chapter two

The Social and Economic Origins of Contemporary Families

INTRODUCTION

The social and economic changes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a dramatic impact on the character and structure of families. During the past twenty years, many scholars have studied this impact in terms of the industrial revolution. Their research has shown that urbanization and the replacement of handicraft production by machine production in factories altered considerably the family's position in society. In the pre-industrial setting, the Canadian economy was in many ways the sum of family economies in which men, women, and children all played distinct but productive roles. With industrialization, Canada's economy became increasingly a collection of factories and agricultural businesses staffed by men whose wives were at home and whose children were at school. This development represented a profound reorganization of society affecting both private experience and public policy. The industrial revolution contributed to new ideals, new legislation, and new institutions, all of which related to the place of families in society.

At the same time, however, recent research has found that the structure and character of families also changed considerably in rural areas at the time of the industrial revolution. The direction of this change was often parallel to the urban experience. For example, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, rural families began to limit the number of their children and increasingly sent them to school. In certain cases, industrialization may explain these changes since the proliferation of sawmills and other rural industries was a central component of the evolving Canadian landscape. The majority of rural residents, however, were not directly affected by such developments, and scholars have now suggested that the origins of modern families actually preceded the industrial revolution. Specifically, studies indicate that many of the characteristics

associated with twentieth-century families emerged from processes of adjustment and innovation within rural society. This finding has particular importance in Canada since more than half of the population lived outside even small cities as late as the First World War.

Researchers have also demonstrated that any examination of change must take into account the considerable continuity of the family as a patriarchal institution. While the decades before the 1960s witnessed dramatic transformations in the structures, functions, and ideologies of family life, the legal, cultural, and economic position of women remained remarkably consistent. In formal ways from land-owning rights to schooling, Canada has been a gendered society in which men have held more power and enjoyed more rights than women. Important changes have occurred since the mid-nineteenth century (especially in the past fifteen years), but the general framework of patriarchy has certainly not been fully dismantled as of the late twentieth century. Thus, change in the history of the family should be interpreted as involving alteration to, and a general weakening of, the patriarchal form rather than its complete rejection (Clio Collective, 1987; Prentice et al., 1988).

This chapter examines the relationship between social and economic change and the history of the family, especially during the nineteenth century. The basis of this examination is those studies that have substantially revised established views not only about industrialization, but also about the extent to which modern families differ from those of the pre-industrial period. For example, contemporary discussion often assumes that families have traditionally been stable units, pillars in a society otherwise undergoing constant transformation. In this view, families have been until recently an important element of continuity within larger social changes. Similarly, observers usually juxtapose a historical image of a single family form with the wide variety of contemporary family patterns. Current diversity in marriage forms, childbearing decisions, and living arrangements is judged with reference to an imagined time of conformity and standard behaviour. In both myths, contemporary families are seen as radically different from those of former times, and critics often interpret this difference as evidence of unprecedented crisis.

Such assumptions about the history of the family are accurate to a certain degree. However, recent research indicates that images of stability and conformity cannot be fully applied to Canadian families of the past, especially during periods of substantial social and economic change. This research has shown that current instability and diversity in family patterns are not simply modern phenomena and that the perception of crisis in the family has a long tradition, which was particularly important in the nineteenth century. Similarly, families have historically been nuclear, fragmented, or single parent in various times and places. The implications of these findings extend to the major themes of Canada's social, economic, and intellectual history, and they suggest quite different ways of assessing the families of contemporary society (Anderson, 1980; Soliday, 1980; Parr, 1982; LaRose, 1977 to present; *Journal of Family History*, 1987).

The following discussion begins with a description of the ways in which the rapid development of both rural settlement and cities affected the economic position of men, women, and children. The changing productive roles of family members provide the key to examination of the structural alterations and new ideals for the family that

characterized the late nineteenth century. In turn, these developments were related to a social reorganization most dramatically represented by the expansion of formal education. The creation of school systems became part of a new emphasis on public institutions and professional "experts," many of whom considered families (especially those of immigrants and the working class) to be in need of constant surveillance and supervision.

Two concepts are particularly helpful to understanding these complex changes that together engendered the families of the late twentieth century: *family strategies* and *family reproduction*. Historians use the concept of family strategies to emphasize the extent to which individuals lived their lives as part of family and kinship networks. The birth of modern society has traditionally been associated with a new sense of individualism considered to have replaced the communal ties of earlier times. However, scholars have now found that what may appear to be individual decisions and behaviour were, in fact, usually part of larger family and kin-based strategies. Studies of migration, for example, have revealed that, in most cases, the timing, direction, and process of relocation occurred within the context of family connections. Most individuals were not simply free to stay or leave; rather, their decisions were reached with reference to the impact of migration on other family members. In this sense, historians now explain individual experience in the emerging modern era more in terms of family strategies than new levels of personal autonomy.

