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A Life in Balance?
Reopening the Family-Work Debate

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INTRODUCTION

Diversifying the Model, Demystifying the Approach: The Work-Family Debate Reopened

Catherine Krull and Justyna Sempruch

Several years ago we worked at the same university and, as it happens, were introduced to each other at one of the interdepartmental meetings. That day we ended up evaluating some reports on mothering and academia, which turned out to be a trigger for exchanging our shared frustrations that centred on the failing mainstream practices of balancing work and family. As full-time working mothers with children, grandchildren, and aging parents to care for, we found ourselves bemoaning how little the state has done to resolve social and economic changes that affect families. Our conversation led then to a number of more constructive discussions at the kitchen table. The clearly dominating question was why does the workplace and home life continue to be viewed as two different and conflicting spheres? And more precisely, why does the unquestioned belief persist that these two spheres are in need of balance?

With the exception of some feminist-informed academic work, the majority of contemporary research across sociology, psychology, politics, and law continues to analyze the "conflict" as if the public and private spheres do not cross and overlap in many different ways, as if work does not indicate or involve our families and can be measured only in wages. Moreover, mainstream Canadian debates, the media, and politicians often assume an incompatibility between work and family without simultaneously considering numerous external factors such as consumerism, exposure to competition, and shrinking public support that accumulates new pressures. Even at our own universities, children have tended to be viewed as briefly visiting bodies that need to be under immediate parental supervision – and then only in emergency situations when there are no alternative caregivers. Even in the Department of Women's Studies, mothering was not necessarily a fashion.

Mothering and work have also been slowly disappearing from many Canadian research agendas, giving the false impression that women-specific family tensions are resolved. Drawing on our own lives as feminist academics, and as mothers who work at home and at the university, we have

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thought to reflect otherwise. The gendered family-work divide has never left us but, rather, has simply become less visible and certainly less discussed. This realization concerned us and, therefore, one of the prevailing reasons for this endeavour was to revisit feminist understandings of this complex dynamic and to address a missing focus on positive research and policy outcomes, especially those deriving from a model based on the diversity of care needs.

Our starting point was to address contemporary research that overwhelmingly centres on the act of "reconciling" family and work and on "striking a balance" between these two incompatible spheres. Despite numerous feminist studies about the decline of the employment norm and the contract between genders (that is, the male breadwinner–dependent female caregiver exchange), the normative heterosexual family model continues to be the reference point in current mainstream thinking and policy making. Self-help books line the shelves of Canadian bookstores, advising readers, especially women, on how to achieve a healthy "balance" between employment and family. Paid work (employment) and unpaid work (caregiving and household work) are set against each other, as if they are components of a zero-sum game. Moreover, household duties and looking after children or other dependent family members are primarily depicted as emotional and spontaneous acts of caring, cast as an altruistic sacrifice that we make out of love and concern for our families. Although these acts of caring remain important, "actual" work is rarely thought to take place in the family. Thus, allowing family pressures to interfere with one's employment is assumed to be costly for the employer, and it communicates incompetence on the part of the employee. Conversely, reducing our time at these tasks because of paid-work responsibilities is often construed as cheating our families – and ourselves.

Following these thoughts, we aimed to address the artificiality of such thinking in the context of Canadian societal structures that perpetuate erroneous assumptions about work, as well as about its neo-liberal functions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Eventually, we collected enough material to come up with the book's objective: to expose dichotomous thinking about family and work by the systematic demystification of the divide. By no means did we hope to be all-inclusive but, rather, our intention from the onset has been to reopen the work-family debate from a new philosophical angle. Therefore, this book aims to fill the interstice in critical literature on the so-called reconciliation agenda and to define a common theoretical ground on which to discuss the interdependence of paid work and family life. Ultimately, we formulated specific objectives, the first of which was to re-examine the persistent ways in which the dichotomy of family and work is perpetuated by the assumed contradiction. Our second objective was to critically assess why current approaches to the family and work balance are

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inadequate and fail to meet the diverse needs of caregivers. The third objective was to examine new ways in which various approaches to family and work, including Quebec's agenda, can be instructive in building a national childcare policy. Our final objective was to provide a feminist-informed discussion on how family care-work integration can be achieved.

Early in our discussions, we also understood that our work would have to involve theoretically diverse positions and, hence, it would need to become a collection of chapters by specialists in the field. We carefully selected eminent Canadian scholars to expand on the debates from a care-centred approach. This we felt would provide the policy framework through which to address the interdependence of work and family, while reflecting the diversity found in both. Care work in our collection has therefore become a combined issue of the continuous alterations in family arrangements and the changing norms of employment that create new challenges for the workplace. Clearly, then, such diversified care-centrism required the involvement of a meaningful interdisciplinary exchange, which was subsequently classified into three specific yet interrelated sections of this book.

Many concepts found in the family and work literature – reconciliation, balance, conflict, integration – originate with the notion of a division that is in need of resolution. We begin the book with a chapter written by Catherine Krull that illuminates this paradox, destabilizes the nuclear family concept and other related binaries, and discusses possible consequences for Canadian policy making. It is an apt place to commence demystifying the family-work contradiction. The chapter targets the underlying but clearly outdated middle-class assumption that one contributes to family life either through paid work outside the home or through unpaid family care. The necessity to opt for one or the other part of the equation speaks to two issues: the problem that one is simply made to *choose* between family and professional employment, and a subsequent long-familiar frustration that one cannot do both. The concept of choice also implies or assumes equality, which renders socially generated inequality invisible. Despite the diversities clearly experienced across families, workplaces, and political institutions today, the postwar model continues to be supported by current policy research, which typically discusses "reconciliation" and "conflict," reinforcing socio-cultural significations of the separate family and work spheres. All this might explain why current feminist critiques incessantly focus on the negative policy outcomes of work and family reconciliation. In the absence of profound shifts in public policy regarding the nexus between family life and the economy of the labour market, the qualities based on the nuclear family model in Canada are clearly decreasing.

In this theoretical vein, Part 1, "Transcending the Prevailing Myths," addresses the need for developing barometers of change across Canadian

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communities. Such a move requires that we abandon discussions that posit the gender contract as an economic institution of family wage – as has been the case since the Second World War. In the Canadian past, as in those of other Western societies, the gender contract was the reason why informal care was not considered work as opposed to formal and less formal caregiving jobs. The gender contract structured the division between paid "productive" labour and unpaid domestic work. As presumed by postwar policy makers, the labour market has been based on the vast majority of men being in secure, full-time wage employment and on economically "inactive" women taking care of households or, otherwise, being in the labour market as supplementary workers. In contradistinction to such a clearly upper-middle-class-oriented model, single-parent households or culturally different family scenarios have been neglected. Today, the gender contract is only superficially maintained by numerous change-resistant mainstream beliefs. Examples of such beliefs are that the family as a basic social form is in decline, or that family time is in short supply as employed mothers neglect their children. The same presumptions maintain that women are natural caregivers, whereas other care models, often utilized by immigrant, ethnic, or racialized families, are somehow inferior.

