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# An Interpretation of Family Change, with Implications for Social Cohesion

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**An Interpretation of Family Change,  
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An interpretation of family change, with implications for social cohesion

Abstract:

*Data on family change point to a greater flexibility in the entry and exit from relationships, a delay in the timing of family events, and a diversity of family forms. These changes have undermined the complementary-roles model as women gained equal opportunities in a variety of domains. Children have been affected such that their interests are no longer paramount in the structuring of adult lives. On the whole, the family has been de-institutionalized with less function and less power.*

*An interpretation of the changes suggests that the family has shifted from a unit of survival in which relations were based on division of labour to a unit of solidarity based on a sense of common identity and expressive relationships. Policies that would further push families in the direction of a collaborative model would promote new kinds of cohesion within families and at the societal level.*

The context of significant socio-economic change, including that resulting from globalization, brings attention to social cohesion, one of the oldest concepts of the social sciences. How will the society hold together, and what will be the relation of individual to society? Similar issues are raised when there is profound family change: what is holding families together and what are the links between individuals and families?

Placed at the junction between individual and society, social cohesion necessarily includes both complementarity and tensions between the interests of individuals and groups. There needs to be both differentiation and oneness, or individuality and togetherness. These dialectics can be observed through contrasting extreme versions of relationships between individuals and society. There can be “bad” social cohesion, which discounts the individual or at least certain kinds of individuals. This cohesion may be based on a common cultural or economic identity but it excludes others who do not belong, or it reduces the agency of individuals. At the other extreme are views that focus on the individual, and the society is only there to promote individual rights and freedoms. This view neglects the well-being that comes from belonging to a society.

Referring to pre-socratic philosophy, Cunningham (2000) observed an interest to speak of both spaces and oneness, or differentiation and alliances. In today’s philosophical debates there is the contrast between a communitarian tradition and the priority of rights. “Good” cohesion would be based on recognition of individuals, on equality and inclusion. It is through common projects and associated alliances that individuals come together in social cohesion. This “project de société” or common purpose can be defined in term of collective security and solidarity, but it can also be defined in terms of social programs.

While families have become de-institutionalized, there are various ways in which common projects can be defined, with the potential for belonging, inclusion and participation. There is of course the “marital” relation between two people, which may be defined as a “projet de couple” wherein people create and re-create their own relationships. This “couple project” typically involves links across gender. Children may be another common project between given individuals, providing links across generations. If one defines families as individuals coming together to earn a living and care for each other, then the common project can be defined in terms of sharing in earning and caring (Beaujot, 2000). While there is complementarity and reciprocity in these relationships, there are also tensions, between the interest of men and women, adults and children, earning and caring.

Social cohesion tends to be defined at the societal or community level, but our interest here is to consider the family dimensions, including ways in which family may be involved in cohesion at the group, community or societal level. The objective of this paper is to consider family change, to suggest interpretations of this change, and to propose some implications regarding social cohesion that call for further investigation.

## **Family change**

Data on family change document a greater looseness of the marital bond as seen through divorce and cohabitation, a delay in the timing of family events, and a greater diversity across families.

### **Second demographic transition**

One way that demographers have created a context for family change is in terms of a second demographic transition. Focussing on childbearing, we speak of two demographic transitions: a long-term change (from about 1870 to 1950), which brought smaller families; and a more rapid change (from about 1960 to the present), which increased flexibility in marital relationships (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Beaujot, 2000: 85-96).

The first transition involved a change in the economic costs and benefits of children, along with a cultural environment that made it more appropriate to control family size. In effect, this transition changed family dynamics surrounding fertility from an emphasis on child quantity to a focus on child quality.

There is remarkable similarity in the timing of the second second transition in a number of Western countries. Given available data, the focus has been on changes with regard to the entry and exit from relationships. This shows greater flexibility as manifest especially through cohabitation and divorce. Lesthaeghe (1995) proposes that it is useful to consider three stages in this second transition. The **first stage**, from about 1960 to 1970 involved the end of the baby boom, the end of the trend toward younger ages at marriage, and the beginning of the rise in divorces. The **second stage** from 1970 to 1985 saw the growth of common law unions and eventually of children in cohabiting unions. The **third**

**stage** since 1985 includes a plateau in divorce, an increase in post-marital cohabitation (and consequently a decline in re-marriage), and a plateau in fertility due in part to higher proportions of births after age thirty.

---Table 1 about here---

Table 1 presents some statistics that capture these trends in the Canadian case. In terms of the first stage, the average **births** per woman, as measured by the total fertility rate, had reached a peak of 3.9 in 1957, declined to 2.2 in 1971, and has been very stable at about 1.6 to 1.7 births per woman over the whole period 1980 to 1996. The median **age at first marriage** declined over this century to reach a low of just over 21 years for brides and 23 years for grooms in the early 1970s, then increased to ages 26 and 28 for women and men respectively in 1996. The law permitting **divorces** on grounds other than adultery dates only from 1968. Per 100,000 married couples, there were under 200 divorces in each year over the period 1951-1966 compared to 1000 in 1976 and 1130 in 1996. While there had been a long term increase in separation and divorce, we can speak of a substantial jump starting in the 1960s. While most marriages remain intact until death, there is greater looseness in the definition of relationships so that marriage is no longer forever.

Turning to the second stage, **cohabiting** unions were not specifically enumerated in the 1976 census, although some 0.7 percent of couples indicated that they were living common-law. By 1986, most Statistics Canada data no longer distinguished between married and cohabiting couples. The 1996 census determined that 13.7 percent of couples were cohabiting. The 1995 General Social Survey found that among persons born between 1951 and 1970, two out of five have lived in a cohabiting union, and over half of first unions taking place since 1985 have been cohabitations rather than marriages (Dumas and Bélanger, 1997: 135, 139). The proportion of births occurring to women who are **not married**, and who are largely cohabiting, increased from 9 in 1971 to 37 percent in 1996. At first cohabitation was seen as mostly affecting pre-marital relationships, but we now see that it has also affected post-marital relationships. In effect, along with separation and divorce, it is a key indicator of family change.

