

AGE-SEX ROLES AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW

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Résumé — Cette étude présente une structure pour l'examen des corrélations de la dynamique de la population et du changement des rôles par âge et sexe. On a fait ressortir des généralisations possibles et plausibles en ce qui concerne les conséquences sur les rôles par âge et sexe des tendances récentes en fécondité, la formation/rupture d'union, la migration et la formation du ménage. On a fait ressortir des généralisations possibles ou plausibles concernant les conséquences sur la dynamique de la population des changements dans la répartition par âge et sexe de l'éducation et de la participation de la main-d'oeuvre, et d'une augmentation générale de l'homogénéité des rôles par âge et sexe.

Abstract — This paper presents a framework for consideration of the mutual interrelationships of demographic change and change in sex-roles. Possible or plausible generalizations are set forth regarding implications for age-sex roles of recent trends in fertility, union formation/dissolution, migration, and household formation. Possible or plausible generalizations are set forth regarding implications for demographic change of changes in age and sex patterns of education and labour force participation, and of a general increase in the homogeneity of age-sex roles.

Key Words — age-sex roles, demographic change, role change

Introduction

This report deals with the interrelationships among modern demographic changes in developed nations, including Canada, and changes in age and sex (gender) roles. More specifically, it discusses ways in which demographic trends may have affected and been affected by the role definitions and behaviour of men and women, married and non-married persons, the young and the old. Demographic variables considered include: fertility (level and timing); mortality; migration, age-sex composition; union formation (marriage, divorce, remarriage, cohabitation); and household formation (extension, home leaving, living alone). Roles are considered primarily in terms of education, labour force participation, leisure, and family responsibilities.

This system of interrelationships is so large and complex that a detailed discussion of the whole system is not possible in a brief report prepared within the time limits of the first round of the Demographic Review. The aim rather is to sketch the main outlines of the system. The style is admittedly impressionistic. Evidence and references to the literature are illustrative only. The propositions set forth below, although stated without qualification, should be viewed not as fact or verified theory but as plausible hypotheses.

Definitions

The term *role* as used in everyday speech and in social science has at least three different meanings: behavioural, normative, and attitudinal. The behavioural meaning refers to what people occupying a certain status actually do. The normative meaning refers to what society thinks they should do — to widely accepted social definitions of appropriate or acceptable behaviour for persons in that status. The attitudinal meaning refers to what individuals or specific sub-groups of society consider appropriate behaviour. This report discusses roles in all three senses, but the emphasis is on actual behaviour, which is easiest to document.

In a discussion of the relationships among demographic changes and role changes, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the two, since they are so close conceptually. For example, the decline in fertility, a demographic change, is so immediately and directly bound up with a change in the extent of childcare for parents — what they do in the parental role — that it is not clear one should speak about a causal relationship; the level of fertility is almost a dimension of the role.

In a related vein, the system of interrelationships involves so many elements of mutual causation, that there is no obvious starting point for discus-

sion. Apart from temporal leads and lags that might emerge from a detailed historical treatment, it may be better to think of a functional system of relationships. The discussion then can begin anywhere in the system, but repetition becomes inevitable, as one discusses a relationship first with demographic change as cause, and then with role change as cause.

This report will begin with a review of demographic change and then move to age and sex-role changes. Along the way, key propositions, stated in summary form, will be underlined and numbered for easy reference. "D" propositions emphasize the causal role of demographic change, "R" propositions the causal role of role change.

Modern Demographic Change in Canada

Mortality

Modern mortality trends are well-known and need not be described here in any detail. Two aspects of these trends are relevant for present purposes: (a) the rise in average life expectancy, with associated declines in infant and child mortality; and (b) the large and increasing excess of female over male life expectancy.

Around 1931, male life expectancy at birth in Canada was 60 years, that of females 62 years. By 1981, these had climbed to 72 and 79 respectively, with the differential thus increasing from two to seven years. Around the turn of the century, a forty-year-old male or female both had a life expectancy of 33 additional years. By 1981, 40-year-old males had a life expectancy of 35 years, but the figure for females at that age had risen to 41 years, a six-year differential.

