial world of corporate capitalism. The contradiction apparent in the exemption of family and women from the motivating self-interest of the marketplace both idealizes and isolates women in families;



it compels women into the role of creating the next generation of individualistic, competitive risk-takers, while they strictly limit, for the sake of family, any of their own tendencies toward competitiveness.⁸ Even in the 1990s, families (a euphemism for women) are to imbue their members with the competitive spirit of individual achievement, as families remain caring, sharing and uncompetitive. Thus, when we hear of capitalist families fighting among themselves for control over the family business, as has happened in Canada numerous times in recent years, we see the image of venerable institutions falling. The question is whether the veneration is for the accumulation of money, wealth and power, or for the idea that this accumulation was accomplished *en famille*. The myth of family cooperation seems stronger than that of the lone individual "making it" despite the odds against success. These images co-exist in the case of family firms.

Canada in 1993 is a country where the recession is declared over (by Statistics Canada in January 1993), and yet the unemployment rate is as high as it has been in recent memory. It is an economist's end to recession, with no end to unemployment and negligible job creation. This is another dimension of policy paralysis or, possibly more aptly, public policy usurption by the private interests of transnational corporations. Employment seems increasingly to be defined as a privilege rather than an expectation. Employment for a lifetime, along with benefits and a pension on which one can expect to live, is more than can ever be hoped for by many Canadians, particularly Canadian women who differentially work in part-time or low-paying jobs, with limited or non-existent job security and no benefits. Prospects for immigrant, Native, minority, disabled and older women are particularly bleak. Employment now seems to be divided into two categories: those fortunate enough to have caught the boat early, who are entitled to a significant degree of job security and benefits; and those who caught the boat as it was leaving the dock, who are on temporary contracts with little hope of job security or benefits. This has been termed the "good jobs/bad jobs" phenomenon. What distinguishes the two groups is not merit or ability, but time of birth, time of exit from schooling and time of re-entry into the labour market. Those with lesser job opportunity and lesser job security and benefits are often but not always women, who may have been forced to postpone entry into the labour market by some aspect of family circumstance, who may have opted for marriage, family and childbearing instead of completing their education, or who may



be just entering the workforce with stellar credentials at the very moment that economic retrenchment is occurring.

Economic restructuring in Canada has left millions of Canadians who did everything according to the book – obtaining skills, working hard at their jobs, supporting their families – without jobs. Unemployment wears on, Unemployment Insurance runs out and re-entry to the labour market looks bleak in the short term and even bleaker in the longer term. One unemployed man of 46, interviewed in research I am doing on the aging workforce, was asked at what age he expected to retire; he replied, “For all I know, I may be retired now.” Companies, both private and public, have downsized, rightsized or simply closed their doors, leaving employees with no option but to seek the often futile route of retraining for jobs that may never return, in educational institutions that have long waiting lists as a result of their own funding and downsizing constraints.

For women, the challenges tend to be even greater than for men. Many may not have had the same opportunities for acquiring skills in trades or in higher education, perhaps because of the age-old preference of parents, when money is short, to give sons the advantage of opportunity, or because of discriminatory practices in schools and the workplace. Women are also disadvantaged economically by family status, for many jobs that do not protect women when pregnant, or provide child care facilities, or provide family leave when women are called upon differentially to care for sick, elderly or dependent family members.

Public policy in Canada, which was constructed at least in part to redistribute wealth and resources, and thus fine-tune the inequities of the market system, has fallen into crisis and profound inaction. The narrative of public policy has become affordability, as if costs of social programs were the weight behind the deficit in Canada, rather than the burden of financing the accumulated debt. A Statistics Canada analysis of contributions to the debt after 1975, concludes that “it was not explosive growth in program spending that caused the increase in deficits after 1975, but a drop in federal revenues relative to the growth of GDP and rising debt charges.”²⁰ The crisis of public policy in Canada has brought to the fore the basic inequities in Canadian society, not only in ability to purchase needed goods and services, but in essential opportunities. Also brought to the fore have been the accepted social arrangements for caring for



non-earning members of society (young, old, disabled, unemployed) and the increasingly understood, but unacknowledged, vital economic role played by unpaid caring. Hence, issues of family and those of security intersect in public policy, and the intersection is distinctly gendered. It is this intersection that I see as the largest of the challenges faced by Canadian society in policy terms. It is here that the contradictions meet, that the invisible becomes vital, where the most fertile deltas of future research and innovative social thinking are to be found, and where few have yet ventured.