It should be noted, however, that, like all analytic terms, "family strategies" does not do justice to the complexity of family relations. In particular, the concept downplays tension and conflict among family members as individuals and as parts of collectivities. Decisions about issues such as migration, childbearing, or economic activity were not reached in a context in which all family members had equal power and compatible ambitions. Distinct positions associated with age and gender gave specific family members more or less ability to define what would be the collective strategy. Consensus was undoubtedly obtained at times, but conflict was also certainly present at other moments. Similarly, the term family strategies should not be interpreted to mean that all families could in fact control their destinies. Rather, the choices available to any specific family were defined by material circumstances; the number of possible strategies ranged from many to few (Moch et al., 1987).

The concept of family reproduction is closely linked to the notion of strategies and, not surprisingly, must also be used with care. The concept concerns the ways in which one generation biologically, culturally, and materially creates the next. In this sense, the process of family reproduction varies according to different family strategies and different historical circumstances. Historians are increasingly focusing on inheritance patterns as a key aspect of generational change and continuity. In this research, the origins of modern families can be traced to profound alterations to the context within which families sought to reproduce themselves. At the same time, research shows that this process was not always characterized by a consensus among family members, but rather reflected the larger influence of norms related to age and gender. Thus, in discussing the history of the family in terms of strategies and reproduction, it is important to remember the internal complexity of specific families (Rapp et al., 1979).

FROM DOMESTIC TO FACTORY PRODUCTION

The process of industrialization is often described as a revolution, since an urban industrial society differs so markedly from a rural pre-industrial community. However, the term revolution implies a sudden event and, in this sense, is misleading, since industrialization occurred over many decades and involved several transitional stages. In the same way, the impact of industrialization on the family cannot be understood in "before and after" terms; rather, family alterations paralleled each stage of the transition to urban industrial society. An appreciation of the complexity of these developments is the first step toward understanding the origins of the modern family.

In the *pre-industrial economy* that predominated in Canada until the nineteenth century, most productive activity took place in individual households. Homes were both places of residence and places of work. Production was very small scale and exceedingly labour intensive. The vast majority of the population lived on farms and engaged in some combination of agriculture, fishing, lumbering, and the fur trade, according to the seasons of the year and the region in which they lived. In addition, these settlers had to produce their own clothing, and thus most households included a spinning wheel and a loom. Cities such as Montreal and Quebec were primarily commercial and administrative centres, although they did include craftsmen such as blacksmiths and coopers. These craftsmen set up shops in their own households and worked by hand with very basic tools to produce their goods. The pre-industrial economy was, therefore, relatively small scale, labour intensive, and domestically focused (Dechêne, 1974; Porter, 1985) (see below).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, rural society was transformed by the spread of agrarian capitalism and the emergence of rural industries. Increased domestic demand and new export markets fuelled agricultural expansion, especially in the area that later became Ontario. Gristmills soon dotted the countryside, and small towns and villages grew, as did the larger commercial cities. Canada's extensive forests also became the object of concerted development as the result of both British and American market

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The greater part of the labour of the farm is performed by the farmer himself, his wife, his sons and daughters, the former managing all the outdoor operations, and the latter the dairy and domestic departments. Herein indeed lies all the secret of his success. Whatever qualification the farmer should have, mental or physical, all are agreed on this one point – that a good wife is indispensable, and what it is the aim of the husband to accumulate, it becomes the province of his wife to manage, and whenever we hear of a managing wife, we are sure to find a money-making farmer, and *vice-versa*.

Source: Upper Canada Board of Agriculture, *Transactions of the Board of Agriculture and of the Agricultural Association of Upper Canada, 1860-1863* (Toronto: Printed for the Board of Agriculture, at the "Guardian" Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1864), 5:25.

demand. Sawmills were built at almost every well-located source of water power, with massive establishments on the major rivers. These opportunities encouraged families to expand their economic activities, often by combining agricultural endeavour with lumber industry participation (Gaffield, 1982).

The first stage of industrialization is termed the *manufactory stage*, in which handicraft production still predominated but manufactories increasingly brought together various craftsmen into one operation. Carriage makers joined wheelwrights, blacksmiths, carpenters, and other skilled workers. At the same time, these new establishments also increased the trend toward specialization. Shoemaking, for example, now involved cutters, fitters, and other more specialized occupations (Kealey, 1980). In certain economic sectors, this division of labour also involved *proto-industrialization*, in which traditional domestic work patterns combined with new forms of labour in manufactories. In the proto-industrial system, domestic activity was responsible for part, rather than all, of the production process. In the case of textiles, for example, households began producing cloth for sale to dressmakers and yarn for sale to weavers. As a result, households became less self-reliant and more integrated into an emerging cash economy. The overall scale of production increased, although the manufactories were still small operations. This system thus reflected the past and anticipated the future of the production process. Domestic activity continued to be important, but production outside the home was increasingly significant (Medick, 1976).