For the third stage, we find that by 1990, half of divorced persons aged 30-39, and more than a third of those aged 40-49, were in **cohabiting** relationships (Dumas and Péron, 1992: 50). Besides the stable fertility of 1.7 to 1.6 births per woman over the period 1981-96 that has already been noted, the proportion of births occurring to women **aged 30 and over** increased from 19.6 percent in 1976 to 43.7 percent in 1996.

These changes in births, marriage, cohabitation and divorce have brought fewer children, but also a higher proportion of children who are not living with both biological parents. In particular, lone-parent families as a proportion of all families with children increased from 11.4 in 1961 to 22.3 in 1996.

These data also confirm the uniqueness of the 1950s as a period between the two transitions. Various

authors have observed that this was a period when life was family centred. Not only was this the peak of the **baby boom**, but it was also a period of **marriage rush**, as marriage occurred at young ages and high proportions of persons married at least once in their lives. It was possibly a "golden age of the family," where many families corresponded to the ideal of domesticity, especially in the suburbs, and consequently there was less variability (Skolnick, 1987: 6-16).

Subsequent research has made it clear that not all was ideal in this golden age. Isolated housewives in particular experienced the "problem with no name" (Friedan, 1963: 15). Since the task of maintaining the home had been assigned to women, men became less competent at the social skills needed to nourish and maintain relationships (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991: 19). The idealism of the time also introduced blinders regarding some realities of family life, including violence and abuse. Given a general denial that such things could ever occur in families, there was little recourse for the victims of violence. There was also a lack of autonomy, especially for women, to pursue routes other than the accepted path (Veevers, 1980). Childless couples were considered selfish, single persons were seen as deviants, working mothers were considered to be harming their children, single women who became pregnant were required either to marry or to give up the child in order to preserve the integrity of the family. For instance, in the 1950s four out of five Americans described persons who did not marry as neurotic, selfish or immoral (Kersten and Kersten, 1991; Wilson, 1990: 99).

The restriction on alternative life styles did imply few single-parent families, and consequently the pain associated with this kind of variability was limited. In hindsight, we can nonetheless observe that there were pent-up problems that were preparing the way for the second transition that started in the 1960s.

### **Timing of family events**

We can speak of family change in terms of greater looseness in the entry and exit from relationships, and thus the importance of separation and cohabitation as indicators of this change. We can also speak of a shift in the average timing of family events, toward later ages.

In terms of childbearing, if one was to identify two trends over the past 20 years, it would be stable fertility and delay in ages at childbearing. There is a similar delay in several other family events. Using data from the 1995 General Social Survey, Table 2 presents a summary of the median ages at which various family life course events have occurred for birth cohorts 1916-20 to 1970-75. The patterns are rather uniform. Over the birth cohorts 1916-20 to 1941-45 there is a general **downward** trend in the age at home leaving, first marriage, first birth, last birth and home leaving of the children. Conversely, the subsequent cohorts have experienced an **upward** trend. In the cohorts of the 1920s to 1940s, the tendency was not only to marry early, but over a relatively narrow range of ages (Ravanera and Rajulton, 1996; Ravanera et al., 1998a and 1998b).

—Table 2 about here—

These delays may be interpreted as a longer period of adolescence, that Côté and Allahaar (1994) have called a Generation on Hold. But the delays also reflect the needs of both men and women to put off the entry into relationships, and especially childbearing, until they are better able to handle the trade-offs between investing in themselves and investing in reproduction. All species face trade-offs in this regard (Kaplan et al., 1998). A longer period of investment in oneself provides the individual with more resources to then invest in reproduction, but there is the risk that reproduction will not occur. Conversely, early reproduction represents a greater security that reproduction will occur, but the danger of inadequate investment in oneself to have the resources necessary for effective reproduction in quality children.

From the point of view of children, one can observe a bifurcation of models in terms of early and late childbearing. Based on census data, Lochhead (2000) finds that delayed childbearing is more pronounced among women who have university education, and that there are increasing income differentials to the disadvantage of younger first-time mothers, even in two-parent families. Using data from the United States, Martin (2000) finds that delayed childbearers, who tend to have more education, are increasingly likely to raise their children in intact marriages, while early childbearers are more likely to raise children outside of marriage. Canadian data also indicate that women under 30 who are formerly married are much more likely to have children than those who are single, cohabiting or married (Ravanera, 1995: 18). Consequently, Bianchi (2000) speaks of a possible bifurcation of models, with one group taking advantage of parental investment from both mothers and fathers, and the other where fathers are absent and mothers do not have adequate time and resources to invest in children. Children born from mature parents are more likely to have the advantages of a mother with more human capital, along with the presence of a father in a dual-income family, which contrasts with the greater likelihood of lone parenthood for those who parent early.

### **Family variability**

A common theme in the literature is the greater variability in family patterns. Especially as seen over the life course, the varied forms of entry and exit from relationships, having or not having children, and in the timing of childbearing, represent much differences across the family life trajectories of individuals. Even restricting the consideration to reproductive relationships, there are the various means of entry into family life from having a birth alone to joining a spouse who has a previous child, to first forming a relationship then having a child. There is further complexity in terms of remaining in these relationships or exit with the possibility of new relationships. This variability is well illustrated and analysed in the census monograph by Péron and his co-authors (1999), entitled Canadian Families at the Approach of the Year 2000. For instance, a quarter of men and a third of women will live at least two different family episodes. From the point of view of children, much of the variability can be related to the family life trajectories of their parents. For example, in the lowest quintile of family income 44.1 percent of children are living with parents who are married to each other, compared to 93.9 percent in the highest quintile (Péron et al., 1999: 248).