These changing patterns of mortality have had the following effects relevant to age- sex-role change:

D1. *Declining infant and child mortality has increased the number of surviving children from a given number of live births. It has made it easier to "have a family," in the sense of raising two or more children to adulthood and beyond.* Since a couple can have a family with as few as two births, and can even count on an only child surviving, there is less felt need for a larger number of live births, and the "required" reproduction can be accomplished over a relatively short period. For both sexes, but for women in particular, given past sex roles, this means a much shorter portion of adult life involved with childrearing.

D2. *Declining mortality rates at older ages, beyond the reproductive ages, have yielded a higher proportion of elderly in the population (although declining*

fertility is a more important causal factor), and the same underlying forces that have lowered mortality have led to generally healthier and more active elderly. It is taken as axiomatic that the relative number of persons in an age-sex category can help shape the social role associated with that category, although this relationship is not well-understood. In the present case, it seems likely that a weakening of the empirical association of old age with infirmity (at least for persons in the lower ranges of old age — say 65 to 75) would change society's expectations of the elderly, and their expectations of themselves. At the same time, older persons have less "scarcity value" when they constitute 25 per cent of the population than when they constitute a much smaller fraction, say five or 10 per cent. On the other hand, they will tend to have more power in a democratic society by reason of their votes, and in any society will tend to have whatever power is associated with accumulated wealth.

D3. Declining mortality has tended to increase the social worth or importance of the individual; the lower the probability that any given individual will die in the near future, the more likely one is to invest in him/her emotionally and economically. This relationship has been discussed most often in the context of infancy and childhood, but it applies at other stages of life as well.

D4. The higher life expectancy at every age — the prospect of a longer life — has changed the time horizon for individual decision making; one has more time for one's life, indeed one has time for "many lives," in terms of residence, career, marriage, and so forth. One consequence is that conventional "lifetime" commitments — permanent marriage, job tenure — become more serious, but often more unrealistic, especially in view of the scope and rapidity of social and individual change. Another is that new commitments may be undertaken late in life that previously would not have been. Persons in their thirties or forties attend professional school with some confidence of being able to pursue the profession for a reasonable period. Spouses facing the "empty nest" and 25 or more years of life remaining are often motivated to try a new marriage as part of a new life. Younger people may see no need to rush in order to make conventional commitments to adult roles.

D5. The less frequent first-hand experience of the event of death — to a relative, neighbour, or close friend — the more apt the individual is to invest in his or her personal life, and the less apt she or he is to seek continuity through commitment to the group (notably the family) and to future generations. Since the frequency of deaths is a function of age composition as well as of age-specific mortality risks, this may be expected to rise as the population ages — indeed a crude death rate of 14 or 15 per 1,000 is likely early in the next century, barring substantial further declines in mortality rates at older ages.

It is possible that the personal consciousness of death as a human reality will increase over the next decades.

A summary statement of these last three propositions would be that modern low mortality has helped reinforce a Western cultural emphasis on the value of the individual over the group.

D6. *The large sex differential in mortality has led to an excess of women over men at older ages, and to a high probability that such women will be unmarried (single, widowed or divorced).* The situation has been complicated by high divorce rates, since divorced males tend to marry younger women. The remarriage prospects for the divorced or widowed woman are uncertain. A realistic expectation for the middle-aged woman is that she will spend her old age without a spouse. Differential mortality (along with the age difference between spouses, and the differential remarriage rates) has promoted what might be called the "feminization of old age."

Fertility

There has been a long-term secular decline in the level of fertility, the number of children born per woman or per married woman, whether viewed on a period or cohort basis. Around 1900, the Canadian period total fertility rate was approximately 4.8; by 1985 it had dropped to 1.7. The post-World War II baby-boom constitutes only a partial exception, since much of the rise in period rates was due to changes in timing of childbearing, and most of the rise in cohort completed fertility was due to an increase in the proportion of women having at least two children, rather than an increase in the mean number of children among women having at least two (see Ryder, 1982).

