

# Beneath the "Sentimental Veil": Families and Family History in Canda

Cynthia R. Comacchio

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# Beneath the "Sentimental Veil": Families and Family History in Canada

Cynthia R. Comacchio

Bettina Bradbury, ed., *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman 1992).

Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1993).

"THE FAMILY" has come under critical scrutiny of the most devastating at times of social anomie. Limiting our historical gaze to the past hundred years, we see this commentary intensifying at certain identifiable conjunctures: the late 19th century, with its industrial adjustments and fin-de-siècle angst; the tumultuous period of reconstruction immediately after the two world wars; the harrowing Depression decades; the disruptive, clanging, clashing 1960s; and during the past decade or so of our post-industrial, post-modern malaise. Belying the very definition of the word, the "crisis" in the family is an on-going process.

Beneath the family crisis debates, historical and contemporary, is a notion of family that is itself a multifaceted myth, with the symbolic force of mythology that mere historical fact can hardly counter. When "the family" is spoken of, it carries the weight of countless meanings, subjective, cultural, spiritual, scientific, materialistic, political, and above all, ideological. Regardless of the instrument of scrutiny, or the source under examination, family transcends the category to which it is assigned. Family, in the end, is used unquestioningly in normative ways when it is a prescriptive term that is only very narrowly descriptive at any given historical moment.

The history of the family was one of the earliest, and most logical, offshoots of what was once the "new social history." Their shared purpose was to introduce the lives of ordinary people into historical research, to "open windows to levels of historical experience long overshadowed" by traditional historical interests and

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analyses.<sup>1</sup> Unlike social critics of any period, historians aspire to understand *families*, in their various configurations, and not "the family." In their attempts toward this end, they inevitably touch upon the differences that have always existed, and that persist, between what family means and what family is.

Two recent publications in the field will allow students of Canadian family history the opportunity to see this historical importance of the family as an institution, its diversity of form and function, and the differential experience of family in accordance with class, gender, age, region, and time. We now have for our use and enjoyment both a collection of essays, *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, edited by Bettina Bradbury, and the first in-depth study of families in Canada that is informed by both class and gender analysis, Bradbury's own *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*.

The collection encompasses seventeen essays ranging over a considerable timespan, from the period of initial contact between Europeans and native peoples through the immediate post-World War II years. Bettina Bradbury has achieved a fairly representative selection, in terms of topic, period, approach and method. The essays cover a broad spectrum of family history, as interpreted by many of its leading Canadian practitioners: included are discussions on native peoples, New France, rural and fishing families, industrializing towns and cities, the sexual division of labour, gender and ethnicity, marriage law, marriage rituals, moral regulation, and state intervention. While some of these essays are already familiar, this is a useful and convenient package. In particular, those essays that were previously unpublished, or at least not readily accessible, make this collection worthwhile for reference and classroom use. Even in a compendium of this heft, as the editor acknowledges, there are inevitably some areas left untouched, especially since there are a great many themes and issues that could fit under the family history rubric where research remains preliminary and largely unpublished.<sup>2</sup>

Québécois historians have contributed greatly to our understanding of the meaning of "family" at various points in Canadian history, and especially in the history of New France. Two of the most imaginative essays in this text are easily

<sup>1</sup>Tamara Harevan, "Family History at the Crossroads," *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), ix-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup>The exciting new work currently going on in graduate history departments in areas such as sexuality, domestic violence, masculinity, health and medicine, and state policy will easily fill a second volume when their findings come to the light of publication. For example: at the Canadian Historical Association sessions at the Learned Societies Conference, Carleton University, Ottawa, June 1993, papers were presented by Nancy Forestell on gender in a northern mining community; Steven Maynard on homosexuality; Adam Givertz on moral regulation; Michael Smith on physical recreation as an aspect of "womanhood"; and there were doubtless many others that I did not personally attend. As an example of recent work on the relationship between family and state, see Annalee Golz, "Family Matters: The Canadian Family and the State in the Postwar Period," *left history* 1 (Fall 1993), 9-50.

those by Yves Landry and Marie-Aimée Cliche. Landry's study, on the "filles du roi," previously unavailable in translation, is worthy of inclusion for that reason alone to those still struggling to teach Canadian history to determinedly unilingual students.<sup>3</sup> More important, Landry's analysis is significant for what it reveals of the gendered understanding of marriage within the particular context of an underpopulated, and largely male, colony where an "atmosphere of urgency and haste" characterized marital matters. (15)

Piecing together the fragmentary evidence, Landry reveals that most (at least 80 per cent) did as expected of them and married within six months of arrival. But his examination of legal records indicates that they did not rush with desperation and without due consideration into whatever marriage prospect first presented itself. The average wait was five months. In addition to the ritual verbal promise of betrothal, most future spouses also went to notaries "in a gesture that betokened both social conformity and good will." Contracts were drawn up for about 82 per cent of first marriages, and about 62 per cent of second marriages.

Landry's conclusion from this evidence, is plausible: the first figure (82 per cent) is definitely high and, like the betrothal ceremony, could reflect "a desire to create a bond between two people who hardly knew each other and to confirm a decision that the vagaries of time and chance might alter." (19) Since the two parties "hardly knew each other," I would lean toward the latter view. It is more likely that they hardly trusted each other to uphold their respective ends of the deal. Most people turn to legal means to safeguard their personal interests rather than to establish emotional bonds where none previously existed. This is, in fact, borne out by Landry's evidence: he shows convincingly that the filles du roi took advantage of the ephemeral power bestowed by the serious gender imbalance in the colony to ensure that they got the deal that would best meet their needs, both at that moment and in the future. Their strategies were long-term, and the legal aspects of their betrothals and subsequent marriages suggest more rational than romantic calculation on their part. Landry's study demonstrates that these women were not simply royal pawns acquiescing to imperialistic demands, even if that was their intended destiny.

Marie-Aimée Cliche's look at the plight of unwed mothers during the French regime, also available here for the first time in translation, is largely reliant on legal records as well.<sup>4</sup> Her judicial sources, "which contain a wealth of information, although they deal only with extreme cases," certainly illuminate what little we have garnered about gender relations in this period. But Cliche herself tends to forget the latter caveat. She points out that women who attempted to effect legal redress "usually explained pregnancy by arguing that their lovers had promised to

<sup>3</sup>Yves Landry, "Gender Imbalance, Les Filles du Roi, and Choice of Spouse in New France," in Bradbury, ed., *Canadian Family History*.