The emergence of manufactories and proto-industrial activity affected only a minority of the Canadian population for most of the nineteenth century. A large export market and the availability of land encouraged settlers to concentrate on agriculture and lumbering. One crucial change, however, was the spread of wage labour that accompanied the expansion of wheat and lumber production. Shantymen and millhands worked in the lumber industry, agricultural labourers toiled for established landowners, and navvies built the canals and railways that facilitated commercial activity. These workers were often young men who hoped to accumulate enough capital to settle on a farm of their own (Darroch, 1988). Until the later nineteenth century, the extent of land availability made this ambition quite realistic, although restrictive land policies, the activity of speculators, and the irregular nature of employment worked against aspiring young adults in certain regions. By the 1870s, however, the frontier in central Canada had been pushed to its limit, and as land prices rose, wage labour became a way of life for an increasing proportion of the population. The shift from farmers and craftsmen in the pre-industrial economy to propertyless wage labourers in the emerging industrial economy is termed *proletarianization*. This process combined with the spread of manufactories and, to a lesser extent, with proto-industrialization to provide the context for rapid urban and industrial growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gagan, 1981).

The proliferation of machines and steam engines after the 1870s heralded the beginning of a full *industrial economy* in Canada. The increased use of sewing machines transformed the shoe industry, while hydraulic presses allowed the Canadian tobacco industry to prosper during the Civil War in the United States. Such industrial growth was certainly not reflected in all types of production, but the trend toward mechanization is evident in the rapid growth of large factories. In Hamilton, Ontario, for example, in

1851, only 24 percent of the labour force worked in establishments employing ten or more individuals. Just twenty years later, a full 83 percent of all employees in Hamilton worked in such establishments. Moreover, just over one-half of workers in manufacturing held positions in firms with fifty or more employees. Hamilton's industrial development at this time was unusual for Canadian cities, but the pattern was certainly not unique. In Toronto, slightly more than two-thirds of the city's factory workers in 1871 were employed in establishments with thirty or more workers (Katz, 1975; Kealey, 1980).

Mechanization and centralization of production affected various economic sectors at different times and in different ways (Heron and Storey, 1986). The general transition from production at home to workshops and factories was uneven, with some industries continuing to rely on household activity even as machines were proliferating. In the clothing trade, for example, work in factories and work at home expanded together during the nineteenth century, with each activity representing a different phase of the production process. Factory machines made and cut cloth from which women and older daughters then made garments in their own households as employees of the clothier. This example illustrates that the impact of industrialization on the production process was not always abrupt or complete, but rather took place gradually over many decades (Bradbury, 1979).

The transition from pre-industrial to industrial modes of production redefined the economic role of the family and forced adjustment and innovation in family strategies. In the pre-industrial economy, families operated as economic units in which individual members performed tasks associated with age and gender. Women and children were active producers within family economies, and material security could only be achieved through collective labour. The contributions of all able-bodied family members were necessary in the labour-intensive rural economy of the time. As a result, the European traditions of apprenticeship for boys and work as domestic servants for girls were not fully maintained in Canada, where economic opportunity meant that children could often be most useful to parents by working at home. From an early age, children would be integrated into productive activity by learning to help with land clearing, seeding, and domestic work such as spinning. Similarly, women were responsible for cooking, making clothes, and farm work such as vegetable gardening. The pre-industrial setting was composed, therefore, of *family economies* in which family members laboured in the context of household production (Gaffield, 1979; Gagan, 1981).

The manufactory stage signalled the beginning of the separation of production from the household. The growth of manufactories, an increased division of labour, and the trend toward centralized production made household production an increasingly supplementary aspect of the economy. Moreover, these developments encouraged the spread of wage labour in the later nineteenth century, a process with roots in activities such as lumbering and canal building. Employment outside the home redefined the extent to which productive activity characterized family life, and consequently, this alteration transformed family economies into *family wage economies.* Centralized production and wage labour meant that certain families began pooling the wages rather than the actual labour of various family members. The key to material security for families in this new situation involved employment outside the home for as many family

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In pre-industrial society, a great deal of economic activity took place in the home, and family members contributed according to a division of labour associated with age and gender. Mothers taught daughters skills such as weaving, while sons learned from their fathers. The first responsibility of children was often to care for young siblings. This photograph from the early twentieth century indicates that the industrial revolution did not immediately transform all Canadian households, particularly those in remote areas.

members as possible, especially older children. A single wage was rarely sufficient to provide for a family, and the general irregularity of employment maintained the traditional interdependency of family members. Therefore, families continued to be economic units, although the appearance of the family wage economy represented an important departure from the traditional strategies of family activity and organization (Tilly and Scott, 1978).