At the same time, it is useful to recognize some elements of uniformity, sometimes more uniformity than in the past. There is considerable variability in the early adult years as people take different trajectories, but at ages 30-54 there is a strong commonality of experience involving living in a relationship, having children and working (Beaujot, 1995). For older persons, there is also an increase in living alone, due in part to differential mortality of women and men. However, in the middle of adult ages there is not much change in the propensity to live alone. In some regards non-traditional families have increased, in particular lone-parent families, cohabiting couples, blended families, couples without children, and living alone. In other regards families and households have become less diversified: households now mostly consist either of one family with no additional persons, or of one person living alone (Péron et al., 1999). Living in non-family households occurs especially for the elderly who have previously lived in families, and for the young who are between families. The high predominance of family living is also visible when considering the extent of cohabitation. For instance, at age 30-39, over a quarter of single persons and a third of divorced persons are cohabiting. This does not include those who are in relationships but not sharing the same household. While there is an increase in lone parenthood and in childlessness, 88 percent of men and 89 percent of women will have at least one parental episode, and 78 percent of both women and men could be expected to form bi-parental unions involving children.

In sum, the main changes have seen more families formed through common-law unions, lone parenthood, and blended families, while the proportion that are two-parent families based on marriage has declined. Nonetheless, by age 20, 76% of children from the 1961-63 birth cohort have known no other than two-parent intact families (Péron et al., 1999). In addition, 94 percent of women who have lived in an intact family have not lived with any other spouse than the father of their children.

## **Interpretations of family change**

The data on family change point especially to greater flexibility in terms of entry and exit from relationships, a delay in the timing of family events, and considerable diversity across individuals. While there is variability in terms of a diversity of family forms, for the most part this is within a strong predominance of family living. Before considering various implications for social cohesion, it is useful to discuss interpretations of this family change first from a gender context and the place of children and then, from broader structural and cultural perspectives.

### **The gender context of family transformation**

Many of these family changes can be interpreted within a gender context. Structural factors in society have undermined the breadwinner model, and feminism has included a cultural push for more equal opportunity in a variety of domains, including within families.

As women became less dependent on marriage, divorce and cohabitation became more feasible alternatives for both sexes. Women make essential instrumental contributions in all societies, but their



status has depended on how this contribution is **structured** and on the extent to which they control the products of their labour. Focussing on men, Mintz (1998) observes the long-term disappearance of patriarchal families based on father-son bonds, as well as the demise of the family wage and, consequently, the decline in the material basis of male familial authority. The growth of dual-income families has reduced the separate spheres of women and men, in the home and at work. Based on time-use data from Sudbury in 1993-94, Bernier et al. (1996) propose that women's paid work is a "trump card" against their exploitation through domestic work. Dual-incomes have undermined what Lerner (1986: 217) has called "paternalistic dominance" or the exchange of "submission for protection," or of "unpaid labour for maintenance."

**Cultural** understandings of appropriate behaviour have become less rigid, in gender as in other areas. In speaking of demographic change over the past century, Folbre (2000) emphasises the increased ability of women to make decisions based on self interest. Of course, there are constraints for both men and women in acting purely on the basis of self interest, but men have typically had fewer constraints in this regard. Folbre proposes that the cultural change has seen an increase in legitimacy of women acting based on self interest, including in forming relationships and having children.

Many have observed that it is the norms and practices with regard to sharing unpaid work that have been slowest to change. In her study entitled The Second Shift, Hochschild (1989: 270) emphasizes the inequality in the distribution of housework in two income families. Nonetheless, she ends with hopeful views on the potential for a "new man" to emerge:

Up until now, the woman married to the "new man" has been one of the lucky few. But as the government and society shape a new gender strategy, as the young learn from example, many more women and men will be able to enjoy the leisurely bodily rhythms and freer laughter that arise when family life is family life and not a second shift.

Based on economic considerations, Coltrane (1998: 176) also ends his synthesis with optimistic projections. In particular, he expects new ideals of shared spheres to develop, first in child care and grocery shopping, then cooking and cleaning.

Similar conclusions are reached in a study of changing values in Canada, the United States and ten European countries. In The Decline of Deference, Nevitte (1996) observes a general pattern between 1981 and 1990 as people become less deferential in their outlooks towards politics, the workplace and family life. In particular, they have less confidence in a whole range of government and non-government institutions. The family remains one of the most important priorities in people's lives, but there is more permissiveness and tolerance in family questions. Especially in Canada, Nevitte finds that both men and women want spousal relations and parent-child relations to be more egalitarian. Among the 24 value dimensions considered, Canadians were most egalitarian when it comes to spousal relations and shared responsibilities.

This comparison of Canadian values between 1981 and 1990 also shows that "sharing household chores" was the only value, among the nine factors measured, that increased as an attribute considered important for a successful marriage (Nevitte, 1996: 247). The very fact that people aspire to fairly democratic family relations may partly explain the lack of respect for institutions that do not operate on the basis of openness and merit. While this is a study of attitudes rather than behaviour, it does express hopefulness regarding the possibilities of more egalitarian gender relations.

## **The place of children**

Family transformations clearly affect children. In the first demographic transition, children lost their economic value to parents as economic activities came to depend less on work within the family, including the labour of children, and the economic role of children changed from that of producer to that of dependent. In the second transition, it became more legitimate for adults to structure and re-structure their lives in terms of their own interests rather than in terms of the interest of children. Demographers have observed that the biggest change in family life since about 1960 has been the extent and effectiveness of control over marital fertility. Keyfitz (1994: 7) proposes that the presence of children, once the main reason not to divorce, no longer plays that role. Similarly, the formalization of understandings through a legal marriage is no longer seen as necessary before having children. Children have benefited from many of the behaviours of adults, especially later childbearing, fewer children and dual incomes, but they have sometimes suffered from the greater flexibility in the ability of adults to structure their relationships (Picot et al., 1998; Kerr, 1992).

The risk of lone-parenthood is much higher when parents have ever cohabited. For instance, among children born in 1987-88 to two-parent families, 8.1 percent had experienced a family disruption by age six if the responding parent had never cohabited, but 24.6 percent if they had cohabited (Marcil-Gratton, 1998: 14, 18). When parents separate, children born in common-law unions have less contact with the absent parent and receive less financial support from the non-custodial parent (Marcil-Gratton et al., 2000).