FAMILIES AND THE STATE

The family, as society's basic social institution, is thought to be both a springboard for and a haven from larger societal forces. As a reality and as an ideal, the family is changing profoundly in Canada. Yet, the ideals with which we imbue the family, including the ideal of a gendered division of labour, are changing less quickly. Why? The widely recognized turn to the right by social policy in Canada, as well as in other Western industrial countries, has seen strong families as central to the State's plan of playing a less salient role in the lives of individuals. The resurrection of old ideals of family is therefore politically and ideologically expedient. Additionally, there is a long-standing human tendency to identify the causes of social change and social unrest as private troubles rather than as public accountability, so that families and family change, centred on women in families and in the paid labour force, are perceived as the root of social challenges and problems. The struggles we face are said to be of our *own* making, rather than as a result of governments, big business, economic changes or massive historical changes. Thus, there has not only been a feminization of poverty, but a feminization of social problems more generally.

Much of what is known about families and what provides the basis of social policy is filtered through biases, myths and misconceptions. This filtration has been explored in detail elsewhere, so will not be elaborated here.^{4,6,14,15,17,18,25,30} Until recently, most research was done from the perspective of men. Families were thus seen in incomplete terms, and in terms of those for whom they worked most advantageously. What was labelled normal or traditional may not have been either, from the perspective of the women in



the families of the 1950s, for example. After all, it was out of this period that the second wave of feminism grew.

The concept of families as private, as places where emotional needs were met, as places of sanctuary from the harsh world of work, has been refuted by recent research. Families have been found to be the most violent places in society and among the most public in the myriad ways in which they are controlled, determined and contained by other societal institutions. In serving the economy, families tend to exert conservative influences. After all, rising up against injustices could imperil the family's economic well-being. For men in particular, but society generally, families (in this instance, a euphemism for women) provide a cheap and efficient source of domestic labour and sexual services.¹⁸ As a socializing agent, families link children and adults to the wider community and to the economy, and they work to create social harmony. As agents of social control, families reinforce the norms of society where private satisfactions and consumer activity are thought to compensate for the deprivations and injustices of the work world. And as reproduction units, families provide the labour force and the consumers of tomorrow, as well as producing each day, individuals who are clean, fed and ready to participate in society.

In each of the vital services provided to society by families, the labour and cooperation of women is essential. Without this labour, not only families, but society itself, it is argued, could be in peril. Much of the inflamed rhetoric about families in crisis today and the quest in some circles to put women back into their central places in the home comes from fears about women "shirking their duties on the domestic front" in favour of paid work: most women now work outside the home, with the fastest growth in labour force participation in recent years occurring among mothers of preschool children. Ideological debates about the place of home and family in society are rooted in discussion about the place of women in the maintenance of social order.

WOMEN AND FAMILIAL SCRIPTING

Women's lives are scripted as familial not only through the well-known scripts of socialization as youngsters, but through other more determined and powerful means. The profoundly negative consequences of early childbearing for women are explored in a longitudinal study by Grindstaff, for example.¹¹



Fully 77% of Canadian women who had babies while adolescents gained no more than elementary school education (64% did not complete high school), and only 2% gained a university degree. By contrast, almost one-third of young women who had not had children graduated from university. The long term economic and occupational prospects of women who experience early childbearing are unimpressive indeed. This suggests that women's lives are scripted by maternity and the timing of maternity to a greater degree than previously understood or now acknowledged. Women who have few options outside the family are more likely to accept abuse and violence in families, in light of their realistic assessment of their prospects on their own with their children. There is, of course, also an object lesson to other women that childbearing circumscribes women's futures, and that child care and family care take precedence over one's own occupational and educational future.