The replacement of collective household labour by individual wage earning did not always have a simple or immediate effect on the family. In the early phases of this economic change, there was a considerable number of job opportunities for youth, especially teenage boys, and in certain cases family members continued to work together through collective employment in mills and factories. In fact, some employers advertised to attract families, recognizing both the profitability of cheap child labour and the value of having parents to supervise young workers. Employers would sometimes provide dwellings for families working at their establishments. The quality of such accommodation was generally very poor, but the provision of dwellings did reflect the fact that the family could still function as an economic unit despite the new modes of production (Bradbury, 1979; Katz, Doucet, and Stern, 1982; Gaffield, 1982).

Recent studies have also found that while many families needed more than one

income, they also wanted to maintain contact among family members. The employment of children was consistent with the tradition of families working together, and thus parents did not hesitate to seek work for their children. Established workers pressured employers to hire younger family members, sometimes by threatening to quit if additional employment was not provided. Of course, such threats were only effective in times of severe labour shortages, but the attempt of family members to work together shows that the traditional concept of collective family labour still operated during the process of industrialization (Kealey, 1973; Harvey, 1979).

The emergence of a wage-labour economy and the growth of manufactories are often described as the beginning of the separation of home and work. However, this description implies significant narrowing of the definition of work to mean wage labour only. In earlier times, the contributions of all family members were considered work, and cooking and cleaning were recognized to be an important part of the family economy. However, the wage-labour economy expropriated the concept of work for paid employment. Thus, the "separation of home and work" must be understood to mean the "separation of home and place of wage labour" (Bourne, 1985).

While early industrial expansion included employment for women and older children, the number of job opportunities for these family members did not match the number of available workers, and in fact these opportunities decreased rapidly over time. In Toronto, for example, the 1880s were a decisive decade in the dislocation of young teenagers from the labour force. Industrialization in the boot and shoe, printing, and tobacco sectors encouraged a sharp decline in the proportion of workers who were under the age of sixteen; this proportion fell from 11 percent in 1881 to 5 percent in 1891 (Kealey, 1980). Economic change especially transformed the position of young women, for whom there were fewer and fewer employment opportunities in cities and no jobs that paid a wage sufficient for material independence. Women continued to gain positions as factory workers or elementary school teachers in the nineteenth century and as nurses and secretaries in later decades. But in keeping with the established patriarchal framework, married women were often excluded from these jobs, and their wages were substantially less than those offered to their male counterparts. In the late nineteenth century, a female teacher received about one-half of the average salary of a male teacher (Danylewycz, Light, and Prentice, 1983). In this context, the economic role of women within families became increasingly confined to domestic chores that were not considered "productive" in the new sense of the word. This new definition of work trivialized both implicitly and explicitly the important activity that continued in the home and that made possible employment outside the home. Moreover, the value judgments that distinguished between home and work must be recognized as contributing factors in the development of contemporary attitudes toward domestic activity.

In stylized terms, the separation of productive activity from the home and the economic dislocation of many women and children changed the affected families from units of production to units of consumption. In the new *family consumer economy*, family life involved decisions and activity related to the purchase and use of goods produced in specialized workplaces. The ideal roles of various family members became much more sharply differentiated, with men as producers, women as homemakers, and children as dependants. This differentiation became increasingly evident among

Canadian families as higher wages in the twentieth century (most notably in the 1950s) made single-income families a viable possibility, at least for the expanding middle class. In this way, the family consumer economy became a characteristic feature of urban industrial society in Canada. The implications of this development extended beyond economic changes to include important changes in the size and structure of families. An examination of these changes provides the next link in understanding the historical development of modern families.

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND KINSHIP

Recent studies have re-examined the ways in which the changing economic role of the family related to the size and structure of households. The traditional version of the transition describes a radical shift during the period of industrialization from large extended households to small nuclear units. This shift is said to have involved a decline in fertility and a decrease in kinship attachment beyond parents and children. However, research in different settings suggests that this traditional interpretation of the impact of industrialization needs to be reconsidered, both with respect to structural changes in the family and to the importance of kinship.

Throughout Canada, the size of families steadily declined after the mid-nineteenth century, thereby considerably changing the biological aspect of family reproduction. Until this time, a marriage was soon followed by the birth of the first child, and children continued to be born every two or three years, with the gap between each birth increasing as the parents aged. By the mid-1800s, however, this natural fertility began to be inhibited by the attempt to limit further pregnancies after a certain family size was achieved. The trend continued to grow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries before reaching a plateau at the modern average of somewhat less than two children per family (Henripin, 1968; McLaren and McLaren, 1986; Gagan, 1981; Katz, Doucet, and Stern, 1982).

