

Essay on families marriage and motherhood

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



How Mother's Manage Their Family's Economic and Social Well-Being

The role of the Canadian women in the family has evolved throughout the years. Women now are neither strictly just confined at home nor are families strictly consisting of a mother and father who are bound by marriage. With the many changes in the society and in the environment came changes in women's role and in the perception of women.

The modern Canadian family has started to veer away from the traditional model where the husband is responsible for working to financially support the family while the wife stays at home to take care of the household chores, the children, and probably even some relatives who need care. In this model, the husband and wife have their own separate responsibilities and there is no overlapping of such (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 178).

One of the changes that occurred in the Canadian family model is that married women now have a more active participation in the paid labor work force. This in turn has introduced changes in the paid work place as well as in the home life.

Although wives and mothers having a job is well accepted by Canadians (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 178), there's still the expectation that the wife remains the one mostly responsible for maintaining the home's upkeep and taking care of the children while the father's main responsibility is to provide for the financial needs of the family.

The society overlooks the non-traditional family models where families are broken because of familial violence; families where both parents work for a

living; families where the fathers are unemployed; families that are led by mothers; families that are led by a single parent; and families where the parents are of the same gender. This reflects what Eichler terms as the “new family model” (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 178), which emphasizes on the equality of the sexes and with it, the shared responsibilities both in the private and public spheres of life.

According to Eichler, this new family model is being brought about by demographic changes such as increased divorce rates, increased life expectancy, and reduced fertility rates. It is also brought about by women contributing more to the family income and by the increased awareness of the existence and prevalence of familial violence, which changes the attitude of people towards the security and safety of families. Since the responsibility of nurturing the home and making it a safe place lies mostly on the wife or mother who is also often the victim of familial violence, the concept of keeping the home a safe place is becoming harder to maintain.

It should be noted, too, that despite more and more women joining the work force, the earnings of men and women remain unequal; thus, women who live alone and families that consist of the mother and children are more prone to experiencing poverty.

Adding to the increasing responsibility of women in the family is the fact that many women nowadays do not feel that they need to be married to have children (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 179). In addition, studies showed that women aged between 14 and 25 prefer to be in common-law relationships for their first conjugal relationship ((WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 179).

Same-sex cohabitations and marriages also seem to have more equality. These relationships tend to be more egalitarian, less bound by the gender-based division of labor, provide more flexibility in social roles, and are more companion-oriented (Mandell 195). In addition, lesbian relationships have more equality in terms of sharing decision-making and financial responsibilities.

For those who do choose to have heterosexual relationships and get married, however, a conflict arises when the woman tries to fulfill her needs for expressing herself, yet at the same time trying to fulfill the needs of her children and her husband. This can cause a lot of stress and pressure on the woman, which can eventually lead to the woman experiencing poverty, getting divorced, becoming teenage mothers, or becoming juvenile delinquents. In addition, this can lead to unemployment, family violence, handicapped children, and others. All of these contribute to the separation of roles between men and women and the increasing responsibility of women to provide both for the financial and emotional needs of the family.

American sociologist Arlie Hochschild stated that working mothers experience three shifts (Mandell 197). The first shift is at the workplace and the second shift is at home. However, because so much time is spent at the workplace, the time spent at home becomes rationalized and hurried. This lack of time for the home and the family, along with its emotional consequences, make mothers go into a third shift, which consists of coping, noticing, and understanding.

Studies found that wives without jobs feel less powerful than those with jobs

(WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 181). Moreover, the better the husband earns for a living, the more chances that the wife will stay at home. This increases the woman's economic and emotional dependence on her husband, but decreases her influence in the family.

It has been found that mothers become healthier when they are committed to their jobs rather than when they devote all their time to the family (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 184). In addition, women who hold jobs contribute largely to keeping their families out of poverty.

As such, young Canadian women are caught in the dilemma of whether to have a child, a job, or both. As Beck-Gernsheim stated (Mandell 198), women now consider the price of having a child, which can include the risk of poverty in case of divorce; financial security in old age; less leisure; increased daily workload; and limited job opportunities. Although there are now more employment opportunities for women, this only means more work for the women, especially since this does not change the domestic labor practices of men (Mandell 198). Women still remain mostly responsible for child care.