<sup>4</sup>Marie-Aimée Cliche, "Unwed Mothers, Families, and Society During the French Regime," in Bradbury, ed., *Canadian Family History*.

marry them," and justified premarital relations, despite church sanctions and social conventions, when they were carried out within the framework of promise.<sup>5</sup> Little more than half of the sexual relationships that could be studied in detail were conducted with marriage in mind, she indicates, "at least in the mind of the girl." (40) Could this mean that little less than half were conducted with marriage in neither participant's mind? If so, what does that suggest about attitudes toward premarital relations in general, and on the part of women in particular?

Again, we come back to the problem inherent in these sources: it is only when something goes wrong and individual interests are at stake that these personal suits are brought before the court. In and of themselves, these figures do not tell us a lot about attitudes or even behaviour respecting sexuality, since we cannot know how many non-marriage-minded women and men "got away" with sexual relationships that did not end in personal or social disgrace and/or unwed pregnancy. The adversarial nature of the legal system insists that there be perpetrator and victim, winner and loser. Clearly all testimony presented in any case is presented with the intention, for both sides, of bringing about a victorious outcome for one.

What these sources *do* tell us is nonetheless significant: the colony's legal structures contributed in no small measure to the structuring of sexuality and gender relations. The "double standard" was underscored and upheld in the woman's claim to have been dishonoured, a claim that did not apply to, and was not employed by, men. Punishment reflected the class aspects of these relations, in that fines were levied accorded to social rank. Where women of markedly lower rank were involved, "no cases were found where the man was ordered to pay civil damages." (50) Moreover, men were held primarily responsible for the affair, and were obliged to compensate women, at the least through provision for the child of unwed unions. If society were less inclined to vilify men for their sexual freedom, the law was used to impose limits on that freedom. But these were limits that clearly had a class basis as well as one determined by specific meanings of gender.

Another of the lesser-known studies included in this volume is Jennifer Brown's examination of childrearing in fur trade country.<sup>6</sup> Brown directly acknowledges the limitations of her sources, which are largely the personal reminiscences, written in old age, of her subject, Edgerton Ryerson Young. Yet she manages to create a deftly-woven and moving story that reveals much about native childrearing culture. By way of contrast and comparison, she also suggests the inner workings of the white Protestant middle-class family, about which facile conclusions are sometimes readily drawn.

Most remarkable about this story concerning the native "nanny" who cared for Young in his early years at a missionary outpost in Manitoba is what it reveals

<sup>5</sup>See Karen Dubinsky's similar findings for late 19th- early 20th-century Ontario, in Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario* (Chicago 1993).

<sup>6</sup>Jennifer S.H. Brown, "A Cree Nurse in a Cradle of Methodism: Little Mary and the Egerton R. Young Family at Norway House and Berens River," in Bradbury, *Canadian Family History*.

about the tensions at the heart of parent/child relations. We see the ways in which social expectations, especially religious and racial attitudes, override the assumed motive force of parenting — the best interests of the child. The differences between the native way and the "Anglo-Protestant" way may be too starkly depicted, because they are filtered through the memory of one whose early childhood experiences were shaped by their uneasy accommodation on the one hand, and open conflict between them on the other. It is nonetheless striking how the parents, at times, obviously strained against their own instinctual/emotional inclinations in dealing with their children, while the native nanny steadfastly responded to the children's needs and actions in an empathic, intuitive manner. At the most basic level, Brown shows that parents, too, are not born but made. This story of clashing ideas and practices indicates how childrearing is so much a product of the larger culture of which it is an integral part, how it becomes a tool for "fitting" the child/object back into that culture through socially-decreed ideals for producing ideal children, hence the ideal society.

On the rural family, we have Gérard Bouchard's demographic analysis of settlement and transmission patterns in the Québec countryside.<sup>7</sup> Bouchard considers the methods and motives behind the social reproduction system of preindustrial rural societies, with transmission of patrimony or family property as the major focus. The system was based upon "a family ethic that made hardworking fathers strive to adequately establish their children." In the Saguenay area of Québec, for example, the close-knit family was "well served by an open and advancing frontier until just after 1920," to change. Its major function became the exclusion rather than the establishment of family members. Moreover, the "Saguenay system" was not specific to that region, but part of a broader North American pattern.

Bouchard contends that we need to seek in rural society itself the principle of structural and social transformation, rather than looking to the external pull of industrializing towns and cities. This is a suggestive argument that positions the family at the centre of structural change instead of viewing it as a mere receptor of such changes, and often, where rural families are concerned, an unwilling and unwitting one. David Gagan and Chad Gaffield have outlined the Ontario aspects of this process by showing rural families continually dealing with shifting prospects for their current living standards, and more particularly for their children's futures.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Gérard Bouchard, "Transmission of Family Property and the Cycle of Quebec Rural Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century," in Bradbury. This study is part of an on-going project; see, for example, G. Bouchard, I. de Pourbaix, "Individual and Family LifeCourses in the Saguenay Region, 1842-1911," *Journal of Family History*, 12, 1-3 (1987).

<sup>8</sup>Gaffield, in examining English and French Canadian settlement in Eastern Ontario — specifically Alfred and Caledonia townships in Prescott county in the mid-19th century — finds that they were similarly positive in responding to economic opportunities but differed in their interpretation of land value and soil fertility, significantly affecting the cultural pattern of settlement in these townships; see Chad M. Gaffield, "Canadian Families in

But Bouchard takes his findings an intriguing step further, in that he correlates changes in the rural social reproduction process not only to structural change but also, ultimately, to the ideological transformations that would herald the Quiet Revolution. (126) It will be interesting to see how this idea is pursued; it should effectively redirect attention from the "thinkers" and policy-makers of Québec society to the core groups in that society.