Associated with this decline in the number of children per woman have been changes in the tempo of childbearing — the average age of childbearing, the average age at first birth, the average age at last birth, etc. These dimensions of fertility have been volatile over time. But with some exceptions (for example, the Depression), there has been a secular trend toward earlier cessation of childbearing, typically around 30 years or younger for the woman.

The combination of low mortality and low fertility allows for considerable flexibility in family formation, as childbearing and rearing occupy a smaller fraction of adult life. In the typical case, to have two children would only require about five years out of a woman's total reproductive span of 35 years. To raise them to the beginning of full-time school attendance would require an additional five or so years, so that full-time mothering might require only 10 years of a woman's 50 or more years of adult life remaining after age 20. Even to raise her children to age 18 would require less than half of her adult

life (see Davis and van der Oever, 1982). Similar patterns affect males, with qualifications to take account of higher male mortality.

Couples are able to take advantage of this flexibility due to the availability of modern contraceptives, including surgical sterilization and abortion. It is feasible to avoid accidental pregnancies or unwanted births over long periods of married life to a much greater extent than was the case prior to 1960.

The rise of this modern fertility pattern has had several direct consequences for age and sex roles:

D7. *Low fertility, concentrated within a brief period of the life span, has made childbearing and childrearing a temporarily less important part of the adult role. Since in the past women tended to specialize in child-related activities, their role change has necessarily been the greater.* This fertility effect has combined with the extension of the average life to create what Davis and van der Oever (1981) describe as a new phenomenon — “prolonged parental survival beyond the last child’s coming-of-age.” In high fertility/high mortality societies of the past, they point out, the period of such survival was virtually zero; in a low fertility/low mortality society like Canada today, by contrast, this so-called “empty nest” period can exceed 30 years.

D8. *Low fertility has been the major demographic determinant of the increase in the proportion of elderly in the population.* Thus, whatever effects on age and sex roles flow from the rise in the proportion of elderly are due indirectly to declining fertility.

D9. *Low fertility tends to reduce the average number of kin of any given individual, which in turn tends to reduce the centrality of familial roles for that individual, regardless of his/her age or sex.* The generic effect is to reduce the salience of kin in everyday life, even though in some sense kin may be greatly valued because of their scarcity. A specific effect reinforcing the trend toward low fertility is the decline in kin support with the overall task of childrearing. The importance of kin in everyday life has been further eroded by migration and by residential independence of the elderly.

D10. *Low fertility and delayed childbearing have contributed to the continuing high divorce rate, which in turn probably yields a net decline in fertility.* The popular view is that couples “stay together for the sake of the children.” Becker *et al.* (1977) have formalized this in the argument that children constitute “marriage-specific capital,” which the couple is loathe to risk through divorce. The rise in divorce, as discussed in more detail below, has been particularly influential in the breakdown of the traditional familial division of labour between males and females.

D11. *The diminution of the temporal importance of childbearing for adults reinforces the tendency toward low fertility, and tends to increase the propor-*

tion of adults who will have no children or only one child. This will be true whether childbearing begins early or late. In the former case, there will be motivation to "get it over with," and get on with the main business of life, typically a job or career. Since many of the logistical problems associated with children tend to increase exponentially with number (at least for the first few parities — before economies of scale set in), such a pattern favours at most two children, and there are signs that the only child is rapidly becoming culturally acceptable. If childbearing begins late, couples will tend to have fewer children, other things equal, even though two remains the culturally stereotypical ideal. Some will simply never get around to it until it is too late in some sense, including the onset of infecundity. Some will be reluctant to have a child given higher age-associated risks to the mother and the child. Others will find that the disruptive effects of one child are sufficient to discourage having a second or third. Overall, it seems doubtful that women now having their first child in their early and mid-thirties will ever have as many children as earlier cohorts, who started childbearing in their twenties. Indeed feminist analyses of the consequence of early childbearing have noted that it tends to "lock women into" the mother/housewife role.

