



Family

10

Learning Objectives

After having read chapter 10, you will be able to

- distinguish between different family and household forms.
- describe nine central changes in Canadian families.
- discuss the ways in which families in Québec differ from families in the rest of Canada.
- compare and contrast different conjugal roles.
- explain the difference between endogamy and exogamy using examples.
- describe how immigration patterns and policies shaped the structure and functioning of immigrant families.
- provide examples of government policies that negatively impacted the structure and functioning of Indigenous families in Canada.

Chapter Summary

Family forms have always been diverse. Traditionally, sociologists have contrasted the **nuclear family**, consisting of a parent or parents and children, with the **extended family**, including relatives beyond the nuclear family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. An alternative and more neutral distinction is that between simple and complex households. A **simple household** consists of unrelated adults, with or without children (e.g., a single adult or cohabitating couple with or without children). A **complex household** includes two or more adults who are related, but not married to each other and hence could reasonably be expected to live separately (e.g., parents living with their adult children or adult siblings living together).

Over the last few decades, the structure and function of Canadian families have changed considerably. Nine major changes to the Canadian family are identified:

1. The marriage rate is decreasing while the cohabitation rate is increasing. The **crude marriage rate**, the number of marriages per 1,000 people, is decreasing. The number of **common-law** (or cohabiting) unions, on the other hand, is rising. Almost 48 per cent of Canadians over the age of 18 were married in 2015, while just over 11 per cent lived in common-law unions.

2. The average age at first marriage has been increasing steadily for men and women.
3. There are more divorces overall, but the divorce rate itself is falling, which is, in part, a function of fewer people getting married.
4. Choices surrounding parenthood are changing. More and more women delay bearing children and an increasing number of women are in their thirties when they give birth for the first time.
5. The **total fertility rate** of Canadian women, defined as average number of children a cohort of women age 15–49 will have, has been in decline. The fertility rate has now dropped below the **replacement rate**, the rate at which children must be born to maintain the current population.
6. Related to the declining fertility rate, couples without children now outnumber couples with children.
7. While the metaphor of the **empty nest** suggests that parents have to readjust once their children have moved out, an increasing number of adult children are living now with their parents for longer periods of time due to prolonged education, high costs of living, and later age at marriage. This phenomenon is referred to as the **cluttered nest**.
8. The number of lone-parent families has been steadily increasing since the 1960s, which is concerning as the poverty rate of lone-parent families, particularly female-headed ones, is high.
9. There are also more people living alone than in the past, with the highest rate being among those 85 and older.

Statistically speaking, families in Quebec are distinct from families in the rest of Canada. In 2005, Quebec families had the lowest marriage, the highest cohabitation, and divorce rates. As a consequence, Quebec sees the highest rate of births to single mothers. The Québécois also have high rates of approval for pre- and extramarital sex, as well as for same sex marriage. It seems that, as Quebec has gone through a rapid process of modernization in recent decades, it is at the forefront of redefining family, along with other political, religious, and educational institutions.

Conjugal (or marital) roles are the distinctive roles of the husband and wife that result from the division of labour within the family. British sociologist Elizabeth Bott (1957) categorized these roles as either **segregated**, where tasks, interests, and activities being clearly different, or **joint**, where many tasks, interests, and activities being shared. More recently, Canadian sociologist Rod Beaujot (2000) looked at roles as either **complementary roles** (Bott's segregated roles) with one partner doing paid work and the other responsible for housework and childcare or **companionate roles** (Bott's joint roles) with both partners working outside the home and sharing in housework. Beaujot noted that a shift is occurring from complementary to companionate roles, though it is far from complete. Moreover, gender and family roles vary from one cultural group to the next, and consequently some ethnic groups adhere more to complementary roles than others. Married women do more total work than married men, particularly more unpaid work. The additional responsibility for the majority housework on top of paid work is referred to as the **double burden**, or **second shift**. The term **double ghetto** describes the marginalization of working women experience inside and outside the home. Women's responsibility for childcare contributes to **occupational segregation**, with women choosing to work in fields that have the greatest flexibility for **work interruptions** related to childcare. Such jobs, however, pay lower wages and provide fewer advancement opportunities.

Endogamy is the practice of marrying within one's ethnic, religious, or cultural group. This contrasts with **exogamy**, which is marrying outside one's group. Support for exogamy in Canada is increasing. However, there is a strong tradition among some ethnic groups to practice endogamy. Both immigrant and indigenous families have been negatively affected by Canadian policies. Head taxes and immigration restrictions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prevented Chinese and South Asian families from reuniting in Canada. Canadian sociologists Ann Duffy and Nancy Mandell note that women of colour who came to Canada as domestic workers have been denied family through immigration policies, which have often required that women be single and childless in order to come to and stay in Canada.