Caring provides another example of scripting in women's lives. Caring is not something on which women have a monopoly, of course, yet many women are conditioned to care for others, particularly in families, at cost and risk to themselves. There is a presumption intertwined with the very definition of femininity that women should be more caring, more concerned with the feelings of others than are men. This reliance on women's caring extends beyond families and into the workplace. Nurses, teachers and social workers, to name but a few, are thought to do their jobs in part, as caring activities. It is even said of these professionals that they are natural caregivers, and that their lower pay can be justified because they do their work out of love!

Caring is known to script women's lives in fundamental ways. Fraser points out that women are constructed and reconstructed by social policy as family carers, as dependents.⁹ This is consistent with the long-standing beliefs that women are biologically structured to care, that motherhood and child care are women's natural roles, and that women who are not mothers or wives are not fulfilling their biological destinies.¹³ It is also the case that "as soon as there is an increased demand for traditional women's work within the home ... the boundaries shift and women come under tremendous pressure to leave the public arena and go back into the home."²⁸ Women's primary roles are thought to be familial, whether or not they work outside the home as well. It is when domestic needs are met that women are "free" to seek outside jobs. Skocpol explains how these outside roles, even political roles played by women, have often been extensions of familial caring.²⁷



Reitsma-Street reveals how caring and the societally reinforced compulsion for women to care constructs women's lives and self-definitions as women.²⁶ By studying so-called delinquent girls and what they are told by the "helping professions" (social workers, judges, lawyers, police, psychologists), Reitsma-Street concludes that girls, whether delinquent or not, are "policed to care" – coerced into caring for others to the neglect of themselves and, importantly, to bear the costs associated with that kind of selfless caring. Fighting against how girls are expected to care is very costly: girls risk being labelled unfeminine, selfish, aggressive and deviant. Learning to be good as a girl means not putting one's own needs ahead of the needs of others. It is the policed learning of a domestic and familial role. State policy works, poignantly, to control women's self-images and to shape women into self-sacrificing carers of others.

This societally compelled caring continues well into adult life. It is women – wives, daughters and daughters-in-law – who are differentially called upon to "look after" older relatives when needed.^{15,16,19,21,30} All family members place heavy emotional reliance on women in times of family turmoil or when family members fail in health. Myles describes the crisis of caring that is resulting from women's unavailability to do the caring work to the same degree when they also have jobs outside the home.²¹ Walker, from his research in Great Britain, describes how women are often forced into the caring role because they are chosen for it by others, even if they do not select themselves for the job.³⁰

Women who are scripted to care for others ahead of themselves are less likely to plan for careers and occupations on which they can support themselves and their children. As a result, women are more likely to be in lower paying jobs with less job security and fewer benefits, including pension benefits. The caring script also means that women tend to devalue their worth in the workplace, another reason for women's lesser pay. Women in jobs that are not well paid, not secure or not rewarding are more likely to leave paid employment in response to family demands for care of either old or young. The scripts of caring structure women's material security in fundamental ways.

Women even devalue their worth in families. When caring is thought to be what women do naturally, then the work and the skills involved are underrated



by all, including the women who actually do the work. Connections are apparent between women's devalued roles in the family and workplace, and the violence suffered by women in their homes, on the streets and in workplaces.

SOCIAL POLICY IN THE 1990s

The abiding concern guiding social policy in the mid-1980s and 1990s in Canada, as in the United States, is cost: cost to society, cost to the public purse, cost to future generations through the image of ever-accumulating deficits. The paradigm that has slipped into place is one of business, rather than one of public responsibility to reduce inequities and provide opportunities. Even when the justification of providing opportunities is called on (and it is seldom used anymore), it is an opportunity that trickles down from the private sector, rather than the more direct, enabling opportunity that comes from having the requisite skills, health and education to take advantage of job and economic prospects. The rhetoric of government and of business, never far from each other, have become synonymous.

The rhetoric of cost and cost-cutting has been somewhat successful in convincing the public that the troubles we face are a function of overspending, rather than ill-conceived priorities or misjudgements. Affordability becomes the criterion of social policy, rather than any more laudable considerations such as investment for the future, social justice or morality, or concern for the well-being of citizens. Although the deficit is real and large, why has it come to be the guiding image of our times, the ultimate threat? The answer is that the deficit paradigm works for the transnational corporate world and neo-conservative governments by bolstering an image that the mythical Everyperson can relate to – cost. Indebtedness, however, is not *per se* a bad thing, as anyone with a mortgage, car loan or student loan will acknowledge. There are justifiable and economically beneficial reasons for debts. It seems, then, that the image of the deficit as the guiding paradigm of social policy has been sold to us for largely ideological reasons to justify social policy paralysis.