Consequently, the co-written chapter by Nancy Mandell and Sue Wilson and the chapter by Maureen Baker discuss the complexities and transformations of family and work. As this new research suggests, studying family life is not about examining decline; it is about understanding the various meanings of diversity and liberalization, as well as the inevitable adjustments governed by the free market economy. What is certainly declining is the norm of the nuclear family modelled on a white, middle-class, heterosexual couple with children. Although many mothers have already begun to shift the boundaries of domestic work, grandparents and other family members have usually been excluded and continue not to be acknowledged for their participation in the private sphere. An increasing number of middle-aged women provide simultaneous care for their children, their grandchildren, and their step-grandchildren.

With this picture in mind, the central part of the book, Part 2, "Integrating Family and Work," is dedicated to the ongoing challenges and diversification of family dilemmas. To understand the vulnerability with which many Canadian families live today, we begin with a chapter focused on rebuilding communities. Donna Baines and Bonnie Freeman reflect on the impact of colonialism and the collective trauma of the First Nations with respect to indigenous meanings of care. In the context of cultural healing, sustenance, and connection, care transcends the typical family models and becomes a natural continuum between home and community. Margrit Eichler's exegesis follows a similar mode of continuum, which she applies to learning opportunities that derive from household and care work – often indispensable in

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paid work. A significant body of literature demonstrates that the performance of unpaid work has a deleterious effect on paid work; Eichler's research questions these results by examining the very skills learned through unpaid work at home that are transferable to the marketplace. Worldwide, very few studies have involved such analysis, and one might conclude with the question of why such substantial knowledge acquisition has not been widely acknowledged in the employment sector.

Indeed, the expectation of overtime, mobility, and general work flexibility, so typical for care work at home, has become characteristic of many career trajectories. Yet neither opportunity for mobility and flexible time nor actual access to paid employment is equal for all parents. The blanket approach for Canadian working parents, resulting from the over-reliance on general and often deregulated rights, is not only gender-blind but also seriously incapable of integrating and harmonizing the dynamics of work and family. In particular, there is a fair amount of discontinuity between the changing structure of employment and actual women's employment patterns. Census data and the observations of our own immediate environment equally confirm that women contribute the lion's share of unpaid work, along with non-standard work, contract work, telecommuting, and multiple job holding.

Drawing on these economic transformations and the fast-forward growth of information technology, Ann Duffy and Norene Pupo's chapter focuses on the shifting norms and deregulation of employment in the Canadian labour market. What their research reveals is that Canadian families increasingly experience a wide diversity of employment forms that are often characterized by insecurity, discontinuity, and intensification of demands – already reflected in the long processes of attaining formal education and in the unpredictable daily hours at paid employment.

Another interesting transformation in Canadian families in the past four decades has been the rising number of stay-at-home fathers and the increasing role of women as primary breadwinners. As Andrea Doucet's chapter reveals, policy supports, community programs, and ideological conceptions that support fathers' participation in caregiving are in high demand. In some significant ways, of course, other ideological conceptions based on the supposed universality of the male breadwinner hinder such participation. Meeting the demands of paid and unpaid work is particularly interesting in the context of Quebec's approach to policy, known as the most child- and family-friendly policy in Canada. Drawing on lessons the rest of Canada might take from Quebec, Patrizia Albanese's work analyzes major difficulties in balancing the demands of a free market economy, childcare, and other family obligations.

Following these intersections of theory and research, we ultimately arrive at the question of how we can learn from all these findings and propositions. In other words, where can we go from here? The final part of this book

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attempts to set possible directions, and it concerns specifically feminist-informed family initiatives and family visions that draw on the ethics of care and politics, as well as on the philosophy of diversity and difference. The chapters therein reflect on the key theoretical tensions that arise for scholars conducting research on mothers, fathers, and care within families. Justyna Sempruch's chapter, grounded distinctively in the philosophy of care, discusses gender subjectivity as crucial to feminist critiques of care practice. As she argues, masculinity and femininity do not necessarily imply any exclusiveness of actual gender. Rather, the simultaneity of gender positions no longer privileges women as those with exclusionary access to reproduction, nor men as those in control of the "productive" economy, allowing for an argument that fathers can also be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order. So long as care work policies do not include formulated gender flexibility, caregivers will continue to battle against exclusion carried out informally where formal restrictions are now illegal and specific policy actions in favour of care are required. In fact, as Justyna Sempruch concludes, gender flexibility recognizes and redistributes value across the public and private spheres, refusing the caregivers' exclusion from economic and political relevance.

The extent to which concepts such as flexibility and gender simultaneity have been adopted by the present working culture needs our attention on several fronts. Judy Fudge reveals that although we have more work flexibility than ever before, working parents, mostly mothers, continue to experience serious time pressures. The double burden and time crunches have certainly not disappeared from Canadian households. One of the key elements, to follow Judy Fudge, is to develop a more equitable distribution of paid and unpaid labour while shifting paid working-time norms in a direction that better accommodates and values care work. Revising hours of work, especially overtime, is as important as revising occupational exclusions, part-time work, and flexibility itself.

Finally, one must not forget that traditional cultural values and normative assumptions about caregiving as unpaid labour most profoundly affect single mothers. Margaret Hillyard Little's chapter informs, in this respect, with the theme of the increasing invisibility of mothering dilemmas. Competing policy agendas and current labour practices have often counteracted recent Canadian programs promoting maternal employment. Although political discourse today focuses on children as a "future resource," politicians continue to encourage low-wage work without ensuring high-quality care for employees' children. Likewise, the growing gap between the income of poor single mothers and the state's expectations reveals that neo-liberal welfare regulations do not aim at decentralizing the normative practice. Margaret Little's research concludes that discussions of child poverty are both erroneous and unethical, for it is the parents who are and remain poor. The only

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ethical turn is to ask why a large number of Canadian parents are poor and why most of them tend to be female. Consequently, feminist examinations of the legal regulation of working-time and working practices in Canada are instrumental in evaluating the regulatory regime and its contribution to various work-family conflicts.

Our concluding perspective presents, therefore, a feminist vision for the integration of family and work, based on a political ethic of care and allowing for a clear picture of where we should go from here with responsibilities for care work. If gender, in its full complexity, is to be understood as a set of social relations that shape access to variously defined citizenship rights in their sexual, socio-cultural, and political dimensions, then all three aspects must be targeted simultaneously. Consequently, it is not care work alone but, foremost, its complex intermingling with market work that we believe is providing fodder for the national and provincial governments and their policy agendas. A pivotal proposal initiated by this book is, therefore, a call for a renewed understanding of social citizenship that politically embodies and promotes equality without sacrificing the health and stability of Canadian society. These aspirations, integrated in Susan McDaniel's epilogue, are neither mutually exclusive nor impossible to attain. Addressing them as such necessitates, however, a culturally integrative and cross-societal positioning that until now has not been sufficiently researched. With this book, we have demonstrated this necessity.