Marilyn Porter's essay, first published in 1985, reveals much about women's work in Newfoundland outport communities "always on the brink of survival," and the role that this fiercely demanding and unrelenting work played in the reproduction of fishing families and the communities themselves.<sup>9</sup> Porter notes the authoritarianism of Newfoundland fathers and the extreme sexual division of labour that coexisted with a "pervasive egalitarian ethic and the consequent avoidance of authority." (166) The explanation that suggests itself for the seeming contradiction between collectivist family dynamics and individualist social ideas is that "family" itself was conceptualized in terms of the individual. For Newfoundland fishing families, at least on the basis of Porter's evidence, it is apparent that individual self-interest was subsumed, as it *had* to be, because of the never-changing marginal position of these families. Porter's study points to the need for comparative analysis of the ways in which "family" is construed, and the ways in which it actually operates, both within class levels as well as between them. Was there a little more leeway for individual negotiation of interests within the families of urban industrial workers that were somewhat better off, materially, than outport fishing families? And what about within the industrial working class itself: did skill and relative employment security allow for the operation of family as a "knot of individual interests," with all the internal wrangling that this implies, rather than as an individual?<sup>10</sup>

Most of the essays on the working-class family should be familiar to students of social history, with the exception, perhaps, of Suzanne Morton's delightful rendition of marriage rituals in a Halifax working-class neighbourhood in the 1920s, with its examination of courtship and marriage within the context of class culture. The remainder include reprints of Joy Parr's examination of the interrelated nature of work, kinship and gender in the hosiery town of Paris, Ontario; John Bullen's still unsurpassed work on child labour in Ontario; Franca Iacovetta's discussion of the accommodation of cultural understandings of family and

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Cultural Context: Hypotheses from the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Bradbury, *Canadian Family History*, 150-1. See also David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto 1981).

<sup>9</sup>Marilyn Porter, "'She Was Skipper of the Shore-Crew': Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland," in Bradbury, *Canadian Family History*.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Laslett, "The Family as a Knot of Individual Interests," in R.R. Wilk and E.J. Arnould, eds., *Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group* (Berkeley 1984), 363; see also Laslett, "The Character of Familial History, Its Limitations, and the Conditions of Its Proper Pursuit," *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987).

women's work to the material realities of a new land; Meg Luxton's follow-up to her seminal 1976 study of women's domestic labour in the northern Manitoba mining community of Flin Flon; and Bradbury herself on the specific contribution of daughters to the family economy and its gendered operation. Mark Rosenfeld's analysis of the male side of the gender/family/work equation represents the new historical interest in the constructed meanings of masculinity and their effects for class identification, gender relations, and the workings of family.<sup>11</sup>

From their various angles, these essays outline the contours of working-class families, wherein all members were potential or actual contributors to the family's collective survival and wellbeing. They also suggest the ways in which both paid and unpaid work remained critical to those ends, and how the idealized roles of male breadwinner and housekeeper-wife were social constructions that, while oppressive in the often-unattainable expectations that they imposed on men, and especially on women, were nonetheless adopted and apparently internalized by many. Most provocative is Rosenfeld's observation that the "peculiar working conditions" of engine and train crews legitimized male involvement in domestic labour away from home, but "when the worker returned home, this labour was his wife's duty." (254) In general, these essays point to the location of work as a crucial, of often overlooked, element in the sexual division of labour and constructions of gender: what is acceptably "manly" in one context is properly "womanly" in another. Their overall theme and focus are the material basis of family and the internal power relations that are defined by the seemingly unvarying and universal labels of father, mother, and children.

The ideas and concepts introduced in this collection are given full treatment in Bettina Bradbury's development of her earlier studies of gender and family in industrializing Montréal. In *Working Families*, Bradbury examines the expanding working class in Montréal at a conjuncture when the "nature of the interaction between family and work are in the process of changing." (11) Her approach is fundamentally materialist, aiming to consider "the continuities and changes in the ways that working class men and women fed, clothed and sheltered themselves and

<sup>11</sup>Suzanne Morton, "The June Bride as Working-Class Bride: Getting Married in a Halifax Working-Class Neighbourhood in the 1920s"; Bradbury, "Gender at Work at Home: Family Decisions, the Labour Market, and Girls' Contributions to the Family Economy"; John Bullen, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth Century Urban Ontario"; Joy Parr, "Rethinking Work and Kinship in a Canadian Hosiery Town, 1919-1950"; Mark Rosenberg, "'It Was a Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950"; Franca Iacovetta, "From Contadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-62"; Meg Luxton, "Two Hands for the Clock: Changing Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labour in the Home." The collection also includes reprints of Sylvia Van Kirk's work on native women and the fur trade and James Snell's study of sexual purity, and essays by Constance Backhouse on 19th-century married women's property laws, and Dominique Jean on family allowances in Québec.



their families in the years between 1861 and 1891." The key issue is one that has been heart and centre of much family history internationally since its beginnings as a sub-discipline of the "new social history": what was the impact of the industrial revolution on the family?

Within the specific setting of two Montréal working-class wards, Sainte Anne and Saint Jacques, Bradbury surveys the legal framework of family life, demographic patterns, family and household structures, the male breadwinner role, the work of children, wives and mothers, and the single-parent household. The ethnically-mixed ward of Sainte Anne, at the core of industrial Montréal, contained the workshops of the Grand Trunk. Saint Jacques, part of the increasingly francophone east end, still supported smaller-scale production in artisans' homes and workshops. In both, the majority of inhabitants depended on wage labour. The different characteristics of production in the two wards "afford the possibility of determining how the structure of the local labour market influences family work decisions." At the same time, the different ethnic origins of their inhabitants "offer a chance to examine the variations in the family economy related to peoples' ethnic and religious background or cultural traditions." (19-20)

The first monograph-length historical analysis of the Canadian family, *Working Families* is easily termed an inaugural study. As it will undoubtedly become the touchstone of much future research in this area, it is worth considering within the wider context of the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings of the field. The principal questions in any attempt to understand historically the impact of industrialization on the family are readily formulated: in what ways does family replicate, reproduce, and perpetuate the social relations of patriarchy and capitalism? Where does family fit into class society, and where does gender fit into family? If the questions are straightforward, the answers involve, as Bradbury points out, "layers of complexities" whose extraction demands an imaginative and resourceful methodology applied to disparate, and often difficult, sources.

Borrowing concepts and methods from working-class, feminist, and family history, Bradbury combines longitudinal assessment of census data with a "family strategies" and life course approach that traces working-class survival during this transitional period to its dependence "as much on the unpaid or informal labour of women and children" as on wages. She contends that "struggles and strategies originating in the household" must be seen as just as significant to standards of living as are those of workers on the job. To that end, Bradbury incorporates, within her materialist framework, a feminist analysis of the division of labour in home and market, the nature and contribution of women's labour, both paid and unpaid, the cost and value ascribed to that labour, and the gendered structure of both production and reproduction.