It can then be concluded that although the role of women in the family is changing and the new family model is becoming more prevalent, the “traditional” role of women as mothers and wives remain attached to them. Women just started taking on new roles, that is, to contribute to the overall family income, which used to be the sole responsibility of men. Although this seems to taint the impeccable image of a selfless mother who devotes her time solely to managing the home and taking care of the children, it has

actually been found that working mothers make for better mothers who end up raising better children (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 184).

Embodiment and Social Construction of Ageism

The existence of ageism in society serves as further proof that although the family is moving away from the traditional model, much of people's behavior and perception are still governed by tradition.

As the traditional family model gradually diminishes and despite the many difficulties that come with marriage, more than 90% of people still choose to marry at some point in their lives (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 179). Even the divorced seek to remarry and common-law couples eventually get married.

Until recently, staying single did not seem an attractive option for women. Seen as inferior, the woman usually depended on a male figure – her father or her husband – for her economic and social status. In addition, being an unmarried woman came with a social stigma. Being called an old maid or a spinster had negative connotations. This also implied that the woman was unwanted or unattractive and that her father was incapable of finding her a mate. In addition, sexual activity outside of marriage was deemed unacceptable and can possibly reduce the woman's chances of getting married.

Women also hold high ideals for marriage and even romanticize the institution that despite the many marital problems that other married couples encounter, people usually believe that these problems won't happen to them.

Instead, women envision themselves to be happily married by the age of 30 (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 180) to a loving husband. They envision having children to care for while their husbands work to earn a living. None of these women anticipated their husbands to be unemployed, and very few anticipated divorce.

Even motherhood has become a mark of true womanhood, making women seek it despite the difficulties and sacrifices it imposes. Today, only 13% of women between the ages of 34 and 40 have never given birth (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 11 183). They seek motherhood even without full-time partners and even as they pursue their personal goals. This, however, can cause guilt, stress, and conflict among women due to the perception that mothers should embody devotion, self-sacrifice, gentle forgiveness, and love.

However, women giving up their careers for the sake of motherhood come with both material and psychological costs. For one, the woman becomes economically dependent on her husband. For another, she gives up a structured, economically organized, and rewarding job for the role of a mother that has no limits or boundaries, yet is not as economically rewarding.

The predicament of a mother worsens even more in the event of a divorce where not all of the couple's assets can be equally divided between them, especially the intangible assets. With many marriages having a lifespan of twelve-and-a half years (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 12 196), middle-aged women are often left with children who depend on them, yet are without a job or perhaps having only a part-time job. This makes her financially dependent on

either the state or her former partner or spouse. Even if she does have a job, chances are that she's still not earning as much as her former partner, which can lead to her and her children experiencing poverty.

As statistics indicate, most single mothers younger than 65 and with children younger than 18 earn an average income that is \$10,000.00 below the poverty line (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 12 197). This causes the single mother and her children to suffer from poor health, lack of nutrition, and inadequate housing, as well as discrimination from society. In addition, women who are poor while they raise their children become more prone to suffering from poor health throughout their lifetime and are more likely to be poor when they reach their senior years. In fact, studies show that the poorest people in Canada consist of single mothers below 65 who have children younger than 18 and unattached women aged 65 and older (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 12 198).

The poverty rates for unattached women in their senior years were 42% while unattached men in their senior years had a poverty rate of 27%. Single mothers with children younger than 18 also had a much higher poverty rating compared to married couples (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 12 198).

One reason for the prevalence of poverty among women is that they have much lower lifetime earnings than men - about two-thirds less (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 12 198). Women continue to earn less than men at every stage of life, and this discrepancy accumulates to finally impact the women's pensions, making them poorer than their male counterparts in their senior years. This becomes even more evident when considering the retirement benefits of older women. Aside from earning less than the men did, some

women would have never held jobs outside the home. This would have led to lower contributions to the Canada Pension Plan, if at all.