While recent studies consistently emphasize the general importance of the fertility decline, scholars have also discovered considerable diversity within the overall pattern. The most surprising finding has involved rural areas where families began limiting family size as early as their urban counterparts. Historians interpret such limitation as a response to increasing difficulty after the mid-nineteenth century of acquiring land, which was the basis of rural family economies. However, the intensity of this decline was less than that of cities where families altered considerably the traditional pattern of natural fertility. Studies also have found that literacy levels and cultural values such as religion were associated with adjustment and innovation in demographic behaviour. Until the 1960s, fertility rates in areas of francophone settlement, for example, declined more slowly than in those of predominantly anglophone regions (Henripin, 1968; Tepperman, 1974; Beaujot and McQuillan, 1986).

Historians are not yet able to explain fully the reasons for such diversity, although the evidence makes clear that different families devised different strategies for dealing with their changing circumstances. Many factors undoubtedly contributed to the fertility decline, including technological developments such as the production of better

contraceptives. However, a key phenomenon may have been the gradual redefinition of children as consumers rather than producers. This redefinition first became apparent in more privileged families (often in urban areas) who were not dependent on their children's labour. Their fertility rates decreased more quickly than did those of less advantaged families. Over time, however, the increasing dislocation of children from productive activity, both in agricultural settings and in the urban working class, encouraged even less materially secure parents to similarly limit family size in order to minimize expenses (Stern, 1987). A study of the 1931 census showed that the families of wage earners had, in fact, become on average considerably smaller than those of employers or those who were self-employed. The authors of this study suggested that "limitation in family size for many people is the only alternative to poverty and misery" (Pelletier, Thompson, and Rochon, 1938:19). Thus, the dominant trend has been toward smaller and smaller families throughout the social structure, although distinct motivations and family strategies have always been very evident, especially with respect to ethnocultural values and economic circumstances.

The changing ways in which families reproduced themselves biologically did not mean, however, that families became isolated nuclear units. Families continued to function within kinship networks throughout the transition from the family economy to the family wage economy and to the family consumer economy. The continuing importance of kinship is related to the fact that the stability of families has never been absolute at any point in the past. While contemporary instability due to the high incidence of separation and divorce is unprecedented, families have always faced uncertainty, especially with respect to health and material welfare. In the past, traditionally high rates of mortality meant that the disruption of marriage by the death of a spouse was not uncommon. Partial evidence from France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests that about one-third of all children younger than age fourteen had lost one or both of their parents. One study in England indicates that one out of every five children was an orphan during these centuries (Tilly and Scott, 1978:28-29). While mortality rates declined in the New World as a result of better nutrition and lower population density, the stability of family units was constantly undermined by warfare and natural disasters, as well as by epidemics such as those of cholera. The important productive roles of both men and women made remarriage both common and necessary in pre-industrial Canadian society, but new unions could only follow an inevitable period of family disruption. Thus, the history of orphans and single-parent families in Canada begins at the time of first settlement and not in recent years (Dechêne, 1974:107-9; Charbonneau, 1975:183-88).

Declining land availability, wage labour, and industrialization ensured that families would face even more serious challenges to their stability, and they relied on kin to help in the search for employment and housing and to support them in times of need. Kin could be instrumental in aiding resettlement in a newly developing agricultural region, or in securing employment for relatives at the same mill or factory where a family member already worked. Relatives could facilitate migration to a new area by providing temporary accommodation or information about land or available dwellings. Historians have found that even the great transatlantic migrations of the nineteenth century were

characteristically based on the chain migration of related individuals and families (Elliott, 1988). Such family and kin-based migration was also characteristic of movement within North America, including the settlement of the Prairies. The insecurity of farming as well as employment and the need of many families for more than one income meant that kinship networks represented a welfare system in which the hardships of certain families might only be somewhat balanced by the relative well-being of others (Dickinson and Russell, 1986:113–49). This type of support became very crucial in industrializing cities, where there was little formal assistance in the struggle to survive (Hareven, 1982).

The growing cities developed major sanitary problems, urban housing was very inadequate, and the workplaces had inadequate ventilation and dangerous machinery. Illness, accidents, irregular employment, and low wages placed families in precarious positions if kin were unable to lend support. Even two-parent families were sometimes unable to care for their children. In nineteenth-century Montreal, for example, some working-class parents dealt with family crises by temporarily placing their children in orphanages in the hope that they might at least receive some food and shelter. When and if the situation of the parents improved, they planned to bring the children home again, perhaps to contribute to the family's survival by seeking employment themselves (Bradbury, 1982). Conditions in nineteenth-century orphanages were rarely ideal, however, and studies indicate that mortality rates were often exceptionally high. Unwed mothers, for example, who gave up their children to the foundling hospital of the Grey Nuns in Montreal could not anticipate that they would be adopted by a deserving couple; between 80 and 90 percent died in the institution (Gossage, 1987).