What are the implications for families and for women? The concepts of debt and affordability, as ideology, are being used to justify cutbacks to universal social programs and to welfare, including Unemployment Insurance. The



ideology of deficit has further revealed some of the implicit assumptions behind social policies and programs that affect families and women. First, the family is presumed to be essentially private and self-sufficient, diligently working for the good of society and being helpful to the State in dealing with problems, rather than being entitled to help from the State. Second, gender marketplace differentials are of minimal consequence to public policy on family income maintenance. Equality of opportunity to earn has simply been presumed by policies, both legal and social, that see women and men as equal in marketplace terms despite the encumbering family responsibilities women are asked to bear. It is as if, by the stroke of a policy pen, the large and continuing gap between the earnings of males and the earnings of females is closed, as each is presumed to be equally able to skitter up the ladder of success and financial autonomy. Third, social policies on family income maintenance contain a large measure of moral reification, so that some kinds of families are seen as more worthy than others. Indeed, some families are increasingly seen as not deserving of scarce public dollars. Two examples: the new provisions of Unemployment Insurance that will disqualify people from eligibility if they quit their jobs might make a sole-support mother who quits her job because she can no longer tolerate workplace sexual harassment “unworthy” of public support. In policies in Alberta, a divorced woman who was married for most of her adult life is not eligible for a pension, even if her ex-husband dies soon after the divorce, while another woman married the same number of years or fewer, is eligible for a pension when her husband dies.

Policy issues become policy problems. The concept of social policy as ameliorative, as redistributive, has the problem focus built in. Social problems, to justify the output of public dollars, must be seen as demonstrably solvable. Solvable, in public policy terms, means resolvable in ways that do not burden the public purse. For families in crisis, female-headed single-parent families in poverty, families where the parents are unemployed and older families, the solution is bolstering the privacy and supposed self-sufficiency of the nuclear family, as defined by the State. There is in this approach, a kind of moral imperative that subsumes individuals, most notably women, under the “good of the family” or the “best interests of the children.” The nuclear family with its gender inequities and the hierarchial authority of the breadwinner is seen as morally superior to any other kind of family in which women’s autonomy



might surface. A woman's worthiness for social support emanates from her family status.

The privatized nuclear family, in which members can rely on each other instead of on the State, fits well with the business and State paradigm of fiscal responsibility. Women become defined by State policy as familial first and foremost, their entitlement to State support deriving more from their family status than from their work status. It is rare indeed for men to make claims on the public purse on the basis of family status; they much more often make claims as individuals based on labour market status, as in claims for UIC, pensions, job retraining or workers' compensation. Women, on the other hand, are filtered through social policy largely on the basis of family status, as in the case of mothers with dependent children, widows' pensions and so on. Less often are claims made by women, in terms of actual dollars spent, as individuals on the basis of labour market status. Social policy creates and recreates women as dependents, both economically and socially, and reinforces the centrality of women's family status as well as their secondary status as wage earners. Women who lack access to jobs with living equitable wages, to educational opportunities, or to child care which would enable them to take advantage of these opportunities are said to be victims of family *choices*, of family circumstances of *their own* making. This argument is regularly raised to "explain" why the gender wage disparity is larger for married women than for single women. It is sometimes raised as well to "explain" why single mothers with dependent children or minority women have lesser earnings: they are said to have *chosen* family instead of labour market credentials.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND WORK

A new culture of work is said to be emerging in Canada, associated with the shift from a manufacturing to a service, or value-added economy. This shift is marked by a move from a material to a symbolic base for the economy, so that knowledge matters more than production of goods. Futurists had long predicted that this shift to a post-industrial society would be accompanied by sharp reductions in the gender inequities that had characterized paid labour in a manufacturing society. The reasoning was that traditional gender differences in strength and abilities would matter less in a post-industrial society. However, Boyd, Mulvihill and Myles conclude that "rather than ending the



traditional sexual division of power, Canada's post-industrial labour market appears to be the source of its consolidation and even its growth ... All this maintains patriarchal relations at work and reinforces women's economic dependency at home."² The new culture of work, it would seem, has had the opposite effect on gender equality in the public sphere than was anticipated. Further, the consolidation of inequalities in the public sphere has implications for gender inequalities in the private sphere.