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Part 1
Transcending the Prevailing Myths

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1
Destabilizing the Nuclear Family Ideal: Thinking beyond Essentialisms, Universalism, and Binaries

Catherine Krull

The nuclear family, composed of a heterosexual husband and wife and their biological children, has long been thought to be the ideal family structure in Canada. Nowhere is this more evident than in our various social resources and policies – government benefits, public policies, laws, national censuses, the structuring of employment and schools, access to contraception and reproductive technologies, pensions, and more – all of which have been fashioned on the assumption that the nuclear family structure is not only ideal but also representative of most Canadian families. Implementation of these social resources and policies in turn reinforces the normative nuclear family ideology. Despite growing family diversity in Canada, this hegemonic family form has permeated our collective understanding of the ideal family. According to a national survey, most Canadians view the traditional nuclear family as "the most recognizable and most preferred family form" (Bibby 2004, 10). As a normative ruler, all non-nuclear family forms become conceptualized as "special" or "other." Terminology such as "broken families," "blended families," and "reconstituted families" makes sense only if such forms are understood in reference to the ideal, namely, the normative nuclear family.

Idealizing the nuclear family form, centred on the male breadwinner–dependent wife caregiver binary, has meant that even after decades of feminism, family care work – domesticity – and paid market work remain bifurcated and deeply gendered. As such, these two types of work have emerged in the public imaginary as distinct, incompatible, and in need of careful balance; as a consequence of seeking this balance, women's and men's full participation in both family care work and paid work has been impeded. Mothers in particular often feel conflicted in trying to achieve the neo-liberal image of the ideal worker while struggling to measure up to the normative nuclear family ideology of good motherhood. Many women therefore continue to be marginalized in the workforce, and their family care work is rendered invisible. Contemporary fathers, on the other hand, experience difficulties

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living up to the masculine breadwinner ideal – often feeling conflicted between time spent at their employment and time spent with family members.

Such gender ideologies have sustained the private-public binaries of work. Narratives of men's and women's disparate yet complementary experiences within the private-public domains are essentialist in that they are linked to the "confines of the nature, essence or biology of the two sexes" (Grosz 1995, 49; see also Grosz 2005). The sexual division of social roles has therefore been rendered natural, necessary, and politically justified. Essentialist approaches to family life disregard diverse and fluid understandings of family and work across ethnicity, geographic location, class, sexuality, and generations. In assuming that women's experiences within families are more or less similar, family experts have typically failed to take into account that "gender is different as lived and imagined by different social groups" (Williams 2000, 145). Moreover, essentialist rationalizations persist despite feminists repeatedly pointing out that women's subordination is not because of biological differences but, rather, because of the meanings that are attributed to those differences (J. Butler 1993). As Cornell (2005, 35) argues, it is the capacity to give life that "is used to justify our treatment as lesser beings, not truly worthy of personhood."

This chapter focuses on the complex legacy of the normative nuclear family model, an apt place to begin this book on demystifying the family-work contradiction. The first section outlines important changes that have contributed to increased family diversity in Canada over the past few decades. A discussion then ensues over the often heated and contradictory interpretations of these transformations in family life. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the socially constructed family-work binary might be overcome by formulating new understandings of family and work. A necessary step toward this end is to destabilize the nuclear family concept by exposing, examining, and challenging its underlying assumptions and the implications they have on performing family care work and paid market work. In this way, the legitimacy of the gendered family work-market binary and ideas of family and work as irreconcilable entities to be balanced can be exposed and challenged.

Changing Family Trends

Although the majority of Canadians – about 84 percent – still prefer to live as families, significant changes have been taking place in the forms that these families take (Lewis 2003). The traditional nuclear family is certainly not as prevalent as it once was; only 17 percent of all census families were classified as nuclear families in 2006 (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007).[1] According to Clarence Lockhead, executive director of the Vanier Institute of the Family, "Even when you look at families today, who may on the surface

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have the appearance of looking like those stereotypical, traditional families of the past, there's probably many, many ways in which those families are quite different" (Canadian Press 2007).

Marriage's popularity has also been waning. Although married-couple families remain the most common type of family, the proportion of such families relative to other family types has been decreasing for the past twenty years. In 1986, married-couple families accounted for 80 percent of all Canadian families; today, they account for 69 percent. Crude marriage rates have hit record lows; there are now only 4.7 marriages for every 1,000 people across the country, except for Quebec, where the rate is even lower – 2.8 marriages for every 1,000 people (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007). And marriages are less enduring – approximately 38 percent of marriages are expected to end in divorce by the thirtieth wedding anniversary (Statistics Canada 2005a). Consequently, an ever-increasing number of Canadian children do not live with both parents in the same household. Between 1986 and 2006, the percentage of children under age fourteen who lived with married parents decreased from approximately 81 percent to about 66 percent. Likewise, between 2001 and 2006, the percentage of lone-parent families in Canada increased from 13 to 16 percent, and the majority of these families were headed by women (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007). Moreover, the percentage of repeat divorces, involving persons previously divorced at least once, has tripled in the past three decades (Statistics Canada 2005a).

Although the popularity of marriage has waned, the appeal of cohabitation has grown: between 1986 and 2006, the percentage of common-law-couple families increased from 7 to 15.5 percent (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007). Cohabitation rates are particularly high in Quebec, where almost 30 percent of all couples live common law, compared with 12 percent in the rest of Canada (ibid.). There is also greater social acceptance of unmarried women having children – the number of lone parents never legally married increased from 1.5 percent in 1950 to 29.5 percent in 2006 (ibid.). The total fertility rate, however, remains well below replacement level, hovering at 1.5 children per woman. Unprecedented in Canada, there are now more census families composed of couples without children than those with children – 43 and 41 percent, respectively. On the other hand, the number of adult children who are living in the parental home – often well into their twenties – has increased dramatically, and the transition to adulthood is taking longer to complete (Clark 2007). Because young people now tend to leave home for less secure reasons – to attend university or to live on their own, rather than to get married or to take on employment – approximately one-third will return home within five years (Mahoney 2006). According to Turcotte (2006, 2), the number of adults between the ages of twenty and twenty-four who live with their parents increased from 40 percent in 1981 to almost 60 percent twenty years later.

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Family diversity has also been enhanced because of the incredible change in the ways that individuals can become parents, including in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, sperm banks, transnational and transracial adoption, and implanting frozen embryos. Although there appears to be a multitude of reproductive choices, accessibility tends to be regulated along gender, class, sexuality, and racial lines (Bartholet 2005; Fogg-Davis 2005; Haslanger and Witt 2005; Roberts 2005; Davis 2001).