In the modern industrial economy, the responsibility of the family for the material welfare of its members declined with the professionalization of health care and the slow emergence of state aid for those in need. The traditional pattern of home births, home remedies, and informal kinship support systems was increasingly replaced by hospitals, clinics, and publicly funded welfare offices. In this sense, the general direction of the twentieth century has been toward the building of public institutions to support individual existence (Strong-Boag, 1979; Struthers, 1983). Nonetheless, these institutions do not fully respond to individual needs, and families have maintained an important support role for family members as well as for kin. The processes of social and economic change may have encouraged some sense of individualism, but family and kin still provide an important framework for personal welfare in the late twentieth century much as they have since the seventeenth century.

The instability of the family during the urban growth and industrial development of the mid-nineteenth century caused considerable concern among politicians and other public leaders, who feared that widespread social disorder would result from the rapid pace of social change. These leaders believed that the family was in peril as a social institution, and so they promoted new ideals for family members, especially for women and children, who were most affected by the new modes of production. The major development for children was the establishment of schooling as a dominant experience in growing up. For women, the result was a definition of their responsibilities that limited them to the home and to the roles of wives and mothers.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

The redefinition of the family as a unit of consumption rather than one of production paralleled the development of formal education as a major social institution. Over time, childhood and youth became an extended period of dependency when schooling was a characteristic experience. From the time of early settlement, schoolhouses appeared throughout Canada, but the need for children within family economies meant that formal education was limited to certain periods of the year, to certain age groups, and generally to a small elite. In the pre-industrial economy, families were the dominant institutions for education, transmitting habits and values as well as vocational training. Childhood involved productive activity rather than reading and writing, and children learned practical skills from parents, older siblings, and relatives. In this context, age groups often intermingled in both work and play. The children of the elite were a partial exception to this pattern, and among them both boys and girls received some training by religious orders. However, most children learned at home within the framework of the family unit (Gaffield, 1982; Moogk, 1982).

The pattern of learning at home continued during the early nineteenth century, when schooling was still limited to children (especially boys) from families with both the interest and the affluence to arrange privately for individual or small group instruction. However, attitudes toward formal education changed rapidly, especially during the 1840s and 1850s, when public concern mounted about the present and future behaviour of unoccupied children. The increasing removal of productive activity from the home left many children without time-consuming responsibilities within the family. Public leaders believed that the phenomenon of "idle youth" boded ill for the maintenance of social order in the major cities. This belief encouraged them to promote the building of schools where children could not only be supervised, but also could be taught the values and habits considered essential in the new social context (Houston and Prentice, 1988).

The promotion of schooling by educators and politicians was facilitated by the construction of better roads and the growing population density, both of which made attendance much easier than in the scattered rural settlements of earlier times. Similarly, many parents came to see formal education as a necessary condition for successful participation in the new developing economy. Literacy and arithmetical skills, for example, seemed to be high priorities in an increasingly complex society. Instead of aiming to transmit land and material goods to their children, more parents began considering the need to also provide their children with formal education. Interestingly, parents sent both sons and daughters to elementary schools, while young men were considerably favoured for more advanced learning, especially in universities, where females were not even admitted until the later nineteenth century. Thus, general support for schooling emerged rapidly during the mid-nineteenth century, and within several decades all the Canadian provinces had comprehensive education systems (Stamp, 1982; Wilson et al., 1970). However, in keeping with the gendered society of the time, males and females experienced this development in quite different ways (Gaskell and McLaren, 1987).

As with other features of historical change within families, considerable diversity

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Despite the creation of public school systems and the increasing promotion of attendance, the material needs of many families and employers' desire for cheap labour meant that working-class children often laboured rather than studied in the late nineteenth century. The terrible working conditions of the infamous young cigar-makers were somewhat exceptional, but the character of child labour confirms the importance of always distinguishing between the rhetoric and reality of family life.

Theophile Charron, Journeyman Cigar-maker, aged 14, of Montreal, sworn.
By Mr. Helbronner:

Q. When you call yourself a cigar-maker, you mean that you have served your apprenticeship, do you not?
A. Yes, sir.

Q. How long?
A. Three years.

Q. You began working at 11 years?
A. Yes, sir.

(. . .)
Q. What wages did you get during your apprenticeship?
A. One dollar a week for the first year, $1.50 for the second year, and $2 for the third. . . .

(. . .)
Q. Did you have any fines to pay during your apprenticeship?
A. Yes, sir.

Q. Many?
A. A good number.

(. . .)
Q. How many hours did you work a day?
A. Sometimes ten hours, other times eight hours. It was just as they wanted it.

Q. Do you remember why you paid these fines?
A. Sometimes for talking too much; mostly for that.

Q. You were never licked?
A. Yes; not licked so as any harm was done me, but sometimes they would come along, and if we happened to be cutting our leaf wrong, they would give us a crack across the head with the fist.