Bradbury considers that the "idea of family economy" is the most useful concept for grasping these relationships, and consequently the internal workings and daily lives of these families. (15-6) Seeking to avoid a flat and static picture of working-class families operating as "one" in the interests of all, she demonstrates

that family was at once a unit of survival, solidarity and support, and also the site and source of tension, gender inequality, and generational conflict. One of her major goals, then, and central to the organization of this study, is the unravelling of the sexual division of labour within the family to facilitate an understanding of "the complementary yet unequal nature" of the roles of men, women and children. (16) In order to meet this challenge, historians must look beyond the economy "narrowly defined," thus beyond factory and workshop, into the homes and neighbourhoods of workers.

The family economy approach has been much advocated in analyses of the interrelation of family and industrial capitalism.<sup>12</sup> Its use, however, often assumes an understanding of its definition. The family economy also encompasses such hazy components as gifts of clothes, food, perhaps occasionally even cash; charity; exchanges of labour — of the domestic variety, such as child care, and of skilled work, such as that involving household repairs and upkeep — among other uncharted and often unknowable contributions. Bradbury delineates the family economy as a set of relationships that include the paid labour of husbands and wives, unpaid domestic labour, informal labour, paid labour in the home, and the paid/unpaid, formal/informal contributions of children. This should suffice to ground the concept in the relations of production. Similarly, the life course and family strategies approaches that Bradbury employs to penetrate the complexities of the family economy have come in for their share of criticism.<sup>13</sup> To her credit, Bradbury has taken these limitations into account, and generally applies them in a qualified and careful manner. If there is a problem in their application, it tends, once again, to be a basic problem of definition.

The term "strategies," for example, denotes conscious, deliberate, calculated effort, the carrying out of specific plans toward specific ends. If it is meant to have broader implications, they should also be specified.<sup>14</sup> While some of this programmed and systematic effort is apparent in family responses to threats to its livelihood and wellbeing, for example, it could argued that much of this response

<sup>12</sup>Probably the most influential of the early works on the family economy is Louise A. Tilly and Jan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (London 1978; 2nd ed. 1989). Tilly and Scott divide their study of family in England and France into three periods that are arguably not entirely discrete: the preindustrial family economy, the family wage economy during industrialization, and the family consumer economy of the 20th century. While they recognize continuity and overlap, they tend to consider production and consumption as distinct categories.

<sup>13</sup>On the life-course approach, see the essays in Tamara Harevan, ed., *Transitions: The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective* (New York 1978), especially G.H. Elder, "Family History and the Life Course."

<sup>14</sup>Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, 7, argue in their introduction to the second edition that they intended the term to have "broader implications"; see Daniel Scott Smith's discussion of the range of meanings and connotations in Daniel S. Smith, "Family Strategy: More Than a Metaphor?" *Historical Methods*, 20 (1987), 118-9.

is not so much a matter of strategy — implicit in which is conscious choice — but lack thereof. Is a strategy necessary for looking for supplementary income when times are tight, or is some form of supplementing the primary breadwinner's wages the only conceivable immediate response? There are certainly different possibilities for the means of supplementation, limited though these may be, as Bradbury reveals. But do they involve strategizing or something closer to reactive, *ad hoc*, emergency coping measures? Does there necessarily have to be an explicit agreement on the part of individual family members to sacrifice self-interest? Intrafamilial relations are often based on implicit understanding of what is needed from family members at any moment. This "understanding" is not defined solely by internal family relations or even by the dominance of certain individuals — usually the parents, and usually the father over the mother — but perhaps as much by social convention.<sup>15</sup> Can we understand who is in a position to direct, or command, the family in a certain manner at a certain time by observing the results of a particular strategy?

Critics of the family strategies approach have also drawn attention to the problematic notion of policy that is embedded in the concept of strategy.<sup>16</sup> Bradbury shows how the legal, political and economic positions of men, women, and children informed family strategies in vital ways, gearing them always toward survival. There can be no argument that survival is the foremost objective of all living things. But does "survival" constitute policy and/or strategy? As Daniel Scott Smith has remarked, employed in this manner, "survival" does not connote the dissolution of the family or the death of its members, but the maintenance of a certain standard of living. And then we come again to the question of policy/strategy. How does the family decide on a standard of living that is acceptable to all, on the steps necessary to that end, on the actions required to achieve or maintain it?<sup>17</sup> Bradbury provides substantial evidence respecting the actions taken by family members in this regard. Given the nature of the sources available, however, the actual policy-making process that is the first step toward strategy remains off the page and somewhere in the margins of history. Does the outcome necessarily reveal a particular strategy, or could it have been, from time to time, the unwitting result of no strategy at all, or of a different strategy than that which appears obvious? As one of the foremost proponents of the approach has succinctly noted, it is quite simply difficult "to disentangle cause and effect."<sup>18</sup>

There is also the complicated matter of the origins of any given strategy. The authoritarian and patriarchal internal dynamic of the 19th-century family is duly

<sup>15</sup>Nancy Folbre, "Family Strategy, Feminist Strategy," *Historical Methods*, 20 (1987), 115.

<sup>16</sup>See the commentaries in "Family Strategy: A Dialogue," *Historical Methods*, 20 (1987), 113-25, especially Scott Smith, "Family Strategy: More Than a Metaphor," 119.

<sup>17</sup>Scott Smith, *ibid.*, 119; similarly argued by L. Cornell, "Where Can Family Strategies Exist?" *Historical Methods* 20 (1987), 121-2.

<sup>18</sup>Louise A. Tilly, "Beyond Family Strategies, What?" *Historical Methods* 20 (1987), 124; P. Moch, "Historians and Family Strategies," *ibid.*, 114.

noted by Bradbury, and supported by studies of other industrializing regions. This set of power relations may have been shaken in practice by the participation of wife and children in obtaining the means of subsistence, but it was barely dented on the level of ideology. Certainly the "family ethic" that sustained it never cracked open in this time — in any time, some would argue. Traditional family strategies mask the privilege of adults, and especially of men, as Bradbury acknowledges. Despite the evidence presented that shows women and children at times resisting paternal authority and making their own "strategies," maybe at heart family strategy was paternal strategy, implemented with varying degrees of willingness and helplessness on the part of other family members. For working-class men, familial authority may well have been the only source of power allowed them in a system that subordinated them on every other level. No matter what the extent of their contribution, wives and children were dependent upon, and subordinate to, the male head of household. Remove him from the family portrait, and, as Bradbury reveals in her discussion of the single parent, female-headed household, we see "women's inequalities laid bare." All strategy must then revolve around compensating for his absence. (191) Bradbury certainly does not deny the coercive element in familial relations. But her attempts to show the multiple negotiations underlying family strategies at times conceal more than they reveal about the unequal power relations at the basis of the family in class society.<sup>19</sup>

Most strategies become visible to historians when they are successful, so that their outcome, again, is proof of pre-existing strategy. The success of a strategy also implies that the family is working for the good of all. At the very least, individual dissent or resentment have been subsumed in the collective interest, and the family goes forward as would any self-possessed individual. What about sanctions against family members who appear uncooperative? Who has the power to decide what form they will take, and how are they used to punish the intransigent within the family circle?