There is also a massive economic restructuring of the Canadian economy at present, a restructuring that involves drastic changes in trade patterns, in employment sectors' growth or non-growth, and in inflation, which has fallen to an almost negligible level. New concepts are being developed, such as "disemployment" to describe the process of being forced into early retirement with no prospects of future employment, and "diswelfare" to describe when an undesired exit from paid employment and consequent exclusion from the labour force results in detachment, idleness and passivity rather than well-being.

Paralleling restructuring has been a shift in perspective with respect to social policies. Social policies are thought to be no longer affordable, just at the time they are most needed. Canada's income security programs are rooted in both markets and politics more firmly than in most other industrial countries, as has been revealed by Myles and Quadagno,²² at once modifying the impact of market forces and allowing market forces to play out, within the limits of government supports.¹⁹ In the 1990s in Canada, income security programs are no longer intervening to insulate against the often devastating effects of market forces on individuals. The very Canadian concept of the universality of social programs has been completely undermined, with the "clawback" of pensions and, lately, baby bonuses through taxes.¹⁹

The shift away from career or labour market activity based on the life course has been a trend for some time in Canada, but a trend that is accelerating. In discontinuous career paths, women have been the pioneers, with men catching up only relatively recently. This means that most Canadians, regardless of gender, family status or educational attainment, can expect to have multiple careers during the working years, and that age is a less accurate predictor of life passages than it used to be. On one hand, this can free people from the tyranny of the age-based career. On the other hand, for people to be free, real



opportunities must exist in the labour market. And for all too many people, the hope of opportunity remains a scant one. Yet, it is true that the script of our lives, particularly the lives of women, are more destandardized, less securely anchored to age markers than previously.¹² Policy-makers, employers, the public, and we as individuals, have a considerable distance to go to build lives, careers and families in accordance with the new economic realities.

WHERE THE CONTRADICTIONS MEET

The Chief Statistician of Canada, Ivan Fellegi, in a report to the federal Deputy Ministers in January 1992, suggests that he sees the next 15 - 20 years in Canada as advantageous, largely because of the large numbers of people of labour force age and the potential for high Canadian productivity.⁵ On the basis of existing data on productivity, he points out that Canada has outperformed the United States on available measures since 1961. Among the people of labour force age in Canada at present are considerable numbers of working women, who have been the source of the largest growth in labour force participation in recent decades. Clearly, challenges arise from this fact. Most significantly, Fellegi notes that we need greater research and policy attention to the unpaid labour of women at home, to issues of pay equity and to the need for compensating services such as child care.

There are many contradictions inherent in the greater productivity of Canadians, achievable in large measure as a direct result of women's labour market activity. One of the most obvious is that the Canadian economy clearly needs the earned incomes and contributions of women in the workplace, while the family needs of women include paid work. Both the economy and families depend on the paid employment of women, even as both deny or underrate that need. The contradiction arises first from the fact that women, as individuals, are bearing the costs and risks of this double burden, in spite of its obvious economic utility to society at large. Second, the unavailability of compensating services makes it incumbent on women to privatize or familize the services they are offering to their society. In short, women are being asked to take up the slack, at enormous personal sacrifice, created by the abrogation by both private and public sectors of major social responsibilities.



The absolute preoccupation of the research literature and the public mind with women in families and the workplace has obscured the important issue of men's roles and contributions. It may well be a question of displaced angst to focus only on women. For example, Blair and Lichter have found that men would have to redirect 60 per cent of their contributions to household labour to be equitable on the family front.¹

SHIFTING SANDS

The situation with respect to women in families and income security is shifting rapidly in Canada, in part as a result of the economic and policy trends discussed. But other, perhaps equally important forces are at work that deserve attention. Only a few of these can be outlined here.