Age-Sex Structure

A demographic consequence of the changes in mortality and fertility described above has been a major shift in age structure: a declining proportion of children; a rising proportion of elderly, especially elderly females. The sheer relative number of persons in a particular age-sex category may be expected to shape the associated age-sex role, although the relationship is not direct and deterministic — other factors are at work and may well be more important. The effects in general are not well-understood, although the following seem likely:

D12. *The decline in the relative number of children may make them more highly valued in some senses, due to scarcity, but in general they will come to occupy a smaller part of the social consciousness, and command a smaller proportion of societal investment.* Children are largely passive recipients of whatever society and their parents care to give them of the overall social good. As their centrality in the life of active adults diminishes, their share may be threatened. Preston (1984) has argued at length that this has already happened in the U.S.A.; and Hunsley (1987) has recently applied the same general argument to Canada.

D13. *The rise in the proportion of elderly in the population will tend to enhance their visibility and power, perhaps at the expense of other age groups.*

The elderly not only vote, but given their low labour-force participation rates, they have more time than other adults to engage in political or quasi-political activity. By contrast with the young, they have experience and a certain credibility that conventionally has been associated with old age. All in all, the elderly are a powerful political force in the competition for social and economic advantage. In the past, as Davis and van der Oever (1981) have argued, competition between the generations was muted by family ties of co-residence and mutual dependency. Increasingly, the competition is impersonal and political.

Marriage, Remarriage and Divorce

The single most important trend in this demographic area has been the sharp rise in the divorce rates, especially since 1970. In some marriage cohorts, the proportion divorced or separated thus far (at medium durations, of 10 to 15 years) is well over 0.20. The proportion eventually divorcing for recent marriage cohorts almost certainly will exceed 0.30 and may reach 0.40 or more.

Other important trends are the rise in premarital cohabitation among the young (as many as 25 per cent of young people report having cohabitted at least once), generally as a prelude to marriage, and the rise in post-marital cohabitation among the middle-aged, as a postlude to divorce or prelude to remarriage.

A third important pattern is the lower (than men) remarriage rates among widowed or divorced women, a factor that increases the proportion and number of nonmarried women at older ages.

D14. *The rise in divorce rates has been one of the most powerful demographic determinants of the changing roles of women. It has undermined the woman's ability to fulfill her conventional role as mother, and the viability of that role as conventionally defined, in the sense that a woman who commits herself to that role at the expense of a career and financial independence is at high risk of eventual poverty or at least downward economic mobility.* Davis and van der Oever (1982) argue that what they term the "breadwinner" system contained the seeds of its own destruction. As the husband moved out of the home to work, leaving the wife behind with the children, he encountered other females, typically young, with involvements often leading to divorce. To hedge against the risk of divorce the married woman had to leave the home to have a career and financial independence. Having achieved these, she too could then entertain the notion of initiating divorce, driving rates up still further.

D15. *The high probability of divorce may well have led to a postponement or even a devaluation of the conventional roles of marriage and parenthood.* If divorce is likely, then marriage should be delayed in favour of cohabita-

tion, and children should be avoided, whether in marriage or cohabitation, until the union seems likely to last. But the absence of commitment to marriage and children in itself increases the likelihood of union dissolution, in a circular fashion. In general, young people may ask why they should commit themselves to a role that has such a high failure rate.

D16. *The lower remarriage rate for divorced or widowed women together with their numerical preponderance in old age will tend to define the role of the older woman as "spouseless".* The prospect of being "alone" in old age may diminish the centrality of marriage in women's conceptions of their lives.

Household Formation

The period since World War II has seen substantial increase in the proportions of persons living alone in a separate house or apartment. In absolute numbers, the rise has been especially pronounced among young adults and among older never-married or previously-married women, but the proportion has increased among virtually all adult age-sex categories. The causes of this trend include rising real income and (for elderly women) the decline in the number of living children, and probably cultural changes (not well documented or easy to measure) relating to privacy and independence of the individual and to the very definitions of age-sex roles, which are becoming more homogeneous (Burch, 1985).