Ariès (1980) speaks of two transitions in the relative priority given to children and adults. The first transition centred on children, with strong parental investments in child quality. Parents came to spoil their children in the sense of giving them more than they could ever expect in return (Caldwell, 1976). Similarly, while many things had previously competed for a mother's attention, maternal love came to put children's well-being second to none, and motherhood even emerged as a full-time vocation (Shorter, 1975; Stone, 1977; Garfield, 1990: 37). The second transition involves a move to adult-centred preoccupations involving self-fulfilment and the quality of the dyadic relation between partners. There is a shift in values and norms from family or child-centred orientations toward more self-centred pursuits (Ariès, 1980; Lesthaeghe, 1983; Roussel, 1987). Children are largely viewed as a means through which adults can receive affective gratification and blossom as individuals (Romaniuc, 1984: 64). Of course, some have concluded that children can also interfere with this affective individualism.

While children remain important for most people, they are no longer so important as to be impediments to parental divorce, and subsequent fulfilment in other relationships.

### **Structural and cultural transformations**

Apart from viewing the changes from children and gender contexts, family transformation can be seen as de-institutionalization of the family. A structural perspective considers that families now play fewer roles and thus can have the flexibility of less institutionalization. Looking within families, the cultural perspective observes a greater importance of the expressive dimension.

Family and kin groups had a larger number of functions in **pre-industrial** societies (e.g. Goode, 1977, Wrigley, 1977). Besides being the chief units of reproduction and socialization of the young, they were also the units of economic production, and sometimes political action and religious observance. Family groups performed many of the essential activities of the society: production, distribution, consumption, reproduction, socialization, recreation and protection. Individuals depended on their families to cope with problems of age, sickness and incapacity. In particular, the overlap between family and economy meant that economic activities occurred in family relationships. For the most part, it was only through membership in a family that people had claim to membership in the broader society, and there was little security outside of families.

Industrialization and modernization brought **structural differentiation**, with increasingly separate structures in society coming to play specific functions. Families lost many of their roles in economic production, education, social security and care of the aged. The pro-family elements of certain political formations can be interpreted as attempts to have families regain some of these roles.

Changing economic structures have meant that families have become less central to the organization of society. This allows for more flexibility in family arrangements. Families have become weaker institutions, in the sense of having less cohesion, less functions, less power over other institutions, less influence on behaviour and opinion (Popenoe, 1988). This can be called de-institutionalization in the sense that there are fewer constraints on family behaviour. For instance, families have less control of the sexual behaviour of adolescents and are less involved in the socializing of children. As marriage became less important as a means of structuring relationships and understandings, cohabitation became a viable alternative.

Other authors have focussed on change within families, proposing that **expressive activities** have become more important (e.g. Shorter, 1975, Hareven, 1977). While in the past the family was held together because people needed each other for survival, family relations have become based on the need for emotional gratification. Families have become centres of nurture and affection; individuals seek emotional support from families as a retreat from the achievement oriented struggles of the outside world.

Based on a survey of people aged 18-30 in France, Roussel (1979) observes a radical transformation in the concept of marriage. A few see marriage in traditional terms, based on established roles, expectations and mutual obligations, where the continuation of the relationship is not dependent on the maintenance of the love that was initially experienced. But the majority feel that a continuation of strong emotional exchanges and communication are essential to the marriage. They refuse to abide by the institutionalized prerogatives; they feel that continued personal fulfilment is essential and therefore they do not make a definite commitment to a given partner.

Roussel (1987, 1989) consequently suggests that the last two decades have involved a **cultural change** wherein people became less interested in living up to external norms and more interested in living up to what they themselves wanted. Marriage has changed from an institution to a "project de couple" where people can follow their own drummer. In many areas of life, it is not possible to increase the freedom from external norms. For instance, work places and bureaucracies must set limits on the variability of individual behaviour. On questions like child abuse and environmental protection, we now accept a higher level of social restrictions on behaviour. However, in the areas of family behaviour it has become possible to live with less social constraints. Here the freedom promised by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and Existentialism have become manifest. Legislative changes making divorces easier and equating cohabitation with marriage also signified a greater acceptability of alternate sexual and marital arrangements.

### **Models of families and social cohesion**

These structural and cultural interpretations of family change relate to social cohesion, in particular, to the models of organic and mechanical solidarity proposed by Durkheim. Organic solidarity is based on a division of labour, while mechanical solidarity is based on an immediate identification with others. Durkheim proposes that the basis of solidarity in society has changed from mechanical to organic. Could it be that families have changed in the opposite direction?

Durkheim tends to favour **organic solidarity**, based on instrumental questions, or interdependence through specialized abilities, as appropriate for a modern society. He also tends to see this division of labour as appropriate for families. That is, the sexual division of labour holds families together:

Permit the sexual division of labour to recede below a certain level and conjugal society would eventually subsist in sexual relations preeminently ephemeral (Durkheim 1960 (1893): 60).

Thus Durkheim saw this "modern" form of solidarity as applying to families from time immemorial. Families were units of economic activity involving typically some specialization of tasks by gender.

While we know little about the inner dynamics of families in pre-modern times, some historians have believed they were based on organic solidarity (Shorter 1975; Stone 1977; Ariès 1962); that is,

families were not so much homes as places of work. Workplaces benefit from clear authority patterns and allocations of tasks.

This is also the Parsons or Becker model of families. Parsons thought that a division of instrumental activities or **complementary roles** (paid and unpaid work) was most functional. Becker sees this arrangement as strong on efficiency. The division of instrumental activities provides cohesion, it also encourages dependency of men on women and of women on men, thus it encourages stability in partnerships.

**Mechanical solidarity** is an immediate (expressive) identification with others. Durkheim saw this as the earlier form of solidarity in societies, based on a sense of identification with others who shared a common sense of values and belonging (“these are my people”). As societies have changed from mechanical to organic solidarity, might families have changed from organic to mechanical? As families are no longer units of economic production, they need not be based on a division of labour, they can be held together by a sense of common identity.