Another epic change contributing to family diversity in Canada is the legalization of same-sex marriages. After several years of public debate, the Civil Marriage Act (Bill C-38) was passed in Canada on 20 July 2005, making Canada the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.[2] The 2006 Canadian Census reported that 45,300 same-sex couples lived in Canada and, of these, approximately 7,500 (16.5 percent) were married and 37,900 (83.5 percent) were common law. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of same-sex couples increased by about 33 percent, more than five times the growth observed for opposite-sex couples, and in 2006, approximately 9 percent reported that they had children (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007). The first divorce of a same-sex married couple took place in September 2004. Interestingly, the initial divorce application was denied because the federal Divorce Act defines a spouse as "either of a man or a woman who are married to each other." Eventually, the Ontario Superior Court ruled that the federal definition of "spouse" in the Divorce Act was unconstitutional.

Family diversity is also significantly enhanced by the cultural and ethnic composition of immigrant families coming to Canada. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the number of ethnic groups has grown from approximately twenty-five to more than two hundred (Statistics Canada 2006c). There are about 6.2 million foreign-born people currently living in Canada, an increase of more than 13 percent since 2001 (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007). This means that about one in five (19.8 percent) of the total population is foreign born, the highest proportion reported in seventy-five years (Statistics Canada 2008b). Moreover, since the 1960s, when the Canadian government removed race and place of origin from immigration criteria, there has been a striking shift in the countries of origin of new Canadians, accounting for a significant increase in the number of individuals belonging to visible minorities.[3] Between 2001 and 2006, the percentage of visible minority Canadians increased five times faster than the general population. Today, more than 5 million people, approximately 16 percent of the Canadian population, belong to the visible minority population, a significant increase from 1981, when 1 million people (4.7 percent of the population) were considered visible minorities. The majority of recent immigrants (84 percent) were born in non-European countries, and almost 60 percent originated from Asia – including the Middle East – a high figure compared with the period before 1960, when only 2.4 percent of newcomers came from

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this region but almost 90 percent came from Europe. There have also been substantial increases in immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and South America (Statistics Canada 2008a). More than 70 percent of the foreign-born population report a language other than English or French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2008b). Canada's family diversity is also enhanced by approximately 300,000 interracial marriages or common-law relationships, which is nearly 30 percent more than in 2001 (Weeks 2008).

Of course, changes in market work have had a significant impact on Canadian families. This has been particularly the case for women, who no longer typically leave their employment when they begin to have children. The male breadwinner and family wage model of work – forty-eight hours for forty-eight weeks of forty-eight years – has ceased to characterize most paid market work (Siltanen and Doucet 2008, 98). So-called non-standard forms of employment have become more widespread, including part-time work, temporary employment, and self-employment, all typically characterized by low wages, lack of job security, and little access to employment benefits. In fact, a large portion of these jobs have been filled by women: "In 2002, women accounted for more than six in ten of those employed in part-time temporary jobs or part-time self-employment, and for nearly three-quarters of part-time permanent employees" (ibid.). Although women's labour force participation has increased enormously – almost 60 percent of women age fifteen and older are employed – the types of jobs in which they are overrepresented have not changed; they continue to have fewer opportunities but more constraints in the workforce, and they continue to earn less than men. In terms of an average hourly wage, women receive less than men in all occupations (ibid., 105), and women also continue to do most of the unpaid household and family care work (Daly 2004a, 2004b; Baker 2001; Benzanson 2006).

Globalization has also had a decided impact on family structures. With increased international trade and exchange, national boundaries have become increasingly fluid. Numerous men and women regularly cross borders to live and work as easily as they once travelled to different cities in the same country (Krull 2006b). Consequently, transnational families have become commonplace, although their experiences vary by ethnicity, gender, country of origin, and occupational class.[4] For example, based on interviews of transnational families in Vancouver, British Columbia, Waters (2002, 118) found that they exemplify "the ways in which social relationships can operate over significant distance, spanning national borders, and reducing the importance of face-to-face context in personal interaction." But whereas migration tends to be empowering for men, women tend to view it as a necessary sacrifice for their children rather than as a way to improve their own life chances (Dreby 2006; Lan 2003).

Global market demands for low-wage female domestic and service labour have resulted in women from developing countries leaving their own

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children and spouses to take on domestic work in another country. This trend in transnational mothering has disrupted the notion of family in one place: "Transnational mothers are improvising new mothering arrangements that are borne out of women's financial struggles, played out in a new global arena, to provide the best future for themselves and their children" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, 567).[5] Globalization might have increased flexibility in the labour markets and, in eroding the material conditions for the male-breadwinner system, produced greater equality between professional men and women, but it has also created new forms of marginality (Dreby 2006; Krull 2006b; Lan 2003; Young 2001) and an international division of gendered reproductive labour (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Salazar Parreñas 2001, 2005, 2008).

Interpreting Changing Family Trends

There is intense debate over how to interpret these changes in Canadian families. As Vincent (1966, 31) recognized in the mid-1960s, "Since the earliest writing available, changes occurring in the institution of the family have been used and interpreted to support either an optimistic or a pessimistic premise concerning social change, and the pessimists have consistently outnumbered the optimists." Whereas some view the contemporary transformation in Canadian families as requisite change in a move toward equity and greater tolerance of family diversity, others regard it as an indication of family decline.

Proponents of the family-in-decline perspective argue that increases in the number of divorces, single parents, and absent fathers, along with the legalization of same-sex marriages, are indicative of the eroding institution of marriage and the two-parent heterosexual nuclear family. Accordingly, increasing individualism, the rise of feminism, and a weakening in religiosity and moral consciousness are held accountable for the breakdown in family values, which have placed children at greater risk of experiencing behavioural problems. As Walker (2003, 407) reasons, "Political debates about marriage and divorce are at their most intense when effects on children are discussed, and deeply held moral, religious, and political views tend to dominate the agenda. Thus, children are viewed as the innocent victims of their parents' selfish behavior."

Neo-conservative narratives advocating for a return to traditional family values have infused Canadian politics for some time. Dave Quist, executive director of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, insists that "a first priority [of the federal Conservative government led by Stephen Harper] should be to change the tax rules so only married couples – not those living common law – are allowed to split their incomes, thereby reducing their tax hit" (Greenaway 2007). And in the 2007 Ontario provincial election, the Family Coalition Party ran a record number of candidates in eighty-three

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electoral districts. Its platform was based on strengthening nuclear families and the traditional values of marriage (see its website for a description of party family policies); election results indicated that more than thirty-five thousand Ontario residents agreed with them (FCPO 2010; Diebel 2007). Likewise, Ted Morton, a former University of Calgary political science professor and now Alberta's minister of finance and enterprise maintained: "After years of producing research that helped to weaken civil society, social scientists are finally recognizing the social and economic value of the traditional family and the moral infrastructure that it helps to sustain" (Morton 1998). Recently, Morton proposed Bill 208, which would have legislated that "information about G/L/B/T [gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals] not be allowed in schools; marriage commissionaires could opt out of performing same-sex marriages; and, a person expressing their opinions and ideas about homosexuality could not have a claim of discrimination brought against them" (Cournoyer 2006). The then Alberta premier, Ralph Klein, supported the bill and justified his position by asserting that Bill 208 was simply an "extension of existing government policies" (Klein 2006).