A concomitant set of changes has seen the decline of extended households, containing persons other than related members of a nuclear family of husband, wife and children. The proportions of households with in-laws, other relatives, servants, boarders and lodgers has declined to near-zero.

These changes are due in part to changes in cultural definitions of age-sex roles, but in turn may be expected to affect age-sex roles in a variety of ways:

D17. *The increase in separate living may be expected to reinforce the breakdown of a family division of labour based on age and sex.* Separate living promotes the homogenization of social roles, as the individual has no one with whom to share various domestic tasks. A male living alone is thus more apt to cook and clean house, a female to fix plumbing or shovel snow — more or less by necessity. At the same time, changing ideology makes such departures from conventional roles acceptable. Separate living, and the privacy it affords, also is related to the introduction of "universality" in regard to regular sexual relations among adults, in particular the trend toward regular sexual relations on the part of young, unmarried adults, and on the part of the elderly.

D18. *Separate living and the decline of the extended family have tended to focus childcare responsibility even more closely on the parents and particularly the mother.* There probably never was a time when the majority of households were extended, but the proportion was appreciably greater in the past (plus there was greater residential propinquity, even if not co-residence), and the extra persons in the household typically played a non-trivial role in assistance with childcare (in some modern societies they still do, for example, Eastern Europe, Japan). This development, along with the increasing labour force participation of married women and mothers has led to increased demand for governmental or commercial child-care services, entailing yet another major departure from the conventional definitions of the parental role: the parent is one responsible for the purchase of third party child-care services for infants and young children.

Geographic Mobility

The last decades have seen a continuation of high rates of residential mobility, including inter-community and inter-provincial migration. Given the increasing urbanization of the population, a larger fraction of this migration is from urban to urban places, much of it inter-metropolitan. This plus Canadian geography means that much migration in Canada involves long distances.

There has been relatively little research on how migration affects age-sex roles, but a few important relationships seem clear:

D19. *Increasing dispersal of kin has diminished their salience, and therefore the importance of family-related roles, and has weakened family solidarity based on cooperation in day-to-day living.*

D20. *Continuing mobility, often job-related, has increased the costs of family relationships.* Migration is more costly in dollars, time and effort if it is a family rather than an individual move. Similarly, one's ability to move at all is restricted by family ties; the most common example relates to dual career couples, who will only move if both find suitable employment in another place. Mobility also increases the probability of divorce, with consequences for age, sex and family role definitions as described above.

Major Changes in Age Roles

Education

The primary role of the young in any society is the learning of their eventual adult roles — the standard sociological jargon is “primary socialization.” In highly industrialized societies like Canada, this process is handled to a large extent by specialized institutions (schools) and involves nearly all young people up to age 18 or so — the age at which they are considered more or less ready to undertake the full range of adult roles. Among persons between the ages of six and 13, for example, virtually 100 per cent are enrolled in elementary school; and, at ages 14-17, ninety per cent or so are enrolled full-time in secondary school, even though the law allows the termination of formal education after age 16.

The near-universal attendance of elementary school has characterized Canada at least since the end of World War II. But the high rates of secondary school enrollment represent the result of a sharp upward trend (see Leacy, 1983, Series W10-20). The ratio of full-time enrollments to persons age 14-17 doubled between 1951 and 1975. Some of the increase represents the tendency of older persons to return to high school, but much of it represents a decline in the tendency of 17 and 18 year olds to drop out for employment or marriage.

A substantial minority of Canadians prolong their education past the age of 18, and that number has increased markedly since the 1950s. The ratio of full-time post-secondary enrollments to persons 18-24, has risen more than threefold during that period, reaching about 20 per cent in 1975 (Leacy, 1983, Series W10-20).

Perhaps the most striking trend in school enrollments is that for persons in what used to be known as the “pre-school” ages — under six years, the traditional age for beginning grade one. The full-time enrollment of persons under age six as a ratio to the population of five-year olds rose from 0.28 per cent in 1951 to well over 1.00 in 1975, partly due to the rise in the proportion of five-year olds attending kindergarten, but partly because of the extension of schooling (or combination schooling and daycare) to four and even three-year olds (Leacy, 1983, Series W10-20). By now this ratio would be even higher, given the growth of day-care in the intervening decade.