This brings up the theme of de-institutionalization of the family, from institution to companionship (Burgess et al., 1963), from orderly replacement of generations to permanent availability (Farber 1964), from instrumental to expressive relationships (Scanzoni and Scanzoni 1976; Thadani 1978). The focus has changed from a division of labour to the quality of the dyadic relation between partners (Lesthaeghe, 1995). When the family was basically a unit of production and survival, relationships were instrumental; as families became a “private sphere,” nurture and affection became the basis for relationships (Hareven 1977). People wanted to establish their own relationships rather than conforming to an external norm; marriage changed from an institution to a “*projet de couple*” (Roussel, 1987). Giddens (1991) talks about “**pure relationships**” (less institutionalized) and reproductive individualism, referring to relationships based on personal choice rather than normative considerations, and reproduction oriented to self-fulfilment. Obviously, sentiment is a weaker basis for relationships and the need for continuous gratification puts heavy demands on relationships, which may not always fulfill the high expectations. People are more prone to abandon family ties when their emotional well being is not satisfied.

These interpretations all suggest that the family has changed from a unit of survival in which relationships were based on a division of labour to a unit of mechanical solidarity based on a sense of common identity. While sentiment is a weaker basis for continued relationships, these families are nonetheless based on emotional interdependence, a sense of belonging together, and on caring for each other.

Oppenheimer observes that this **companionship** model may be lower on efficiency but it is also lower on risk, it provides insurance against the inability or unwillingness of the breadwinner to provide for (especially former) spouse and children. While various words are used, Goldscheider and Waite (1991) talk simply about **new families**. Others have used the concept of a **collaborative** model or **co-providing and co-parenting**.

A collaborative model suggests that there is solidarity in terms of both instrumental and expressive questions. That is, a couple is collaborating in order to both earn a living and care for the family. In effect, the classifications proposed by Durkheim need not be seen as mutually exclusive. There could be a two-fold classification in terms of the presence or absence of mechanical and organic solidarity. A relationship based only on mechanical solidarity may be called a "pure relationship," while one based on organic solidarity may be an "instrumental relationship," and if both are present it becomes a collaborative model. This recognizes the importance of both instrumental and expressive activities for families, or both earning and caring. Of course, if neither are present there is no relationship.

### **Implications for social cohesion**

The interpretation of family change includes both structural and cultural considerations, and it clearly needs to pay attention to gender and the place of children. The consideration of alternate models, ranging from complementary roles, to pure relationships and a collaborative model, provides a basis for elaborating implications for social cohesion that merit further investigation. The investigation of social cohesion within families needs to pay attention to both instrumental and expressive questions, and to the situation of adults and children.

### **Social cohesion through partner relationships**

In pre-industrial societies, families were often the only basis for belonging to society; orphans and others without family support were in desperate situations. However, families also remain very important in modern societies. When people speak about what is important to them, they attach particular significance to family questions. People tend to be concerned about their homes and their families. They may say that the work they do outside of the home is simply a means of securing the well being of their family. For instance, Lapierre-Adamcyk (1990) concludes that three things are high priorities for most people: to live in a rewarding and continuing relationship, to have and raise children, and to have secure and meaningful work. For most people, the issue is how to fit these priorities together.

Far from seeking to downgrade family life, people have high standards; they do not want to give up on the intimacy and commitment that only families can provide. In effect, marriage or at least ongoing relationships are **in**, not only for heterosexuals, but also for lesbians and gays. Parenthood is **in**, not just in suburbia but also for middle-aged feminists (Skolnick, 1991). Fathers too are a **hot** topic, with everything from the Promise Keepers movements to new age fatherhood (Cherlin, 1998). In spite of significant changes regarding sexuality and childbearing, Szreter (1996) considers that much sexual behaviour remains interpretable in terms of the perpetuation of "durable dyadic relationships and the rearing of children as two central sources of adult identity." Persons living alone also consider that they have families, and they resent being counted by the census as "non-family persons."

A 1989-90 qualitative survey in Southwestern Ontario asked "Why do people get married?" Most

referred to companionship, love, social support, or the emotional aspect of life (Beaujot, 2000: 108). Respondents saw marriage as providing stability, as providing someone to come home to and share happiness and problems with, someone to lean on in good times and bad, and someone who is there for you, offering the experience of being needed, or of working together on common goals. People often saw it as “natural” to get married – they largely take it for granted, as providing a base for a family, to bring children into the world. Marriage is the norm: people are made to be together, to have a partner in life. Asked to compare the advantages of being single to the advantages of being married, the overwhelming majority (85 percent) saw more advantages to being married.

### **Social cohesion through relationships with children**

One of the important reasons people give for preferring marriage or cohabitation over living alone is that there is a built-in companionship. The same applies to having children; children reduce the risk of being alone. In the 1984 Canadian Fertility Survey, 84 percent said that children “provide an irreplaceable source of affection,” and 72 percent said they “provided an irreplaceable goal in life” (Balakrishnan et al., 1993: 159). Children typically mean a stable interpersonal relationship, which can be especially fulfilling when other relationships are less stable. Friedman et al. (1994) see parenthood as a strategy for reducing uncertainty. Young children also reduce the risk of separation, at least in comparison to the risks when there are no children (Andersson 1996).

Children enhance social integration, not only in terms of family ties but also at the community level. Children provide contact with others in the neighbourhood, at school, and in the community. In “Why do Americans want children,” Schoen and his co-authors (1997) observe that people are more likely to intend to have another child when they attach importance to the social relationships created by children. This “social capital effect” is found to be strong across parity, union status, gender and race. Respondents tend to emphasize primary group ties, along with affection, stimulation and fun, as intrinsic values of children. Anthropologists have long recognized the kinship ties and other relationships that come with children. In some societies, child placement establishes a special bond between given families. Schoen et al. (1997: 350) conclude by observing “Childbearing is purposive behaviour that creates and reinforces the most important and most enduring social bonds. Children are not seen as consumer durables, they are seen as the threads from which the tapestry of life is woven”.