Racist government policies targeting Indigenous Canadians have often focused directly and indirectly on the family. For example, during the early twentieth century, Indian Agents withheld food rations to enforce monogamy. Indigenous families were also affected by policies of forced sexual sterilization (considered a form of **genocide** by the United Nations). Reflecting a belief in **eugenics**, a form of **scientific racism**, sterilization laws were passed in Alberta (The Sexual Sterilization Act, 1928–72) and British Columbia to prevent those deemed “mentally defective” from reproducing. Indigenous and Métis people accounted for a disproportionately high number of those sterilized, with eastern European immigrants also targeted. Later, **Residential Schools** were created to keep Indigenous children away from the (assumed harmful) influence of their parents. Starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing through the 1980s, this system kept children at boarding schools for most, if not all, of the year and discouraged parents from visiting, thus leading to long-term family separation and estrangements. Children sent to these schools were often physically, emotionally, and sexually abused by staff. Beginning in the 1960s, Indigenous children were also taken from their families through a practice known as the **Sixties Scoop**, which involved removing Indigenous children from their communities and placing them in non-Indigenous adoptive or foster homes.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the different types of family. Where does your family fit in? Why? Do you feel as though your family is “typically Canadian”? Explain.
2. Discuss three of the nine major changes that are occurring in Canadian families. Provide specific examples and statistics to support your arguments.
3. In which ways is the family in Quebec sociologically distinct from the family in other parts of Canada?
4. Compare and contrast Bott's (1957) segregated and joint roles with Beaujot's (2000) complementary and companionate roles. How do these roles manifest within your family dynamic?
5. What is the difference between endogamy and exogamy? Provide examples to illustrate your answer.
6. How have immigrant families, particularly those of domestic workers, been restricted by Canadian immigration policies?
7. Discuss two of the ways in which Indigenous families in Canada been affected negatively by government policies.

Exploration and Discussion Exercises

1. As an exercise, watch the film *American Beauty* (1999). What does this movie tell you about the differences between families? Does this movie simply outline one deviant group of individuals or does it suggest that every family has underlying issues (some more serious than others)? Identify the types of families outlined in the movie. Can you relate to any of the situations faced by these individuals? How is your family similar/different?
2. In contrast to this representation of the North American family, now watch the documentary *Baka: The People of the Rainforest* (1987). What does this movie tell you about the family dynamics of hunters and gatherers? What marital roles are expressed in this documentary? In what ways does the family dynamic evident among the Baka differ from the family dynamic typically seen among typical North American families?

Further Readings

Coltrane, S.R. (1989). Household Labor and the Routine Production of Gender. *Social Problems* 36(5): 473–490.

This article examines how couples share unpaid domestic labour when both work outside the home.

Ranson, G. (2001). Men at Work Change—or No Change?—in the Era of the “New Father”. *Men and Masculinities* 4(1): 3–26.

This article focuses on the relationship between men’s professional careers and fatherhood.

Canadian Human Rights Commission: Same Sex Marriages

<http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/submission-standing-committee-justice-and-human-rights-same-sex-marriages>

This website provides insights pertaining to the legalization of same-sex unions

Childless By Choice Project: <http://www.childlessbychoiceproject.com/>

This website explores the reasons behind the choice to remain child free

Thoroughly Modern Marriage: <http://www.cbc.ca/doczone/episodes/thoroughly-modern-marriage>

This documentary discusses current trends pertaining to Canadian families and provides a number of different perspectives on “the modern family.”

Generation Boomerang: <http://www.cbc.ca/doczone/episodes/generation-boomerang>

This documentary examines why young adults stay at home longer than previous generation and why some return home after graduating from university.

Flying Solo: <http://www.cbc.ca/doczone/episodes/flying-solo>

This documentary explores why an increasing number of adults chooses to remain single.

Mother Load: <http://www.cbc.ca/doczone/episodes/motherload>

This documentary illustrates the concept of the second shift. As mothers try to balance employment and family responsibilities, something has to give.

The Sterilization of Leilani Muir: https://www.nfb.ca/film/sterilization_of_leilani_muir/

In 1959, Leilani Muir was forced sterilized under the Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act. This documentary tells her story.