And although assisted reproductive technologies allow the possibility of transcending the state-informed heterosexual, nuclear, monogamous family (Satz 2007; Spar 2006; Cornell 2005; Haslanger 2005; Throsby and Gill 2004), new technologies have primarily been used to reproduce normative understandings of family. Baker (2005), for example, found in her study on infertility that despite the potential of reproductive technologies to radicalize families, they have often been used by middle-class couples for the purpose of creating nuclear families. And, reflecting the high value that is placed on children who are genetically related, there is a booming industry in reproductive services, whereas adoption continues to be viewed as "a clearly inferior way of forming a family" (Satz 2007, 525).

Given the increasing family diversity in Canada, the nuclear family exists more as an ideal than an actuality (Fox 2009; Ranson 2010). And as an ideal, deviations become indicative of "family decline," their very difference justifying public scrutiny and surveillance (Little and Marks 2010). As such, they are regarded as being in need of resocialization to conform to the normative form (ibid. 1999). However, the argument that families and family values are in decline rests primarily on three flawed assumptions: (1) the normative nuclear family model is superior to all other family forms, (2) families were more stable in the past, and (3) families are declining in importance to Canadians.

Outcomes of Privileging the Nuclear Family

Despite research indicating that marriage, mothering, fathering, domesticity, and work have very different meanings for different communities and, therefore, are highly contested categories (Baines 2004a, 2004b; Collins 1990,

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2000; Das Gupta 2000; Smith 1987), the normative nuclear form is privileged in Canada. Even in non-normative families, such as single-mother families, the nuclear family ideal can have a powerful impact in shaping interactions and expectations among family members (Nelson 2006b).

Not replicating the hegemonic family structure has had devastating consequences for many marginalized communities in Canada (see Baines 2004a, 2004b; Das Gupta 2000; Dua 1999; Walmsley 2006). Residential schools for Aboriginal children, the Sixties Scoop, and foster care are cases in point. The primary objective of earlier government policies was to purge Aboriginal children of all traditional cultural identifiers. And they were successful – of fifty distinct Aboriginal languages once spoken in Canada, only three are now considered secure: Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibwa. And despite decades of documented atrocities committed against Aboriginal children at residential schools – mental, physical, and sexual abuse – the federal government did not close the last residential school until 1996 (Krull 2006b, 2010; Das Gupta 2000). Aboriginal children continue to constitute the largest percentage of children in foster care in Canada – approximately 40 percent – which means that about 5 percent of all Aboriginal children are still being removed from their homes (Canadian Press 2008).

The result of Canadian federal policies has been a legacy of trauma with which First Nations people are still trying to cope. In addition to generations of family breakdown caused by the residential school system and forced adoption, many Aboriginal communities suffer the lowest living standard of any other family group in the country and have suicide rates two to seven times that of the national population (Beaujot and Kerr 2004; Beavon and Cooke 2003). And it took until June 2008 for the federal government, under Prime Minister Harper, to properly acknowledge and apologize for federal policies that devastated the families of Aboriginal peoples: "We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow ... The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of aboriginal peoples for failing them so badly" (Curry and Galloway 2008).

In privileging the nuclear family, the growing importance of multi-generational bonds (Bengtson 2001) and created family bonds (Cherlin 1999; Stacey 1996; Collins 2004) are disregarded. The value of the extended family in terms of social identity, economic support, and psychological nurturing for many immigrant and Aboriginal families cannot be overstated. Kin networks of First Nations people are twice as extensive as those of other Canadians (Fiske and Johnny 2003; Strain and Chappell 1989), and it is not unusual for First Nations people to identify over fifty different familial relationships among people living with them (Buchignani and Armstrong-Esther 1999). Many black families include multi-generational relatives, as well as

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members of the community. Black communities have historically distinguished between the fluid meanings of a blood mother (the biological mother of a child) and other mothers (women in the family and community who share the mothering responsibilities of a child). Bell hooks (2000, 144) also points out that other mothering "is revolutionary in this society because it takes place in opposition to the ideas that parents, especially mothers, should be the only childrearers." However, the subordination of blacks in Canada has often been rationalized and reinforced by their portrayal as promiscuous and less deserving of parenthood (Calliste 2003). Multi-generational bonds have also been important to many minority immigrant groups in Canada. Yet, despite liberal changes to immigration policy, minority immigrant groups continue to face barriers to their participation in family life. Canada's immigration policies continue to privilege the nuclear family form by restricting which immigrants count as family members.

Indeed, Bengtson (2001, 5) argues that for many families in North America, "multigenerational bonds are becoming more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the course of their lives." And because of changing family demographics, like high divorce rates and increased longevity, a significant number of grandparents have become primary caregivers for their grandchildren, a phenomenon known as skip-generation households. In Canada, over 56,000 grandparents are raising their grandchildren on their own, and two-thirds of these grandparents are women (Statistics Canada 2004a). Bengtson (2001, 12, 14) concludes that there is little evidence to support the family-in-decline argument: "Families continue to perform their socialization function across successive generations, transmitting aspirations, values and self-esteem, even when parents are divorced ... the increasing prevalence and importance of multigenerational bonds represents a valuable new resource for families in the 21st century." This conclusion echoes the research of Levin (2004) and Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) on partners who are not living together, Pahl and Spencer's work (2004) on "personal communities," Stacey's study (2004) on creative "families of choice," and McDaniel's work (2004, 2008) on intergenerational transfers.

An additional outcome of idealizing nuclear families is that inequities within these families are often rendered invisible. Depending on gender and age, there tends to be significant differences among members of nuclear families in terms of power and access to resources. Le Bourdais, Lapierre-Adamcyk, and Lapierre-Adamcyk (2004, 940) assert: "Families remain, to this day, the last places where equality between men and women does not seem to be fully recognized" (see also Eichler 1997a, 2008). This disparity is particularly salient within power differentials associated with paid work (men's domain) and household-care work (women's domain). According to Butler (2004, 43), "A restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field

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performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption." Naturalizing the gendered distribution of power and resources renders the disparity necessary and justifies it politically.

Power differentials between family members can spill over into family violence (Sev'er 2010; Gelles 1987, 1994; Strauss and Gelles 1990; Strauss, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1986). It has often been assumed that women and children within middle- and upper-class nuclear families are more insulated from family violence, since they are less likely to experience the stress factors that plague working-class and single-parent families. However, these assumptions have been challenged by feminist scholars showing that the ostensible prevalence of family violence in poor non-nuclear families is partly due to their higher surveillance, and that the invisibility of violence in largely middle- and upper-class nuclear families has been largely due to romanticizing the nuclear family as a place of loving and supportive relationships between equals. Research indicates that women in traditional marriages who are economically dependent on their husbands are more likely to be victims of spousal assault than wives who are more independent (Baker 2010). More prosaically, rather than an outcome of family form, family resources, or other stress factors, family violence is the outcome of an inequitable distribution of power and access to resources (Sev'er 2010; Le Bourdais, Lapierre-Adamcyk, and Lapierre-Adamcyk 2004; Baker 2010; Eichler 1997a; Pence and Paymar 1993; Mackinnon 1982; O'Brien 1981).