Bradbury indicates that the law, and social misapprobation, constrained individuals to act in the family interest. But we have a firm impression of actual family practices for controlling dissent and punishing offenders against the family ethic. At the most extreme, these would include emotional abuse, possible violence, and expulsion. Revealing that family can be the locus of evil as well as cooperation and conflict, Bradbury mentions the cases of bigamy, prostitution, wife-beating and other forms of assault that "were frequent in the city's courts." (44-5) These, the strategies of the unsuccessful, look to the darker side of working-class family life, to the stresses inherent in material deprivation, subordination in the wider class

<sup>19</sup>See Tamara Harevan's warnings in this regard, in Harevan, "Family History at the Crossroads," *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), xv-xvi; also Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, Introduction, 2nd ed., 9.

system, and dependence and oppression by virtue of age and sex.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, in the end, we can observe family strategies most clearly through the historical mists when they fail, and it is left to institutions outside the family — the law, the church, state agencies, social welfare institutions — to cope with, and mitigate, that failure. By providing little beyond acknowledgement of these darker strategies and their repercussions for the working-class family, Bradbury appears to miss an opportunity to examine “strategies” in all that the concept implies within her own application of it.

Alcohol, we know, was one of the favourite means of escape available to working-class men who could ill afford it in every sense.<sup>21</sup> While she agrees that alcohol was frequently as much a menace to the family as were unemployment, low wages and recurrent illness, Bradbury’s discussion of its impact, and alcohol-related family violence, also disappoints in its sketchiness. (105) In her attempt to round out this grim picture of working-class family life, she points out that “suicides, starvation, indebtedness and wage seizures,” not to mention emotional and physical abuse of wives and children, the overall unhealthy conditions of life, and the psychological impact of living always on the edge of subsistence, “hide moments of fun and period of ease.” To emphasize the “dark side,” in effect, “minimizes both the differentiation within the working class and the ingenuity with which many workers and their wives and children shaped their standards of living.” (107)

Without denying the value of attention to historical agency, this sort of argument appears to conflate standard of living and quality of life. It would be interesting to speculate, since we cannot know, about the relative proportion of “moments of fun and periods of ease” in these lives under study. It would be somewhat less difficult to know the form that these took. Ultimately, however, no amount of ingenuity in making ends meet could assuage the mental and physical costs of being in that trap to begin with. The effort required to come up with these ingenuous methods, and the sheer amount of necessary labour involved in their implementation, most of it devolving upon already overburdened and physically-undermined women and children, does not leave room for the possibility of much fun. Rather than redressing the “grim portrait,” Bradbury’s own evidence actually

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Katherine Harvey, “To Love, Honour and Obey: Wife Battering in Working-Class Montreal, 1869-79,” *Urban History Review*, 19 (October 1990), one of the few published studies on family violence in Canada, and an essay that Bradbury cites. On family violence in the United States, see Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny* (New York 1987), and especially Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York 1988).

<sup>21</sup>On drinking and working-class [male] culture, there is the oft-reprinted classic by Peter DeLottinville, “Joe Beef of Montreal: Working Class Culture and the Tavern, 1869-89,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 8/9 (1981-2), 9-40; see also Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992), 102-5.

confirms the reality of it for a great many working-class families in industrializing cities in this period.

In her discussion of men's contributions to the family's standard of living, Bradbury observes that "providing" was more than a legal responsibility. The male breadwinner image was firmly rooted in both male and female conceptions of masculinity, and upheld in law. (80) Men's superior earning power made their wages indispensable, but these wages were often insufficient in and of themselves, particularly for those families at the bottom of the subordinate class. The earnings of the unskilled were so low as to leave no flexibility in family budgets. (83) Alongside conjunctural and seasonal fluctuations in wage rates, the "standard of living" of all working class families was also directly related to the life cycle. (89)

Empirical data can be employed to come to terms in some degree with questions about living standards. Regarding life quality, only those who lived these lives can ultimately judge whether they had what was essential to their happiness and comfort. It is sometimes unclear whether Bradbury means survival, in the sense of continued existence, or standard of living; these are not synonymous, either. There are moments, again, when she seems to contradict her own evidence, or at the least to downplay what is her starkest finding: the cycle was "most acute in families of those workers unable to earn more than \$300 per year, the majority of the working class." (99) And the repercussions are probably most discernible when the fundamental issue of shelter is considered, bringing us into the working-class home.

Historians of the family have long been preoccupied with the effect of industrialization on household composition, differing among themselves as to whether it signalled the end of the extended family, or whether, in fact, the "nuclear" form represented a continuity from preindustrial times.<sup>22</sup> Bradbury's findings again indicate that the answer is not a simple either/or. Montréal families headed by a man were less likely to include kin in the immediate residential unit in the 1890s than in the earlier period of industrialization, but this was not a matter of rejecting kin and rupturing kinship ties. Her subjects were just less likely to be sharing living space with relatives, a sharing that was itself a function of the family's life cycle and its related economic need. (67-70)

In the housing sphere, Bradbury's focus on the internal stratification of the working class is both noteworthy, and yet somewhat overplayed. Skilled workers could, and did, have better accommodations than did the unskilled and those in the "injured trades." But, as she observes, the sanitary state of most old, and even much new, working-class housing was altogether deplorable, no doubt negatively affect-

<sup>22</sup>Especially Peter Laslett, and other participants in the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. See Laslett, R. Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge 1972); also L. Berkner, "The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household," *American Historical Review*, 77 (1972); Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, 13.

ing general health and well-being, and especially the very sensitive infant mortality index. Overcrowding and doubling-up remained a reality for a certain proportion of the poor families. Bradbury cautions that the experience of the truly marginal "should not be seen as typical," especially when evidence is derived from contemporary "muck-raking" journalism. (75) At the same time, "other less sensational evidence does point to crowding and doubling-up as phenomena that were not limited to the city's outcast poor." (76) Perhaps other types of qualitative evidence are required here: obviously the subjective element is at work again, not only in the eyes of the beholder of poverty, but also in those of the poor themselves.