In summary, the student role has become more nearly universal among age groups traditionally associated with schooling — six to 18 — but has also been extended outside that age range in three important ways: (a) more young adults (18-24) are enrolled in some form of post-secondary education; (b) more

older adults are returning to school for further education; and (c) children are beginning full-time enrollment at earlier ages, often as early as three.

Some demographic consequences of these changes in age-related educational roles include the following:

R1. *For parents, the extension of education to the secondary and post-secondary level means greater costs of childrearing over a longer period of dependency.* There are direct economic costs, but also indirect costs associated with the young person's postponement of entry into productive work. There also are psychological costs, as parent-child struggles associated with adolescence are prolonged to higher ages, with legal and chronological adults wishing to be independent while *de facto* dependent on their parents. In general, modern attempts to raise "quality" children, of which prolonged education is symptomatic, have made children very expensive, and contributed both to the decline of fertility and to the delay of childbearing.

R2. *The increasing resort to pre-schools or daycare for very young children should ease the time costs of childrearing, especially for women, but the money costs remain high, and in any case the pattern reduces the centrality of childrearing in a woman's life.* Daycare both symbolizes and reinforces the secondary position occupied by motherhood for the contemporary woman. Note that fatherhood has long tended to be secondary for males.

Labour Force Participation

At the turn of the century, Canada had what Davis and van der Oever (1982) have called the "breadwinner" system: virtually all able-bodied males worked for pay (all except the very young, the very old, and the infirm); women's participation in the labour force was marginal, at least by comparison to the present. Their main tasks were the rearing of children and housekeeping — although on farms and in other family enterprises, clearly their labour was financially productive.

Two important age-related trends in labour force participation can be noted since that time. The first is the steady decline in the participation rates of males ages 14-19 (Leacy, 1983, Series D107-122). From 1921 (the earliest date for which the relevant data are available) until 1961, the rate for this age-sex group declined from 68 per cent to 41 per cent. Since then the rate may have risen somewhat, but there are problems with the comparability of data for more recent dates. The decline presumably is related to the rise noted above in the proportion of young males attending secondary school. But some part of it also may be related to the rising unemployment rates among males in this age group, which discourage labour force participation. Unemployment rates for

this group, which ranged between four and seven per cent between 1946 and 1953, had climbed to 16 per cent by 1975. Among males 15-24 in the labour force, 13 per cent were unemployed in 1983.

The other important trend is the decline in the labour-force participation rates of older males, that is, those 65 and over. In 1921, 60 per cent of these men were reported as in the labour force. By 1961, this proportion had been cut in half, and stood at 31 per cent. It was more than halved between 1961 and 1981, reaching 14 per cent in the latter year. Part of this trend is due to the decline of the quantitative importance of agriculture as an occupation; part is due to the growth of the notion of mandatory retirement, and of private and government pension schemes to support it.

Whatever the causes, this trend, together with that noted for young males, signals a withdrawal of males under 20 and over 65 from "productive" labour, and a focussing of productive effort in those between 20 and 65, among whom labour-force participation rates have remained virtually constant over the last several decades, at rates above 90 per cent. As will be seen below, some of this effort increasingly has been shared by women.

Stated most generally, the trend in the youth role has been toward education, consumption and leisure, and in the elderly role toward consumption and leisure.

Some demographic implications are as follows:

R3. *Declining labour-force participation rates and high unemployment rates among the young, especially young males, increase the costs of children to parents, and diminishes the readiness of young adults to assume the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing at any early age.*

R4. *The declining labour-force participation rates among older males, and the continuing low rates among older females do not seem to have helped make jobs available to young adults, since their unemployment rates remain high. Nor has the newfound leisure of the elderly been employed in any effective way to assist in the raising of the younger generation.* In fact, as Davis and van der Oever argue, the slack caused by the retreat of males from the labour force has largely been taken up by middle-aged women (see below). They also suggest that the elderly have become a greater financial burden on those in the prime working ages (through taxation), with delayed marriage and lower fertility a result.