Despite the efforts of women to become independent and despite the many options they now have when it comes to raising a family or not, it stands that most women are still held by the dogmas of society to which they comply for fear of being discriminated upon, but which, more often than not, lead to more hardship for them in the long run.

Violence against Women

Violence against women takes on many forms and affects all women regardless of whether they experience it directly or not.

One of the main reasons for the prevalence of violence is that women keep silent about the violent acts done against them. As stated by Susan Griffin (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 206), women have been silenced for centuries and this goes as far as being inherited by the women of today. Silence has been regarded as the appropriate feminine way of dealing with violence.

Just thirty years ago, it was taboo to write about violence in the press or mention it in the media. Even the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada did not regard violence against women as having a relevant effect on the status of women (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 206). The Commission also considered rape offenses as unfair for men since only men could be charged with this offense.

Only recently have women started to break their silence by discovering, naming, and challenging the existence of violence against women. Women

are encouraged to openly talk about these acts of violence and their awareness about these issues is being raised. However, even the women of today remain reluctant to complain about sexual harassment or sexual assault. A large number of them never even inform anyone of the violence done against them.

It was believed that talking about them would result in more abuse. As rape and battery issues were analyzed by feminist groups in the 1970s, it was found that acts of violence against women were not considered as serious as other crimes (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 207). Justice systems even tended to disbelieve women and put the blame on them, considering wives to be naggers and young girls to have provoked the rape. These made women feel as if they were the ones on trial.

It should be noted that silence only “reinforces the violence and makes it more possible” (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 206). In addition, not naming an experience leaves it unrecognized. This implies that ignorance about violence against women prevents one from recognizing it as a problem, and can even make one forget about the incident until such time that enough knowledge about it is gained.

Despite the prevalence of violence against women in Canada, there’s still a question about how prevalent it is and how valid the claims are regarding its prevalence. This question arises from the lack of an effective way to measure violence against women.

One cause for this is the high rate of unreported cases. Figures were based mostly on police statistics. However, given that most women prefer to stay silent about the violence committed against them, it is no surprise that the

number of police reports filed would be low. There's also much subjectivity with regards to the evaluation of these acts as violent and criminal, as this evaluation would rely largely on the police officer's personal values and judgment. In addition, very few of these victims seek professional help; hence, further providing inaccuracies in the number of their occurrences. Even population surveys are not reliable, as people won't always readily divulge sensitive information. Survey questions may also be misunderstood or misinterpreted, leading to inaccurate answers from the survey respondents.

Adding further to the confusion are the results of researches that used the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). These researches showed that husbands were getting physically abused by wives just as much as wives were getting physically abused by husbands (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 209). However, this method was highly criticized due to its discrepancies. It considered neither the context in which the violent act occurred nor did it measure the severity of the sustained injuries. For example, a wife may be physically attacking her husband in self defense, and even so, the injuries that a woman can inflict on her partner does not necessarily match the severity of the injuries that the male partner can inflict on her.

Despite these discrepancies, CTS has gained credibility in the field of social sciences and has been used to discredit the claims of feminist groups who found - through different research techniques - that there was an increasing prevalence of violence against women (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 210).

There's also no clear single definition for violence. On one hand, theorists prefer to use as broad a definition as possible, encompassing all forms of

violence – physical, emotional, and psychological (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 210). This enables women to more easily identify the violent acts that are committed against them. These theorists believe that having a very narrow and specific definition of violence may lead to women remaining silent about them, as there won't be a clear distinction of what is violent from not. On the other hand, critics of this theory argue that such a broad definition of violence diminishes the seriousness of offenses such as sexual harassment and rape and prevents the understanding of the specific causes and solutions to these specific problems (WOMN 1005EL 10 Unit 13 210). Although the lack of accurate metrics to measure the prevalence of violence, as well as the lack of a single definition for violence, do not directly explain the increasing prevalence of violence against women, they do serve as hindrances in the identification and acknowledgement of such, which in turn hinder or obstruct the formation and implementation of solutions to stop them. Moreover, with this lack of understanding about the nature of violence against women, it seems that only education and awareness can put a stop – or at least reduce – their occurrences.

Works Cited

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