Without doubt, there is an ideological and policy backlash against the welfare state policies of the past, separate from the issue of deficit. This parallels a backlash against feminism and advocacy for child care, the poor and others in need. This situation leads some policy-makers to think that they will have the support of the electorate if they backtrack on the gains made in the past, initiate no new social programs and work to privatize, familize and feminize caring.

The shifting sands include the economic situation under which families are restructured: women work while men do not; children doubt their futures; violence and family disruption increase; and threats to traditional gender roles in family exist.⁷ The family comes to see itself as dependent on the public realm, on guaranteed work. Despite the challenges, social scientists are afforded a clear, unencumbered glimpse of the economic underpinnings to gendered family life under these times of stress and uncertainty.

That 16.9 per cent of Canadian children under age 18 (almost 1 in 5) lived in poverty in 1990 caught the attention of even the most conservative of parliamentarians.^{10,24} Policy-makers have been forced to see the undeniable links between women's economic opportunities and those of their children. The United Nations has acknowledged unequivocally that the plight of children in poverty will never be solved without serious attention to the economic prospects of women.²⁹ The term used by the United Nations is "the apartheid of gender," which they see as the undeniable cause of child poverty worldwide.



Population aging is another dimension of shifting sands. Aside from the challenges noted earlier of the extra burdens of caregiving, demographic shifts have meant that there are more generations alive at the same time now than ever before, and longer parts of women's lives spent as widows and without children at home than ever before. With declining family size, these shifts have meant more and more family care responsibilities falling to fewer women.

A last aspect of shifting sands is the increasing but contraindicated tendency to privatized caring of young and old. Institutions are closing or cutting back sharply due to funding crises or the growing belief that "community care" is superior to institutional care, and yet the needed infrastructural adjustments have been slower in coming. This leaves the ultimate responsibility for care where it always has been: with families, or more accurately, with women in families. These are women already forced to cope with double or triple days of paid work and family responsibility. Out of guilt or the simple reality that there is no one else to do it, women take on yet more.

CONCLUSION

What are some of the implications for a public policy agenda that arise from this discussion? Clearly, the shape of the future is written in the present and the past, so that the contradictions, tensions and tendencies outlined here are likely to shape the policies of the future in Canada. Rather than attempt a thorough analysis of policy implications, what seems indicated is a brief highlighting of how our current knowledge and understanding might be used by policy-makers to move toward a future more of our own making.

The conceptual frameworks exist to explain how women in families and women in the workplace – most often the same women – are central to the agendas of economic restructuring of Canada, and to social policy inertia and retrenchment. What is missing is the *political will* to act on these understandings. Paradoxes abound in the unwillingness for political action at the very moment of increased public and political attention on families and women's roles. Increased rhetoric may be a substitute for decisive policy action. Like the child's game of repeating something over and over until it ceases making any sense, politicians seem to be hyping family and family



values so much that they have lost track of the meaningful work that families and women in families do for society, and how that work is being impeded by the substitution of words for action.

Social policy may not be so much paralyzed as reactive to economic policy and increasingly coincident with it. The image of belt-tightening may work with economic policy (although many have legitimate doubts), but it does not work when the belts being tightened are differentially around the small waists of children and babies, around the waists of women who are already struggling with poverty, violence, lack of economic opportunity and a social welfare program that sees them as familial first and foremost. Coping with a system gone amok is not an incentive to self-sufficiency, creativity or economic security for women.

Although it seems that the current thinking about women in families, and women and security issues, and women and social policy, has been informed by the enormous strides made recently by social science and feminism, there are ways in which this thinking is not new at all. Over 60 years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt said,

*We crave a man [it must be noted that politicians we crave might well be women today!] with an understanding and human heart, who will make of government not merely a perfectly running machine, but an instrument to contribute to the greater well-being and happiness of the whole people. Democratic women ... do not want the economy which refuses to help those in need and deserve the help of the state, nor do we want the kind of economy which saves a little today and loses thereby much opportunity for the future. We do not want a purely Wall Street Aluminum Trust prosperity, a prosperity of invested capital as against several millions unemployed. The human values mean more to us than the money values.*³

We still crave such politicians, politicians with the vision and force to declare that what matters is people, and that women are more than the means of reproduction and the means by which production continues.



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