Idealizing the nuclear family reinforces the fallacy that it operates as an independent, self-contained unit that satisfies the needs of its members and is ideally suited for raising children. But as Hansen (2005, 3) points out, this supposition ignores today's reality that both parents within the household are likely to be employed and that they "consciously and creatively construct networks of interdependence" that include having people outside their immediate families care for their children. Moreover, in presuming that the nuclear family is a self-contained unit, the contribution of domestic workers (usually women of colour) in maintaining privileged nuclear families is ignored (Iacovetta 2006; Salazar Parreñas 2008; Williams 2000). Marriage is also becoming less common and, therefore no longer provides a guarantee of stability (Le Bourdais, Lapierre-Adamcyk, and Lapierre-Adamcyk 2004, 937-38). As research indicates, children are resilient and can in most cases adapt to changes within their families, including divorce (Strohschein 2007; Walker 2003; Smart and Neale 1999).

The "Golden Age" of Family?

To believe that family values are in decline presupposes a golden age of family life, a time when "the family" was more vital, stable, and efficient than it is

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today. In North America, the 1950s is often considered to be such a time (Beaujot 2004; Smart and Neale 1999). At this time, Canadian families lived more than ever as nuclear family households – most children lived in a two-parent breadwinner-homemaker home (Milan 2000, 5), and about 20 percent lived with at least five brothers or sisters (Saccoccio 2007). For the first time in North America, nuclear family emotional bonds became valued over those of other relationships (Coontz 1997, 37; see also Coontz 1992). Accordingly, the 1950s nuclear family is thought of as the "traditional" family because it has been "discursively constructed as the way the family was before change began" – in other words, the impression has been created that "once upon a time, the family did not change" (Smart and Neale 1999, 28).

Even though the 1950s might have been more stable than preceding or following decades, it nonetheless did not constitute a golden age of family life. As Canadian historian Doug Owram (1999, 8) explains:

> The post-war family is surrounded by popular myths ... the ideal nuclear family with working father, understanding mother and lively but loving children. There is also a darker story however that descends from the second wave of feminism and from critics of the suburban wasteland. It is the story of isolated housewives and commuting husbands surrounded by tick-tacky houses and an ethic of competitive consumerism.

Three ideals became reinforced in this era – the nuclear family form, companionate marriage whereby wives and husbands are each other's best friend, and the veneration of motherhood that viewed stay-at-home mothers as best suited to raise children and maintain domestic life – all of which contributed to a framework that disguised gross gender inequities in the distribution of power and allocation of resources and disregarded class and ethnic differences (Luxton and Corman 2001, 40). Middle-class women became increasingly economically dependent on their husbands as post-Second World War government efforts purged many married women from the paid workforce by closing government-sponsored daycares and generating "propaganda claiming maternal care was the most appropriate care for children" (Luxton and Corman 2001, 48). Age of marriage decreased by approximately two years for both men and women, though women married at a younger age than men – "more than four out of every ten women were married by the age of 22" (Owram 1999, 11). An unprecedented baby boom ensued and, by 1959, women were having on average 3.9 children (Ambert 2006b, 9). Accordingly, the gap in the educational attainment of middle-class men and women significantly increased (Milan 2000; Owram 1999). With divorce difficult, divorce rates remained low – only about one in twenty marriages ended this way. As Owram (1999) spells out, divorce reform was improbable

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at a time when society believed that divorce psychologically damaged children. Moreover, women who worked typically earned half of men's average salary (Lowe 2006) – low employment rates meant that many women were isolated from most of the adult world.

But probably most damaging to women's equity was a cult-like transformation of domesticity, whereby women's worth and identity became exclusively linked to their domestic skills – the 1950s modern woman was fundamentally a wife and mother (Spencer 2006, 226; Baker 2001, 92). This assumption was reinforced by academics who exalted the gendered division of labour as progressive, inevitable, and ideal. One of the more influential scholars in this regard was sociologist Talcott Parsons, who asserted: "The importance of the family and its function for society constitutes the primary set of reasons why there is a social as distinguished from purely reproductive differentiation of sex roles ... the male adult will play the role of instrumental leader and the female adult will play the role of expressive leader" (Parsons and Bales 1955, 315, 341). According to Bradbury (2000, 216), historians contributed in constructing nuclear families as "normal" while marginalizing and even rendering invisible single-parent families. Not surprising, less than 5 percent of Canadians believed that it was acceptable for mothers to be employed outside the home (Owram 1999).

Given the family's new ascendancy, women were also bombarded with advice and even admonished by so-called family experts in the media. *Chatelaine* magazine, for example, advised women that they could be whatever they chose to be as long as their primary roles remained that of housewife and mother:

> It is important for a woman to cultivate, with ever-increasing perfections, elegance and beauty as well as the various household arts which, in our daily lives, carry on the finest French traditions ... the accomplished woman should also know a little about everything, since her destiny and that of her children are tied to the fate of the world. (Cited in Clio Collective 1987, 303; see also Spencer 2006)

Television was also culpable for reinforcing the idea of the happy well-adjusted 1950s family in which fathers were successful breadwinners and mothers were content in their self-sacrificing role as family care worker. Nowhere was this romanticized ideal better exemplified than in the fictional Cleaver family in the 1950s American television sitcom *Leave It to Beaver,* which was also popular in Canada. Ward Cleaver went to work every day after eating a wholesome breakfast prepared by his always smiling, empathetic, and well-dressed wife, June; when he returned at the end of the day, he found the house clean, dinner ready, the boys – Wally and Beaver – quietly occupied; indeed, the minute he walked through the door, his still-smiling

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wife would offer him his slippers and pipe, all problems of the day sorted out (Canadian Press 2007). As nonsensical as this sounds, *Leave It to Beaver* and other similar television programs reinforced an ideal family form that persists today.

As the expressive leader in the home, mothers became liable for any and all family dysfunctions. For example, in addressing concerns over what was perceived to be a diminishing nationalism among Canadians in the immediate post-Second World War period, women were implicated by the media for not having instilled adequate national pride in their children (Spencer 2006, 237). Women's active role as nation builders during the war years was superseded by their more passive roles as mothers and wives. For Thurer (1994, 251), "It was as if the New Woman, Rosie the Riveter, and the women's suffrage had never happened." And little tolerance existed for those who defied normative gender role expectations: "Childless couples were considered selfish, single persons were seen as deviants, working mothers were considered to be harming their children, and single women who became pregnant were expected either to marry or to give up the child for adoption" (Beaujot 2004, 7). Given this context, it is not surprising that the 1950s gave way to a resurgence of antifeminism (Cancian 2004).