If families were increasingly less inclined to live with kin, the importance of reciprocal relations between family members, both within and outside the household, remained an operative component of family strategies. Bradbury shows how these relations were negotiated by different family members over the various stages of the life course. While discussing neighbourhood ties, she does not give much attention to organized support networks. In the absence of state intervention, these must have provided certain vital emergency services for families that were so often needful of them. What about mutual benefit societies, and religious and charitable organizations, often overlapping as they were? We know something of the significance of the latter with respect to day nurseries, a crucial service from the point of view of the worker family, and something of the good works done by the "ladies' auxiliaries" composed of the wives of organized workers.<sup>23</sup> How did families go about availing themselves of non-kin support networks? What were the scope and nature of any organized support available and provided to them?

Bradbury concludes that formal institutions run by the churches, by unions or by organized groups "were important in some peoples' lives," but for much of the working class "the texture of daily life revolved more around the sociabilities built up within families, between neighbours and friends, on the streets or in taverns and shops." (47) Was there a working-class aversion to these organizations, a sense of shame at being publicly needy? An examination of the relationship between families and these formal institutions could foster a clearer sense of working class respectability, and of the ideological basis and class interpretation of the family ethic.

It could also shed some light on the matter of class consciousness in industrializing Canada.<sup>24</sup> Did the collective protective efforts of the family promote and encourage a wider sense of collectivity, a larger sense of family within the

<sup>23</sup>Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority," in S.M. Trofimenkoff, A. Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority* (Toronto 1977); S. Murray, "Quand les menageres se font militants," *Labour/Le Travail*, 29 (1992), 157-186; Marta Danylewicz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto 1987). On the associational life of workers, see Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Kingston/Montréal 1979), and Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, especially ch. 2.

<sup>24</sup>See Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 98-102.

working class? Certainly, the labour movement, in its turn, used the language and symbolism of family to promote and reinforce class solidarity. It also supported key concepts such as the family wage, the male breadwinner, and the stay-at-home wife. What impact did such external reinforcement of the family ethic have on internal familial relations, and vice-versa?

Bradbury does effectively contextualize the working-class family with respect to its situation in an industrializing urban setting, drawing supportive evidence from often-fragmentary sources, and carefully reconstructing working-class lives as they were lived out in mundane reality. The material underpinnings of "family" are firmly established. But she is not nearly as successful in situating the family within the realm of ideology, paying surprisingly little attention to the force of ideas and symbol systems surrounding "family" at that time. It could be reasoned that ideas about family are not particularly relevant to a materialist analysis focused on the concrete details of everyday life, which are difficult enough to uncover. But Marx himself was interested in the gap between social reality and its ideological representation, and attempted to situate "family" within the ideological contours of class society. Regarding the family and its contradictory internal relations, he observed that the fact that "the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must, therefore, itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionized in practice. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and in practice."<sup>25</sup>

For purposes of historical understanding, then, we must examine "family" in its internal contradictions — which Bradbury has done — but also in relation to the contradictions between the "holy family," the social construct/ideal that exists "in the clouds," and the "secular basis" that is the actually-existing "earthly family." Engel's *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), a study more descriptive and historical than theoretical, also painted an unremittingly bleak picture of "the dissolution of family ties" and the "universal decadence of family life among the workers," leading its author to conclude that "family life for the worker is almost impossible under the existing social condition."<sup>26</sup> There are clearly assumptions about the meaning of family ties and family life that are class and time specific, as well as gender specific. Nor were these escaped by Marx and Engels, and we cannot expect that they could or should have escaped them.

More important, in pointing to these contradictions between prevalent ideas about family and the actual historical experiences of real families, Marx and Engels

<sup>25</sup>Karl Marx, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* v. 5 (New York 1975), 4.

<sup>26</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Stanford 1968), 145, 160-1, 225.



determined that "one cannot speak at all of the family *as such*."<sup>27</sup> There has been a variety of families in history, "with no single form absolute and final."<sup>28</sup> Yet, in the 19th century as in the 20th, the public discourse about family resolutely depicts it as this single, simple, universal form.<sup>29</sup> Both Bradbury's edited collection and her own study are grounded in this recognition of the variety of family forms, but, beyond the gender argument, she does not directly examine this other relationship that defined family and familial roles. Ideas, after all, do not exist solely in the clouds. They have a formative impact on the economic, political and legal structures, hence the policies that affect social relations and material reality.

In her discussion of institutions, ideologies and daily life, Bradbury points out that "religion, ethnic traditions, and class solidarities collided, competed, and at times complemented each other as individuals and families adjusted to the challenges of survival on fluctuating and inadequate wages." (43) Successive waves of Irish immigration made Griffintown, in the heart of Sainte Anne ward, home to one-third of Montréal's Irish population. She indicates that bishops and priests were powerful influences in state policies and in the daily lives of much of the population. Working with families was the chief instrument of Bishop Bourget's ultramontane vision, and he proposed to effect his plans for increasing Church control over its members by "intervening directly with families in calming internal dissensions, bringing together alienated spouses, encouraging rebellious children to obey their parents, pushing negligent parents to raise offspring well." (44) But we learn no more respecting the details of these plans, whether they were actualized, how they were received by their intended targets, what impact, if any, they had on intrafamilial relations. Was it Church, rather than state, that played the most significant interventionary role in working-class families in French Canada, as has commonly been argued?<sup>30</sup> Or was the imperious voice of the parish priest ineffectual in the city?

<sup>27</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 5, 180-1; Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (New Brunswick, NJ 1983), 48-65, provides a thorough and astute critique of Marx and Engels and their perspectives on family/class/ideology and "the woman question."

<sup>28</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols. (Moscow 1971), 1: 460.

<sup>29</sup> See the overview by Diana Gittins, *The Family in Question* (New Jersey 1986), especially ch. 3; also D. Cheal, *Family and the State of Theory* (Hertfordshire 1991), 8-14; Jane Lewis, "Reconstructing Women's Experience of Work and Family," in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love* (London 1987); and for a summary of contemporary conservative views, see P. Abbott, C. Wallace, *The Family and the New Right* (London 1992).

<sup>30</sup> For example, S.M. Trofimenkoff, *The Dream of Nation* (Toronto 1982), especially ch. 8 and ch. 16; see also Dominique Jean, "Family Allowances and Family Autonomy," in Bradbury, *Canadian Family History*, 404; Bernard Vigod, "History According to the Boucher Report: Some Reflections on the State and Social Welfare in Quebec Before the Quiet Revolution," in A. Moscovitch, J. Albert, eds., *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (Toronto 1987), 175-7.