In a 1982-83 survey in Tunisia, people largely wanted children for two reasons: for support in old age and because children are the “joy of life” (Beaujot, 1988). Survey in other countries suggest the same conclusions. The support in old age is translated into reducing the risk of being left alone, having someone who is in a close relationship. Children as the “joy of life” is translated into reproductive individualism and the various values of children. The literature suggests various values of children (Friedman et al., 1994: 380). One value is the joy of interacting with children, seeing them grow, and the sometimes unexpected joys of interacting with adult children. Another value is the security of having someone in life; given that marital relationships are less secure, children represent a kind of insurance

against the risk of being alone in life. The costs of children include of course the direct and opportunity costs, but they also include costs associated with reduced cohesion, such as labour force withdrawal or interruptions, and the risk of being left alone to raise children. These costs can be interpreted as impediments to social cohesion through work and other relationships.

### **Effects of lack of family cohesion on children**

Children are a source of social cohesion for adults, and families are clearly important to the cohesion of children. Not only are dysfunctional families detrimental to children, but family change has probably more often been in the interests of adults than that of children.

The abundant literature on lone parenthood suggests that the difficulties faced by children are a function of the transfer of financial, human and social capital (Beaujot, 2000: 287-300). At first the literature seemed to conclude that it was the lack of a male role model that was the problem, especially for boys. Then it seemed to conclude that it was the lack of the male income in a typical lone-parent family. But then it was found that children in step-families had similar problems (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994; Demo and Acock, 1988). In considering this literature, it is important to keep in mind that, on average, children in both intact and non-intact families do well (Haddad, 1998; Canadian Council on Social Development, 1997). Clearly there are conditions where children are better off without a given parent, and even instances where they are better with neither parent.

In A Generation at Risk: Growing up in an Era of Family Upheaval, Amato and Booth (1997) presented the results of interviews with American adults aged 19 to 40 in 1995. Data had been collected from the time the subjects were children in 1980. The link between parental marital quality and children's well-being is the most consistent finding reported in the study. For instance, they suggest that both fathers and mothers play key roles in their children's lives through relationships with the other parent. Divorce is advantageous to children under some circumstances; that is, when children are in highly conflictual marriages (idem., p. 237). However, they propose that only a quarter to a third of the marriages that dissolve are in this category. Consequently, when couples dissolve their relationships at "relatively low thresholds of unhappiness" many children undergo adverse effects that last into adulthood. That is, "the worse situation for children to be in is either a high-conflict marriage that does not end in divorce or a low-conflict marriage that does end in divorce" (p. 238). These influences are not rigid and deterministic, but on average they affect most aspects of the lives of young adults: standard of living, size of support network, whether they cohabit, quality of their marriage, whether the marriage ends in divorce, self-esteem, and general happiness with life (idem., p. 222). When divorce occurs early in life there is more consequences for the child's economic attainment and psychological well-being, and the relations with both parents are weakened. When divorce occurs in adolescence, only the cross-sex parental relationship is weakened.

The literature on step parenting and children largely concludes that, on average, children are not better situated than in lone-parent families (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). For instance, among persons



aged 20-44 in 1994, the likelihood of having completed high school was 82 percent if at age 15 they were living with two biological parents, compared to 71 percent with a lone parent, and 69 percent if they were living in a blended family or step family (Frederick and Boyd, 1998: 13). Cooksey and Fondell (1996) find that of all fathers living with children, the ones who spend the least time with their children are step-parents. On average, mothers also spend less time with their children after a separation, and children tend to leave home more quickly. It may be because children do not “buy into” the co-parenting social capital (Amato, 1998). More investigation is needed to further understand the conditions under which children in lone parent and step parent families have positive outcomes. We hypothesize that key considerations are the transfers of financial, human and social capital from biological and informal parents.

### **Social cohesion through earning and caring**

Earning and caring, that is how families organize themselves to earn a living and care for members, is key to their well being. These links of men and women to productive and reproductive activities have enduring consequences on their social cohesion both in families and in the market. There is also need for a junction between family and work, where the constraints clearly differ over the life course.

Kempeneers (1992) makes the important observation that women largely provide the “junction” between work and family, between the changing needs of production and reproduction, and thus they largely bear the costs of the inevitable conflict between these two areas of life. In effect, she proposes that women's position as "conciliators" between the work and family domains is a primary factor in explaining the persistence of significant gender inequalities. For the most part, both women and men are involved in both spheres, but women bear the brunt of the accommodation between the two spheres. Especially as family needs change over the life course, the corresponding adjustments are largely made by women. Individual decisions, if they can even be thought of as choices, to work, choose an occupation, have children, work part-time, change employment, are a reflection of what Kempeneers (1992) calls the global adjustment processes between the structures of production and reproduction. It is women, much more often than men, who are at the junction between the activities that correspond to the needs of reproduction (domestic work) and those that correspond to the needs of direct production (salaried work).

Time-use data provide a useful way of looking at both the earning and caring spheres because there is a common metric in the measurement of both paid and unpaid work. Data from the 1992 time use survey indicate that both women and men make accommodations for family status, but women's accommodations are larger. For instance, in husband-wife families at ages 30-54 where both are working full-time, they each do the most paid work and the least unpaid work when there are no children. When there are children under five, men's paid work is reduced from 6.8 to 6.4 hours per day on average over a seven day week, but women's is reduced from 7.3 to 4.9 hours. Concomitantly, the unpaid work of men is increased from 2.3 to 3.7 hours, while that of women from 2.9 to 5.8 hours

(Beaujot, 2000: 211).

—Table 3 about here---

Comparing the total time use according to four major activities from the 1986, 1992 and 1998 time-use surveys shows considerable stability for men and women in the average total productive time, that is both paid and unpaid work (Table 3). It is not surprising to find that, relative to men, women's time in paid work has increased from 60 percent in 1986 to 65 percent in 1992 and 68 percent in 1998. Conversely, relative to women, men's time in unpaid work increased from 46 percent in 1986 to 58 percent in 1992 and 61 percent in 1998. In 1986 we could say that women did twice as much unpaid work, but that is no longer true in 1998 as men are making larger accommodations.