The new-found prosperity, optimism, domesticity, and consumerism of the 1950s characterized primarily white, middle-class families. Discrimination against gays, non-Christians, and visible minorities was endemic throughout North America (Coontz 1997; Thurer 1994), and family diversity among these groups was often attributed to their inferior status (Luxton and Corman 2001, 40). Therefore, problems within working-class and marginalized families were rendered invisible. But problems experienced within white, middle-class nuclear families were also obscured because of the acute belief that these families were somehow exempt from such difficulties. Exasperating this was the indubitable conviction that family matters were private, even though "alcoholism, substance abuse, spousal abuse, child abuse, poverty, mental illness, stress and marital problems were all certainly present. But, at the time ... airing dirty laundry was considered shameful" (Lowe 2006). Tending to be isolated in their homes, women were rendered particularly vulnerable by this code of silence; it cut them off from any potential support from friends or community members, and victims of violence and abuse had little recourse (Beaujot 2004).

As Baker (2010) and others have pointed out, family forms were as diverse in the 1950s as they are today and just as vulnerable to family problems. Still, politicians, the media, and others who lament the demise of "the family" continue to make references to a golden age of the family – idealized and hegemonic – despite evidence to the contrary. As Luxton (1997, 11) writes, "During a period of social insecurity and disruption, arguments supporting plurality can easily appear to promise chaos while those calling for

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a return to a golden age of the 'traditional family,' however mythical it may be, appear to promise stability and security." And since rhetoric echoing fears that "the family" is in decline escalates at times of social stress, it is not surprising that this current economic crisis in North America has brought about a resurgence of defenders of "family values."

The Importance of Families Today

A third neo-conservative argument that the family is in decline pertains to the assumption that family life is diminishing in importance to Canadians. Such arguments are often tied to women's public participation. Accordingly, fertility rates and marriage rates have plummeted while divorce rates have rocketed as women "choose" the pursuit of education and their own career aspirations over prioritizing and sacrificing for their families. But as many feminists have long argued, this idea of paid work as a choice is not only incredibly sexist – men need to work, women choose to work – but it totally disregards women's lived reality, since most women also need to work. It is also telling that despite women's labour force participation, they remain primarily responsible for household work. But in spite of such evidence, the rhetoric of choice continues.

Conceiving women's paid work as a choice facilitates the myth that women must balance their responsibilities in the home with those at their place of employment if they are to be successful in both. Investing too much in one form of work would constitute losses or failures in the other. Family work and employment are thus treated as irreconcilable entities that are in need of careful balance – an approach that reinforces gendered work and negates the need for social policies that work at integrating household-care work and paid work. As Susan McDaniel points out in the Epilogue, work and family have historically been thought to be indivisible and not separate entities in need of balance: "People work and have families. The two are inextricably linked and dependent one on the other."

The argument that in doing paid work, women are valuing their careers over family life is incongruous. Regardless of family form, family life continues to be highly valued by both women and men. Indeed, between 2001 and 2006, the number of census families increased by 6.3 percent (Milan, Vezina, and Wells 2007). Citing results from an Angus Reid opinion survey that indicated that two-thirds of Canadians over age eighteen identified their families as the source of their greatest joy in life, Milan (2000, 5) insists that "Canadians remain fiercely loyal to the idea of family." She also points to the fact that the majority of young Canadians plan to marry, have children, and remain married to the same spouse. And in his recent comprehensive survey of 2,100 Canadians, Bibby (2004) found that the majority of Canadians aspire to fairly traditional family ideals – that most Canadians want to marry, stay married, and have children – and the majority of Canadians

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"are convinced that families are essential to both personal and social well-being, contributing to healthy communities and a healthy nation" (7). Almost 60 percent of respondents stated that the traditional nuclear family was ideal, and 80 percent indicated that getting married was either "very important" or "somewhat important," whereas less than 10 percent indicated that marriage was "not important at all." When asked why they want to marry, especially at a time when divorce and cohabitation rates are high, Canadians regardless of gender or age cited three reasons: marriage signifies commitment, marriage is morally the right thing to do, and children should have married parents.[6] Bibby concludes that Canadians do indeed aspire to an ideal family structure and that the future of marriage is not in doubt. Obviously, family is not in decline; people today simply have more choices in terms of how they arrange themselves as families. Young Canadians may be rejecting marriage, especially those living in Quebec, but the increasing incidence of common-law unions indicates that the majority of young people continue to want to live as couples.

Avowing that paid work and family work are incompatible and that women who value their families should stay at home reinforces domesticity and divides women against themselves, each trying to live up to either the role of the ideal worker or the full-time caregiver. This has sparked what has been dubbed "the mommy wars," whereby women extol the benefits of either staying at home or of being employed, adamantly arguing that they are doing what is best for their families (Steiner 2007). Full-time working mothers continue to be characterized as "uninvolved, absentee parents ... full-time homemakers, [as] nonintellectual, hovering, and provincial ... the women in each group have nothing in common with the women in the other; they share no values" (Peskowitz 2005, 20). This depiction fails to consider the significant number of mothers who work part-time, and it treats each group of women as fixed, ignoring that most women move in and out of the workforce over the course of their lives. Moreover, mothers are often put in the position of having to justify their choice to continue or discontinue working (Peskowitz 2005; Gerson 2002).

Primarily directed at women, but not precluding men, the family-work balance narrative is based on gendered and incongruent conceptions of the family. For Litt and Zimmerman (2003, 156-63), the "constructs of public and private spheres constitute a false dichotomy that serves only to obscure the more fundamental mechanisms perpetuating gender." Women do not need guidance on how to balance work and family: they need options that increase their choices so they are not put in a position of having to choose between family care work and paid work. Policies that help parents integrate family and work are essential. Such policies could assist parents who want to be at home full-time raising their children, or working either full-time or part-time in the paid market. The failure of the current Conservative federal

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government to implement its Liberal predecessor's proposal for universal childcare reflects the state's unwillingness to assist parents with such integration.

Conclusion: Performing Family and Market Work

The nuclear family continues to prevail in the public imaginary as the ideal family form despite growing diversity in how Canadians choose to live as families, the concomitant deinstitutionalization of marriage (Amato 2004b; Cherlin 2004), the tendency of Canadians to move in and out of different family forms throughout their lifetime (Baker 2010), and an abundance of research that clearly indicates that the links between traditional and non-traditional family forms are fluid, not closed (Coontz 1997, 3). Clearly, this gendered heterosexual family model needs to be decentred in our intellectual imagination if we are to develop a more integrative understanding of care work and market work. However, the key to decentring lies not in adopting more pluralistic descriptions of family – that is, adding "ies" to "family" – since past efforts of family researchers to pluralize "the family" have simply emphasized "the 'still alive-ness' of the category" (Budgeon and Roseneil 2004, 127). Instead, it calls for destabilizing the normative assumptions about family and reconceptualizing intimate relations and care work.