Q. Was it usual to beat children like that?
A. Often.

Source: *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital in Canada: Evidence Quebec* (Ottawa: Printed for the Queen's Printer, A. Senecal, 1889), Vol. 3, Part 1, pp. 24–25.

accompanied the general expansion of public school systems. Not all parents easily accepted the control and intervention represented by teachers, school inspectors, and other education officials. Conflicts emerged immediately over questions of language of instruction, religion, corporal punishment, and many other issues associated with the establishment of a public institution for children. These conflicts exposed the basic contradiction between the idea of uniform schooling and the reality of diversity among

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With the development of a wage-labour economy, social leaders promoted school attendance as the only appropriate activity for children between the ages of seven and twelve. However, working-class families could not survive without the economic contribution of their children, and thus many children spent more time as producers than as pupils despite official opposition to child labour.

families. In some cases, at least partial resolutions were achieved (such as with the establishment of separate schools in most provinces), but other issues (such as language of instruction) remain stubbornly on the agenda of the late twentieth century (Gaffield, 1987; Curtis, 1988).

The pattern of increased school attendance occurred throughout the social structure, although it was less pronounced among materially disadvantaged social groups where youth remained associated with the search for productive opportunities. The continued need for some families to rely on child labour was actually reflected in the Ontario compulsory school attendance legislation of the early twentieth century, which stipulated that the officially accepted age of school leaving could be reduced by two years to age twelve if parents were able to demonstrate a need for income from their children. The 1911 census showed that children in Hamilton, for example, did in fact contribute substantially to the survival of working-class families. Employed children from the families of general labourers contributed just over 44 percent of total family income. This proportion varied among different working-class families, but the trend was consistent (Synge, 1979). The ideal of children as students was simply inappropriate for materially insecure families. Overall, however, children have spent a greater number of years in school and have been dependent on their parents for longer periods since the mid-nineteenth century. The result is that education outside the home has become a characteristic mechanism of family reproduction, and a more important vehicle of cultural transmission. To a greater and greater extent, each generation has transmitted values, skills, and traditions to the next generation through the medium of standardized books, certified teachers, and public school systems. The question of whose values, whose skills, and whose traditions remains very problematic, however, for many families.

THE NEW IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

The redefinition of children as students was part of a new ideal for families that included a considerable narrowing of the ideal economic role for females within the patriarchal society. Separation of production from the home encouraged what historians have called the *cult of true womanhood*, which defined women primarily as reproducers and creators of havens from the hustle and bustle of the productive world. The ideal woman was pure, pious, and submissive, but also capable of effective nurturing and efficient household management. Despite the transformation of the family's economic role in society, the woman's "proper" place was still in the home. New attitudes to cleanliness, child rearing, and marriage led to a complex array of prescribed female duties to replace women's traditional participation in a family economy. The goal of these duties was to counterbalance the negative aspects of urban industrial development, which had moral and spiritual flaws since it was created by men, who were believed to be naturally less sensitive to the non-material aspects of life. The ideal role of women was to raise children and support husbands in ways that would offset the heartless nature of the marketplace. By the late nineteenth century, the ways to create a proper family environment were specified in an extensive prescriptive literature that included books, pamphlets, and magazines describing the path to "true womanhood." This view was also institutionalized in the development of domestic science as part of the public school curriculum and as the accepted course of advanced study for women (Welter, 1966; Stamp, 1977).

The most vigorous challenge to the exclusive definition of women as mothers and wives came from certain middle-class women who decided that the new ideal of

FOR INTEREST

The social welfare legislation of the twentieth century has been directed toward the support of the family as the basic unit of social order and organization. The extent of this support, however, has never been equal to the material needs of many families. Moreover, the legislation has often assumed a belief in an "ideal" family characterized by male breadwinners and female nurturers.

The Mothers' Pension Act aims to protect the home as the center of human life and activity. We hold that the family ties, deeply embedded as they are in the laws of nature and life, are the greatest source of the strength, morality and stability of the social order, and should not be broken. . . . Nations have risen to power and eminence and have fallen, because the children, mothers and homes of the masses were not taken into account, and nations will again rise and fall until we recognize that no nation can be great until built on the stable foundation of good, strong men and women. That foundation must be built in the home; by the motherhood and childhood of the nation.

Source: Mrs. Rose Henderson, "Pensions for Mothers," *Social Service Congress, Ottawa 1914, Report of Addresses and Proceedings* (Toronto: Social Service Council of Canada, 1914), p. 112.

womanhood could be effectively extended beyond the family and into the larger society. These women agreed (at least publicly) with the basic concept of natural female virtue, but argued that these "feminine" qualities had to be exercised not only in private, but also in public spheres. And so middle-class women formed groups to speak out on temperance, child welfare, sanitation, and similar social issues that attracted concern in the late nineteenth century. The same beliefs motivated the suffrage movement, which helped women gain the vote at most levels of government by 1920. By modern standards, these early challenges to the cult of true womanhood may not seem very radical, since they operated within a framework of accepted gender distinctions. However, the behaviour of at least some of these early feminists may in fact have represented a quite profound critique of patriarchal society. For certain women, the apparent acceptance of a gendered order may have simply been a strategy to achieve more immediate goals such as the right to vote (Gorham, 1979). However interpreted, the activities of these reform groups do demonstrate that women continued to be active agents in the historical process, despite the image of passivity and the attempt to restrict them to the home.