To consider models of the division of paid and unpaid work, the weekly estimates for respondent and partner allow for a three-by-three classification: compared to the respondent the spouse could do less, the same amount or more of each of paid and unpaid work (Table 4). This nine-fold classification can be reduced to three models. Among couples aged 30-54, 58 percent involve **complementary roles** where one does more paid work and the other more unpaid work; in 95% of these cases it is the woman who is doing more unpaid work. The second largest model is the **double burden** where typically a given person is doing the same amount of paid work but more unpaid work. This corresponds to 28 percent of the sample; in 75 percent of these cases it is the woman who has the double burden. The remaining 14 percent of the sample can be called a **collaborative model** or shared roles, including the 5 percent who do the same amount of both paid and unpaid work. Equal sharing of unpaid work is more likely to occur if there is less total work done in the household, and if there are fewer children (Beaujot, 2000: 225).

—Table 4 about here—

## **Discussion**

Family change has mostly seen greater flexibility with regard to entry into and exit from relationships, or greater looseness of the marital bond. The greater prevalence of separation and divorce has meant that, while most marriages last until death, its permanent nature has gone. Cohabitation has changed not only pre-marital and post-marital relationships, but marital relationships themselves have become defined through the greater looseness of cohabitation. In addition, we have seen a delay of home leaving, entry into relationships and especially childbearing, as both men and women invest more in themselves before investing in reproduction.

These changes imply that more families are formed through common-law unions, lone parenthood, and blended families, while the proportion that are two-parent families based on marriage has declined. Children have benefited from sharing resources with fewer siblings, later parenthood and more dual-

income families, but they have also been exposed to a higher risk of lone parenthood.

Broadly speaking, both structural conditions in society and cultural orientations in terms of values and norms have underlined these family transformations. Families have more flexibility now that they are less central to the institutions of society; and the more equal involvement of women and men in the market has brought new options. There is a larger interest in self-fulfilment through relationships, with the concomitant norm that relationships which are not fulfilling are not worth preserving. Thus marriages based on complementary roles have declined, along with an increased interest in companionship and a collaborative model. While marriages were once held together as a division of instrumental activities, they are now to be based on a sense of common identity.

These new families involve common projects, including building a relationship and having children, with associated cohesion across gender and generations. Women remain more responsible for caring activities, and thus in solidifying the links across generations. In spite of greater maternal employment, there is considerable continuity in women's time with children (Bianchi, 2000). Nonetheless, the time that married fathers spend with children is increasing relative to that of mothers, as is men's total time in unpaid work relative to women.

These changes clearly have important implications for social cohesion, in terms of inclusion, participation and belonging, that merit further research. Women have become more included in the market, which can reduce their availability for participation in community affairs, but they may find other means of participation such as volunteering through work. Men's greater involvement with child care may increase their participation in community affairs associated with children. That is, the collaborative model may apply not only to families but also to community participation. Just as in families, belonging may be based less on norms and traditions, and more on expressive relationships; there may be more choice in belonging, where, how and with whom. The valuation of tolerance may permit more inclusiveness of people with different characteristics such as gender, age and origin. Due in part to societal tolerance for varying family types and men's adoption of greater family roles, women have now more options as to the manner of inclusion, participation and belonging.

Compared to men, however, women continue to have a lower likelihood of being in relationships, and a higher likelihood of living with children; both these states entail economic disadvantages which are further accentuated through their lower inclusiveness in the market. For men, it is typically the sense of belonging with children that suffers when relationships are not stable, as they become non-custodial parents, or informal parents who need to work out new relationships given the presence of a biological father in another household. Children may suffer from both the economic disadvantages faced by women, and the inter-generational relationship disadvantages faced by men. Children in two-parent families may benefit from the greater parental involvement of fathers, but these advantages are harder to establish in one-parent families where there is also a lack of parental time from sole providers.

These observations suggest that family change would bring less stress on women, men, and children if

economic opportunities and caring responsibilities were more equally balanced between men and women. Women would suffer less when not living in a relationship, and men would have more claim to a continued relationship with their children. Children in turn, would benefit from the economic and caring support of both parents, even if not living in the same household. In a variety of ways, children benefit from links with more than one parent.

Far from seeking to re-establish traditional families, these observations suggest that social cohesion would benefit from policies that would further move families along the direction of a collaborative model, or co-providing and co-parenting. Canadian policy seems to be very ambivalent, retaining many provisions of the old breadwinner or family wage model, such as spousal benefits and tax deductions that encourage dependency. It is surprising that even same-sex couples are seeking to have access to these provisions. Tax deductions for children make sense since children are by definition dependent. But should we not put aside the spousal deductions which are based on a family wage concept, along with widowhood benefits in pensions when the breadwinner dies, and alimony and pension splitting when the breadwinner separates? For instance, Sweden has never had pension splitting and widow's pensions have been abolished for persons who married since 1989. These changes would need to be made slowly in order not to penalize persons who lived their lives by the old models, but there should be policy encouragement for the new models.

With regard to children a more symmetrical model might include joint custody as a default condition, along with more equal sharing of paid leaves around childbirth. It is found that absent fathers see their children more often if the parents have a private agreement on custody or no custodial agreement, rather than a judicially established agreement (Marcil-Gratton et al., 2000). Agreements that are worked out between parents may imply a continuation of co-parenting, with the potential for better transfers to children from both the residential and non-residential parent. The more continuous relationship with children would also benefit the inter-generational cohesion of absent fathers.

The big negative of the new families is that they come with high levels of dissolution, which affects children in particular. Societies have found some solutions for orphanhood (adoption), even orphanhood from one parent (Canada Pension Plan and other life insurance provisions), and also for the disability of one parent as long as that disability occurred at work (worker's compensation, Canada Pension Plan). We have not found ways to handle the unwillingness or inability of parent(s) to parent. Consequently, besides encouraging parents to parent (child support obligations; joint custody), there needs to be a basis for children receiving support from the society (advance maintenance payments, guaranteed annual income). While day care, schools, and media have assumed greater roles of socialization, families remain the basis for taking care of the whole person and the long-term interests of children.