This silence on the issue of religion and its relationship to the working-class family is all the more puzzling because of the Catholicism of the majority of these families, regardless of their ethnic origins.<sup>31</sup> Catholicism has historically inscribed a forceful, explicit ideology of motherhood and family, its central images the Virgin Mother and the New Testament Holy Family, images extended to all humanity as the family of God. The medieval cult of Mary had a considerable following in Catholic Québec. This family iconography was intensified by the nationalist thrust toward messianism, the notion of providential mission with family as both distinguishing feature (by comparison to English Canada) and foundation of an elect people. We need more discussion, therefore, if necessarily speculative, about the psychological, behavioural, and ultimately material effects of these pervasive ideas and ideals. Bradbury's examination of schools (many of which were under religious auspices) as agents of socialization that "reflected and perpetuated class and gender inequalities" points to only one many possibilities for the power of organized religion to make itself felt — as it may have done in ways more tenuous and subtle with respect to the issue of family limitation. (122-4; 64)

Contradictions between "holy" and "earthly" families notwithstanding, at bottom, the key social relation under analysis here is the relation of the family to the means of production. The survival of the family is the survival of the working class. Both domestic labour within the broader scheme of labour-power and its reproduction, and the social reproduction issue, have been central to on-going and as yet unresolved debates about class, gender and family.<sup>32</sup> Marx never developed a comprehensive theory of the reproduction of labour power, all the while conceding its importance for a theory of the capitalist mode of production: "the maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital."<sup>33</sup> Any production is at once reproduction:

<sup>31</sup>See Gittins, *The Family in Question* 158, on the importance of patriarchal religious ideals/beliefs in family ideology; see also P. Hudson, W.R. Lee, "Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective," in Hudson, Lee, eds., *Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective* (Manchester 1990), 3.

<sup>32</sup>For an overview of these debates, which commenced in the mid-1960s, see Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*; P. Armstrong, H. Armstrong, *Theorizing Women's Work* (Toronto 1990), 67-97; S.J. Wilson, *Women, Families and Work*, 3rd ed. (Toronto 1991), ch. 4.

<sup>33</sup>Marx, *Capital*, 1: 168, 537; see Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 64, 129; also J. Dickinson, B. Russell, "Introduction: The Structure of Reproduction in Capitalist Society," in Dickinson, Russell, eds., *Family, Economy and State: The Social Reproduction Process under Capitalism* (New York 1986), 1-4; also Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy: 100 Years of State Intervention in the Family* (Toronto 1992), 17-58; and James Conley, "More Theory, Less Fact? Social Reproduction and Class Conflict in a Sociological Approach to Working-Class History," in G.S. Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John's 1988); Wilson, *Women, Families and Work*, 13-23.

"a society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and as following on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction."<sup>34</sup>

At base, social reproduction demands an available supply of labour power, and therefore the procreation, maintenance and replenishment or replacement of the labour force. The daily processes that restore the worker, enabling him/her to return to work, take place largely — although not exclusively — within the family, just as the family is usually the site for procreation. Recent studies about the social reproduction process have focused on the social construction of factors of material production, in particular that of labour power as a commodity, and the reproduction of capitalist social relations.<sup>35</sup> Feminist research has brought forward the often-obscured connections between household structures, the social position of women, and social reproduction.<sup>36</sup>

There is not much in Bradbury's analysis that theorizes women's roles within the family vis-à-vis social reproduction. The latter concept is used largely as a descriptive term that is assumed to be self-evident in its meaning and application. Bradbury points out that the emergence of industrial capitalism precipitated "a gradual reshuffling of the distribution of responsibility for the daily reproduction of workers away from the owners of the means of production to the families of the workers." There, it was largely the task of wives and mothers. The sexual division of labour and women's overall responsibility for domestic labour were, of course, nothing new.<sup>37</sup> Rather, the Industrial Revolution made a growing proportion of wives largely dependent on wages earned by others. At the same time, the expansion of industry opened up segments of the labour process to women and children. Thus, while unpaid domestic labour is integral to the reproduction of labour power itself, women in class societies often participate in surplus production as well. Women's position in the working class is shaped not only by their activities in the realm of social reproduction, that is, in the maintenance and renewal of labour power, but also by the nature and extent of their participation in the labour force.

As Bradbury indicates, the patterns of intermittent labour force participation of women and children fit them readily into the category of industrial reserve army.

<sup>34</sup>Marx, *Capital*, 1: 531; 3: 790.

<sup>35</sup>See the essays in Dickinson, Russell, eds., *Family, Economy and State*; also Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 151; Bryan D. Palmer, "Social Formation and Class Formation in North America, 1800-1900," in David Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family History* (Toronto 1984), 262.

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, M. Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women* (New York 1987), 27-8; the collection of essays in Bonnie Fox, ed., *Hidden in the Household: Domestic Labour Under Capitalism* (Toronto 1980); Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love* (Toronto 1980), 14-9.

<sup>37</sup>Kerry Abel points out that this sexual division of labour existed in pre-contact Dene society: K. Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montréal/Kingston 1993), 20-3.

They possess a potential labour power which is drawn upon according to the need of the individual, the family or capitalist society. For Marx and Engels, the effect on the family of its relation to capitalist production is harsh and irremediable: the family is stripped of "its sentimental veil" and the family relation transformed into "a mere money relation." All members of the working-class family, regardless of gender and age, are instruments of labour, "more or less expensive to use," and "all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour."<sup>38</sup> A "latent slavery" within the family now sees the worker selling wife and child in addition to his own labour power.<sup>39</sup> Whatever we may conclude about his brutal assessment of proletarian family relations, the implications of the factory system for family and gender are readily grasped.

Under the industrial mode of production, women would have increasing difficulty combining productive and reproductive activities.<sup>40</sup> The long-standing debates about the theoretical significance of domestic labour and its nature and relationship to production are complicated, unrelenting and largely unresolved. One model depends upon a rigid dichotomy of public and private, use-value and exchange value, consumptive activity and productive activity. The "dual systems" approach falsely separates patriarchy and capitalism, production and reproduction; it obliterates their mutual support, and negates the impact of class on the lives of women as well as the importance of a gendered understanding of class divisions.<sup>41</sup> A more fluid and relational framework, as Diana Gittins has pointed out, would allow for the interaction and overlap of two economies and two labour markets. This approach would elucidate not only class/gender oppression, but the often-hidden material contributions of women to the family economy, and consequently, to the larger economic system.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the theoretical significance ascribed to domestic labour, in the real world women are primarily responsible for performing it, and have been historically. As such, they have contributed heavily to the maintenance and renewal of

<sup>38</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 6: 491-502.