Major Changes in Sex Roles

Education

The main sex-related trend in education has been the increasing participation of women in higher education, specifically university education.

The proportion of university undergraduates who were female rose sharply from 1920 to 1925-30, and then remained at about the same level (actually there was a slight decline in the period 1945-55) until it began a sustained rise from 1955 on. The trends in the percentage of graduate students who were female were similar, although there was a more pronounced decline from relatively high levels in the 1920s to a trough in 1955. Not until 1975 did the proportion exceed the levels achieved in the years 1920-35 (Leacy, 1983, Series 340-438). Full-time undergraduate enrollments of females as a proportion of women ages 20-24 show a roughly similar trend, with a plateau in the 1930s, and a sharp upward trend beginning after 1955.

Not only have women increased their overall participation rates in university education; they also have shown a greater tendency to take advanced degrees, and to take programs related to professions or specializations traditionally reserved to males, although pronounced sex differences remain in these regards. An increasing proportion of women clearly view university education as preparation for a career.

R5. *The increasing pursuit of higher education by women tends to delay their entry into marriage and childbearing.* This effect is all the more pronounced since men are increasingly neither willing or able to support women in such a way that they could undertake both education and family formation at an early age.

R6. *Both the content and the experience of higher education are apt to broaden women's horizons and to give them a sense of role options other than the conventional roles of marriage, motherhood, and housekeeping.*

Labour Force Participation

While the overall labour-force participation rates of males 15 and over have remained virtually unchanged since the turn of the century (at around 80 per cent), those of women have climbed steadily from 14 per cent in 1901 to 29 per cent in 1961, roughly doubling, and then nearly doubling again to 52 per cent by 1981 (Leacy, 1983, D107-122). A similar trend can be observed in the proportion of the total labour force accounted for by women, which rose from 13 per cent in 1901 to 27 per cent in 1961 and 40 per cent by 1981 (Leacy,

1981, D86-106). The bulk of this increase has been among women between the ages of 20 and 65. Among women 20-24, the rise between 1921 and 1981 has been from 40 to 73 per cent. Among those 25-34, the rate rose from 20 per cent in 1921 to 68 in 1983.

Even more striking, in terms of the gradual breakdown of the "breadwinner" system, has been the rise in labour force participation by married women and by women with young children. Among women with a husband at home and pre-school-age children, for instance, the per cent in the labour force rose from 34 in 1975 to 52 in 1983 (Statistics Canada, 1985).

These changing patterns of female labour force participation probably constitute the single most important change in sex roles, in general and specifically in respect to demographic change. Their effects may be summarized as follows:

R7. *The expectation on the part of young women that they will work full-time for most of their adult life, possibly in a career, has led to a postponement of marriage and childbearing.*

R8. *These same expectations have led to a curtailment of family size.* One or two children may be managed on the basis of part-time parenting, but with three or four, the logistics become difficult if not impossible. The problem is exacerbated by the facts: (a) that the redefinition of the male parental role has not yet reached the point of equal sharing of the responsibilities for child-care or housekeeping; and (b) adequate and reasonably inexpensive daycare is not generally available. As is well known, the additional responsibilities borne by woman as full-time workers have not been fully compensated for by release from residual responsibilities for domestic tasks. Lower fertility is the inevitable result.

Increasing Role Homogeneity

A strong cultural emphasis on the value and rights of the individual seems to have had two effects on the definitions of age-sex roles: (a) the individual is seen as "transcending" any particular social role in the sense that he/she is not expected to subordinate her/himself to a role, except by personal choice; and (b) individuals of different ages and sexes are increasingly seen as having the same rights, prerogatives, privileges, and responsibilities. The two trends are closely related, since equality of rights may be seen as a logical consequence of the overarching value of the individual.