As in any difficult policy area, there will always be trade-offs and contradictions. This includes the basic trade-off between supporting families as a way of supporting individuals within these families, but also wanting to support the removal of individuals from their families when these are abusive. Similarly, there

is an interest in promoting self-sufficiency, but also to encourage family support of dependents. This carries the contradiction that those who look after dependents within families will have less ability to be themselves self-sufficient in the labour market. Here again, a more equal division of caring activities would reduce the inequalities.

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Table 1: Summary statistics on family change, Canada, 1941-1996

	1941	1951	1961	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996
Total fertility rate (average births per women)	2.8	3.5	3.8	2.1	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.6
Median age at first marriage									
Brides	23.0	22.0	21.1	21.3	21.6	22.5	23.9	25.1	26.3
Grooms	26.3	24.8	24.0	23.5	23.7	24.6	25.8	27.0	28.3
Divorces per 100,00 married couples	--	180	180	600	990	1180	1302	1235	1130
Common-law couples as a percent of all couples	--	--	--	--	0.7	6.4	8.2	11.2	13.7
Births to non-married women as a percent of all births	4.0	3.8	4.5	9.0	10.9	14.2	18.8	28.6	36.8
Births to women aged 30+ as a percent of all births	35.6	36.2	34.1	21.6	19.6	23.6	29.2	36.0	43.7
Lone parent families as a percent of all families with children	9.8	9.8	11.4	13.2	14.0	16.6	18.8	20.0	22.3

Notes: For 1941-71 births to non-married women are "illegitimate births".

Source: Beaujot, 2000:89

Table 2: Ages at various family life transitions, birth cohorts 1616-20 to 1971-75, Canada, 1995

	---Birth Cohorts---											
	1916-20	1921-25	1926-30	1931-35	1936-40	1941-45	1946-50	1951-55	1956-60	1961-65	1966-70	1971-75
<i>Median Age at:</i>												
<i>Home Leaving</i>												
Men	22.9	22.0	21.9	21.2	21.8	22.0	21.8	21.5	21.8	22.7	23.2	23.6
Women	21.8	21.6	21.0	20.6	20.1	20.3	21.0	19.9	20.6	20.9	21.2	21.6
<i>First Union</i>												
Men	26.6	25.7	25.2	24.8	25.0	23.6	23.8	24.4	24.5	25.2	25.1	--
Women	23.4	22.9	22.0	21.9	21.7	21.4	22.0	21.5	21.8	22.7	22.7	22.9
<i>First Marriage</i>												
Men	26.6	25.7	25.2	25.0	25.1	23.6	24.0	25.6	26.4	28.7	--	--
Women	23.4	22.9	22.0	21.9	21.8	21.6	22.2	22.1	23.3	25.3	26.1	--
<i>First Birth</i>												
Men	29.6	28.8	28.6	27.3	27.7	26.5	27.5	29.3	29.9	31.2	--	--
Women	26.2	25.0	23.9	23.5	23.5	23.3	25.4	25.6	26.3	27.8	27.8	--
<i>Last Birth</i>												
Men	38.0	35.6	35.8	33.6	33.5	32.5	32.5	33.7	33.2	32.1	--	--
Women	35.6	34.5	33.7	31.8	30.1	29.8	30.6	30.3	31.0	30.6	--	--
<i>First Child's Home-Leaving</i>												
Men	49.4	47.5	48.1	47.0	48.4	47.9	49.3	--	--	--	--	--
Women	45.4	45.0	44.6	43.3	43.7	45.1	48.0	--	--	--	--	--
<i>Last Child's Home-Leaving</i>												
Men	57.6	56.6	59.2	57.1	57.2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Women	56.7	57.1	56.3	53.0	54.6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
<i>Mean Number of Births</i>												
Men	2.9	3.1	2.6	2.9	2.5	1.9	1.9	1.5	1.5	--	--	--
Women	3.3	3.6	3.4	3.3	3.0	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.7	--	--	--
<i>Cohabitations as Percentage of First Unions</i>												
Men	1.9	3.2	1.8	4.4	6.3	9.3	16.1	30.3	39.3	49.9	67.1	--
Women	0.3	1.0	2.5	1.6	2.9	9.2	13.5	25.0	35.9	47.5	55.3	76.6
<i>Proportions Separated within 25 years of First marriage</i>												
Men	0.03	0.05	0.09	0.09	0.17	0.24	0.27	0.39	--	--	--	--
Women	0.06	0.06	0.10	0.13	0.14	0.29	0.30	0.34	--	--	--	--

Source: Special tabulation from Statistics Canada, 1995 General Social Survey.

Table 3: Time use of total population 1986, 1992, 1998

	Average Hours per Day in Population Aged 15+					
	1986		1992		1998	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Total productive activity	7.5	7.4	7.7	7.8	7.8	7.8
Paid work and education	5.6	3.3	5.1	3.3	5.0	3.4
Unpaid work	1.9	4.1	2.6	4.5	2.7	4.4
Personal Care	10.8	11.2	10.3	10.8	10.2	10.6
Leisure/ free time	5.7	5.3	6.0	5.5	6.0	5.6
Total	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0

Sources: Beaujot, 2000: 207; Statistics Canada, 1999, No 12F0080XIE, 1999: 5.  
General Social Survey, 1986, 1992, 1998.

Table 4: Predominance of models of husband-wife families in terms of relative participation in paid and unpaid work, for respondents aged 30-54

Compared to husbands, wife does	Compared to husband, wife does		
	More paid	Same paid	Less paid
More unpaid			
Men	4.0	12.4	55.8
Women	6.0	19.7	54.0
Average	5.0	16.1	54.9
Same unpaid			
Men	1.9	4.6	8.7
Women	2.6	5.3	4.4
Average	2.3	5.0	6.6
Less unpaid			
Men	2.8	4.1	5.5
Women	3.8	2.0	2.1
Average	3.3	3.1	3.8

Source: Beaujot, 2000: 225  
General Social Survey 1992