CONCLUSION

The extent to which the economic changes associated with the emergence of modern society altered families varied with social class. In general, the alterations were less extensive for working-class families than for middle-class families during the formative decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite the ideal family pattern of husbands as sole breadwinners, wives as mothers, and children as students, the concept of a family wage economy remained important as a result of insecure employment and low wages. The economic growth of Canadian society from the late nineteenth century made the ideal of single breadwinners increasingly realistic, but many families still had to rely on supplementary income, and they thus followed strategies more appropriate to their own circumstances. In such families, the strong stigma against married women in the paid labour force placed a large economic burden on other family members, even young teenagers. In comparison to the general trend, a large proportion of working-class children continued to pursue job opportunities, and many of them did not attend school on a regular basis. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of working-class children in Hamilton, Ontario, for example, were already wage earners by the age of fourteen. Some children from single-parent families worked full-time in local mills and factories (Synge, 1979; Brandt, 1981; Coulter, 1982; Strong-Boag, 1988).

Similarly, the ideal of women as domestic nurturers has never been applied or accepted equally by all social groups at all times. In the twentieth century, married women have been seen as a reserve labour force to be called upon when the supply of male workers did not match the number of job opportunities. During both world wars, married women worked in munitions factories, textile mills, and other establishments considered vital to the war effort. In these years, the prejudice against employed wives was only suppressed out of concern about the war effort (Pierson, 1986).

The concept of women as a reserve labour force was extended after the Second

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The concept of the family consumer economy is evident in this photograph, which depicts a happy and supportive wife in the kitchen welcoming her approving husband home after another day at the office. The inherently unequal and sexist nature of this concept has become a major focus of public debate since the 1960s.

World War to include employment to supplement family income during periods of high expenses, such as when older children were in university. More recently, our society has accepted in principle the idea that women should share equally with men in opportunities for vocational training and financial independence. In this perspective, women's employment is equal rather than supplementary to men's work. However, many aspects of the nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood continue to characterize the reality of contemporary family life, and the legacy of the family as a partriarchal institution is clearly evident. Employed women are still paid less than their male counterparts in many cases, and they remain disproportionately responsible for most duties within the home (Luxton, 1980). The current position of men and women within families must therefore be evaluated with an understanding of the past, which reminds us that social ideals and social realities have only converged at particular points in time and among specific groups in society.

The evidence examined in this chapter emphasizes that a historical perspective should inform discussion of the current state of families and their futures. The history of the family reveals the ways in which the decline of land as the basis of households, the development of a wage-labour economy, and the process of industrialization affected the roles of men, women, and children, and thereby transformed social organization. The changing character of family strategies and family reproduction emphasizes the ways in which factors of age, gender, ethnicity, and social class have contributed to a diverse range of individual experience during this transformation. Within the general trends,

family patterns have included elements of both change and continuity, stability and instability, cohesiveness and fragmentation.

It is not obvious that the historical trends describe either a prelude to the final rejection of the patriarchal family or proof that this family form is a truly resilient social institution. Serious research on the history of the family has only been undertaken during the past two decades, and many basic questions have yet to be explored (Stone, 1977; Lasch, 1977; Flandrin, 1979; Anderson, 1980; Parr, 1980; Sutherland, 1976). Moreover, the variety and amount of evidence available for research is not unlimited, since all societies view routine family experience as unexceptional and thus not always worthy of documentation. One inescapable conclusion, however, is that families must be analysed within a larger social and economic context. The character and structure of families relate directly to the pressures and possibilities of the external material environment. In this sense, questions about the future of the family actually represent questions about the future of modern society.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the concept of *family strategies*? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this concept?
2. What is meant by the process of *family reproduction*? What are the specific components of this process?
3. What are the similarities and the differences among the activities of *family economies, family wage economies,* and *family consumer economies*?
4. Why have historians criticized interpretations that see an industrial revolution as responsible for the transition from "traditional" to "modern" families in Canada?
5. Why was instability a common characteristic of many nineteenth-century families?
6. How has the role of kinship changed during the course of the social and economic changes after 1850?
7. How was increasing school attendance related to the changing context of families in the late nineteenth century?
8. How are contemporary ideals of men and women similar to and different from those associated with the cult of true womanhood?
9. Why do many historians now insist on using the expression "the history of families" rather than the "history of the family"?
10. Do you think families have become less important with the development of major institutions of business, health, education, and welfare? Or are families today simply important in different ways?