R9. *The increasing homogeneity of age-sex roles has diminished family/household solidarity based on a division of labour, and has increased intra-*

family/household competition for scarce goods; this in turn has fostered the formation of smaller and less complex households, as is manifested in demographic trends such as declining fertility, the rising divorce rate, and increased proportions living alone (Burch, 1985).

Conclusions and Suggested Research

The above overview of age-sex roles and demographic change suggests the following general conclusions:

1. Demographic change has played an important causal role in the shaping of modern conceptions of age-sex roles, but modern roles and role definitions have in turn affected demographic trends. Many of the key relationships tend to be mutually reinforcing.

2. The relationships thus constitute a system, such that any one factor is unlikely to change in isolation. From a policy point of view, this implies both options and constraints — options, since the system provides many potential points for intervention; constraints, since superficial or narrow policy interventions may be ineffectual.

3. The changes in age-sex roles and in demographic patterns are deeply rooted in the very nature of Canadian society — a modern, urban-industrial society, in which the vast majority of adults work as individual employees of large organizations. Many of the changes described above result ultimately from the virtual disappearance of family-owned productive enterprises, a major source of traditional family solidarity. Many also derive from a central cultural emphasis — in the Western cultural tradition of which Canada is a part — on the pre-eminent importance of the individual. This suggests that demographic policy will be able at best to introduce marginal corrections in levels and trends (where this is seen as desirable). Demographic policy cannot change the nature of Canadian society.

4. From the standpoint of demographic impact, the single most important change in age-sex roles described above is the entry of women into the labour force on a full-time, permanent basis.

5. The increasing centrality of work as opposed to childbearing and rearing in women's lives suggests that minor changes in the costs of children to parents are not apt to encourage higher fertility. The savings are more apt

to be devoted to career enhancement, leisure and to investments in "child quality," notably for female children.

6. The above review is consistent with the view that the burdens of productive work and of childcare have been increasingly focussed on middle-aged adults, with less help than previously from the young and the old. If true, then the trend has to be critically examined from the viewpoint of demographic implications (divorce, fertility, morbidity) as well as from the viewpoint of social equality.

The research agenda associated with the broad area of this report is potentially endless. A few specific topics seem to stand out as especially timely and important:

1. There is need for a more detailed description of Canadian age-sex roles. Behavioural indicators of certain aspects of roles are readily available in *Historical Statistics of Canada*, in some cases valuable time series back to the early part of the century. But most of the time series end around the mid-1970s or before, and updating them with comparable data is not always a routine matter. In any case, they deal only with behaviour (school attendance, employment, etc.) and tell us nothing directly about attitudes or cultural definitions. Some digging is necessary to see if sample surveys, including public opinion polls, can yield some direct measures of role attitudes and their changes. Further analysis of such surveys and polls (as well as other micro-data) might also yield some insights into variations in role definitions across subgroups, and into causes of attitude change. But for a demographic review, the mere detailed documentation of changes is important.

2. The Preston-Davis thesis, namely, that a disproportionate share of the societal goods has begun to flow to the elderly, at the expense of children and perhaps of middle-aged adults, needs to be evaluated for Canada (see conclusion 6 above). It is political dynamite, but is potentially too important in terms of social and demographic implications not to be tested and answered one way or the other. Clearly it is not entirely a scientific question, since values and notions of justice and equity are central. But a clarification of the relevant facts would be a major contribution.

3. The likely demographic effects of extended child-care services, whether commercial or governmental, need to be assessed. Such an extension currently seems to be the most popular proposal to mitigate the conflicts between labour force participation and child-rearing. But such a result is hardly certain (see 5 above). A related investigation would look into other approaches, including remuneration (through tax breaks, guaranteed income, "parent's al-

lowances") for those — whether men or women — who forego labour force participation in favour of the "household management" role.

4. Further research is needed on the forces leading to the increase in separate living noted above, with particular attention to role homogenization (Burch, 1985) and the supply of housing (size, type, etc.). Detailed analysis of census public-use tapes and of available surveys, notably the Quality of Life survey, could provide new empirical information on these matters.

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