Margrit Eichler (1981, 1988, 1997b, 2001, 2008) has spent most of her career admonishing family researchers about the dangers of assuming a monolithic family. This assumption results in conjectures of congruence that lead to biases in data collection and the negation of the incidence of non-congruence. Consequently, genuine problems in large numbers of families are overlooked, and the work of family practitioners and policy makers is rendered ineffective. Eichler (1997b) promotes the social responsibility model of family characterized by a concerted effort to minimize stratification based on sex. Legal marriage is an option rather than a privilege over other types of relationships, and marital status, residency, gender, and sexuality are not requisites for parental responsibilities. All individuals are entitled to equal state benefits, and care for dependent children is a parental and societal duty. Similarly, Simonen (1991, in Litt and Zimmerman 2003, 158) advocates "social mothering" – the state-funded occupation of municipal homemakers, which allows the state to share and adjudicate private household divisions of labour. Stacey (1996) favours "the postmodern family condition," a pluralistic, fluid space where diverse and even unorthodox "families of choice" can be constructively created. She points to the choice in understanding contemporary families:

> Either we can come to grips with the postmodern family condition by accepting the end of a singular ideal family and begin to promote better living and spiritual conditions for the diverse array of real families we actually

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> inhabit and desire. Or we can continue to engage in denial, resistance, displacement, and bad faith, by cleaving to a moralistic ideology of *the family* at the same time that we fail to provide social and economic conditions that make life for the modern family or any other kind of family viable, let alone dignified and secure. (1996, 11, emphasis in original)

In demonstrating that sex, gender, and sexuality are discursive constructions, several feminists have laid the groundwork for destabilizing concepts such as family, mother, father, wife, and husband and for deconstructing the forms of work normatively linked to each (see, for example, Fausto-Sterling 1999, 2000, 2003; Butler 1990, 1993; Wittig 1992). Judith Butler's concept of performativity is particularly useful here. Performativity, she argues, is "not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration ... it is that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 2004, 94). Performance is a crucial part of performativity – within families, the "act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene" (Butler 1990, 272). Thus, performances are conditioned by the social norms and ideologies within one's culture – by "what other practices are and by what practices are legitimating" (Butler 2004, 345). In effect, individuals perform cultural norms.

Understanding work and family as performative acts that are constrained by norms opens up possibilities to destabilize the nuclear family ideal and, hence, a gendered private-public binary. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler demonstrates how "doing gender" involves shared structures of imitation. Performing family can be understood in a similar fashion. In performing gender, males and females also enact the fabricated roles of family. Through "a sustained set of acts" that we "anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts," we come to understand ourselves and others not only as man (male) or woman (female) but by extension also as mother, father, husband, wife, son, or daughter (xv). And it is in producing and reproducing a specific set of behaviours that men and women become anchored within the household-market work continuum, coagulating the material embodiment of family roles. Accordingly, the private-public binary is a fiction created to sustain the status quo.

In this important sense, families emerge as something we do, not what we are. However, even though conceptualizing family as performance allows for incredible diversity in how we do family, it can only do so if gender is displaced. Otherwise, a hierarchical placement of family performances results that privileges masculine performances over feminine performances. We need to approach domesticity as Butler approaches feminine gender display,

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not with a pre-emptory demand for its immediate abandonment but with the goal of gender bending, of focusing attention on the contingent and stitched-together quality of our performances, thereby opening up ways to bend the elements of domesticity into new configurations. Suppleness and a sense of open-ended play are important weapons if the goal is domesticity in drag (Williams 2000, 198).

Conceptualizing family work and market work as performances challenges the family's ontological status and raises possibilities for more diverse, complex, and fluid ways of "doing" family. In one view, doing family is a perspective that "emphasizes interactional work and activities that create and sustain family ties, define family boundaries, as well as specify appropriate behaviors for difference family members" (Sarkisian 2006, 804). It is the process that comes about as people perform family life within both structural and ideological constraints. For example, there is a multitude of ways that single mothers doing family are shaped by cultural normative ideals and structural material forces (Nelson 2005, 2006a, 2006b). These and other families are continually being created, dismantled, and recreated. Nelson (2006b, 790) contends that it is possible to "do several types of families simultaneously and in motion," something Hertz (2006, 799) maintains "captures a new dynamic of the multiple families in which women and their children live and function simultaneously and over time." Indeed, Nelson is lauded for demonstrating how single mothers "are not reconstructing a dated, diseased North American model that ensures male domination" but, rather, "are seeking newer, decidedly less 'standard' models that promise a more balanced reciprocity and offer companionship and emotional closeness" (Cherlin 2006, 803). Research on gay and lesbian families have also highlighted how families can be creatively constructed (Naples 2001).

Frameworks such as "doing family" are decisively central to the process of destabilizing the nuclear family ideal and, therefore, the family-work binary. "Doing family" opens up possibilities for understanding families as networks of love, support, and work, regardless of gender, blood, or marriage ties. Whom we call family will come to be defined by the type of interactive performances that individuals engage in, rather than in terms of gender or how they are related to us. With such networks of support and coinciding family policies that reflect the diverse needs of Canadian families, women will have the possibility of performing both family and paid market work in an integrative manner and will thus be freed from the fruitless pursuit of balance.

Notes

1 Statistics Canada (2010) defines a census family as being composed of "a married couple and the children, if any, of either or both spouses; a couple living common law and the children, if any, of either or both partners; or, a lone parent of any marital status with at

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least one child living in the same dwelling and that child or those children. All members of a particular census family live in the same dwelling. A couple may be of opposite or same sex. Children may be children by birth, marriage or adoption regardless of their age or marital status as long as they live in the dwelling and do not have their own spouse or child living in the dwelling. Grandchildren living with their grandparent(s) but with no parents present also constitute a census family."

2 The passing of Bill C-38 in 2005 allowed same-sex couples to marry across the country, but several provinces allowed same-sex marriages prior to Bill C-38 (Ontario and British Columbia since 2003; Quebec, Yukon, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland since 2004; New Brunswick since 2005).

3 Canada has a long history of implementing racist policies that not only prevented certain people from immigrating here but also prevented family reunification for those already living in the country (Beaujot and Kerr 2004; Harrison and Friesen 2004; Das Gupta 2000). Aboriginal people were particularly vulnerable to racist Canadian policies designed to strip them of their culture, language, and religion. Residential schools and the 1960s adoption sweep are cases in point in which families were torn apart based on beliefs of their inferiority (Castellano 2002; Emberley 2001; Das Gupta 2000).

4 According to Bryceson and Vuorela (2002, 3), transnational families are those "that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood,' even across national borders."

5 Researchers such as Salazar Parreñas (2001) also point to the more harmful impact that mothering from a distance can have for families in the country of origin.

6 Significantly fewer Quebecers believed that it was important for children to have married parents (Quebec: 61 percent; rest of Canada: 81 percent).

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