<sup>39</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 1: 373, 285.

<sup>40</sup> Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, 14-45; Sonja Rose, "Proto-industry, Women's Work and the Household Economy in the transition to Industrial Capitalism," *Journal of Family History*, 13 (1991), 183; S. VanHorn, *Women, Work and Fertility, 1900-86* (New York 1988), 4; S. Yeandle, *Women's Working Lives: Patterns, and Strategies* (London 1984), 2; Gittins, *The Family in Question*, ch. 6; Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love*, 17. See also the essays in Fox, ed., *Hidden in the Household: Domestic Labour Under Capitalism*, especially E. Blumenfeld and S. Mann, "Domestic Labour and the Reproduction of Labour Power," 271-301; and w. Secombe, "The Expanded Reproduction Cycle of Labour Power," 225.

<sup>41</sup> D. Gittins, "Marital Status, Work and Kinship, 1850-1930," in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*, 250; Armstrong and Armstrong, *Theorizing Women's Work*, 27-8.

<sup>42</sup> Gittins, "Marital Status, Work and Kinship," 251, 265.

both the nonworking and the active labour force. As Lise Vogel contends, "so long as capitalism survives, domestic labour will be required for its reproduction, disproportionately performed by women and most likely accompanied by a system of male supremacy."<sup>43</sup> Bradbury ascribes much significance to women's reproductive activities within the context of gender oppression, but little within the context of class. Her analysis skirts the question of the relative importance of this responsibility for the domestic labour necessary to social reproduction, with respect to the sexual division of labour, and the family itself, in the material basis and perpetuation of gender inequalities in capitalist society.<sup>44</sup>

Bradbury's most important findings respecting women's work support those of Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, among others who have studied industrializing Europe and women's economic participation, both within and outside the home.<sup>45</sup> As she demonstrates, married women appear to have sought relatively formal work only when they could find no other way of ensuring their family's survival. (171) Other means, such as raising animals and growing vegetables for consumption, exchange or cash, and taking in boarders, laundry, and sewing, were customary in both Irish and French Canadian families. These practices on the part of wives continued a pattern "that derived not simply from their farming background but from a history of having to supplement low wages." (163-9) They represented, in effect, a tradition of "sub-penny capitalism."<sup>46</sup> Such activities not only made a difference to the family's well-being, but also underpinned the urban economy in substantial ways. Production, reproduction, consumption and exchange intermeshed, and there were no clear lines of demarcation between formal and informal economies. (153) When women did seek formal employment, it was "invariably in jobs that allowed them to reconcile their multiple responsibilities as wife, mother, domestic worker, wage manager and revenue stretcher." (169)

Both men and women recognized the importance of the wife's efforts at "keeping a good home," which was integral to constructions of femininity just as being a good provider — contingent upon not having a working wife — was a crucial component of working-class masculinity. Some historians have argued that this very ideal was the most powerful factor restricting women's access to a broader

<sup>43</sup>Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 170.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>45</sup>For example, A. Meyering, "La petite ouvrière surmenée: Family Structure, Family Income, and Women's Work in 19th Century France," in Hudson, Lee, eds., *Women's Work and the Family Economy*; P. Ayers, "The Hidden Economy of Dockland Families: Liverpool in the 1930s," in *ibid.*; and the essays in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*.

<sup>46</sup>Elizabeth Roberts, "Women's Strategies," in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*, 239-44; also L. Jamieson, "Limited Resources and Limiting Conventions: Working Class Mothers and Daughters in Urban Scotland," in *ibid.*; E. Ross, "Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's Working Class Mothers," in *ibid.*; see also Hudson, Lee, "Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective," in Hudson, Lee, eds., *Women's Work and the Family Economy*, 14; P. Ayers, "The Hidden Economy of Dockland Families," in *ibid.*, 271.

spectrum of paid work during the 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>47</sup> What Bradbury indicates, however, is that the nature of production in this transitional period played an important role in the availability, and viability, of women's paid work outside the home. The changing configuration of the household within the system of production necessarily affected women's participation as members of the economic unit, while the family nonetheless remained the main channel of recruitment to wage labour.

While Bradbury has clarified this relationship, the question remains as to the ways in which ideology and the legal structure influenced boundaries between male and female labour. Clearly the ideology of gender that attempted to confine women to the domestic sphere predated industrialization. The extent to which workplace supervision and hierarchy replicated, and were supported by, the power structures of family and household also remains a vital question.<sup>48</sup> The concept of the family wage and the retention of gendered wage differentials were useful to industrial paternalism, and therefore to capital/labour strategies. But local attitudes to women's work were also important, especially in the setting of Catholic and francophone Québec, where the clerico-nationalist elite persisted in denying the reality of women's paid labour and sanctifying their roles in the home.<sup>49</sup>

The increasing stratification within the working class, where wives of the unskilled and those in the "injured trades" were much more likely to work outside the home, may also have contributed to an internal status consciousness that reinforced support for the bourgeois ideal. The male breadwinner myth became increasingly important to working-class respectability, a respectability defined firstly by the bourgeoisie.<sup>50</sup> Its working-class adherents must have felt the pressures of conforming to role prescriptions, that, for most of them, were out of reach because of their material circumstances. How did the women and men of Montréal's working class adapt and modify these notions of respectability to accord

<sup>47</sup>Hudson, Lee, "Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective," in Hudson, Lee, eds., *Women's Work and the Family Economy*, 4-6.

<sup>48</sup>See T. McBride, "The Long Road Home: Women's Work and Industrialization," in R. Bridenthall, C. Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston 1977), 283; for Canada, Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto 1992) goes a long way toward unravelling this interplay of capitalism and patriarchy for two Ontario towns, Paris and Hanover; see also her article in the Bradbury collection reviewed herein.

<sup>49</sup>On the influence of local attitudes, see Rose, "Proto-industry, Women's Work and the Household Economy," 181-93; Ayers, "The Hidden Economy of Dockland Families," in Hudson, Lee, eds., *Women's Work and the Family Economy*, 280.

<sup>50</sup>J. Lewis, "The Working Class Wife and Mother and State Intervention," in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*, 100-3; also Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 98-102. E. Roberts, "Women's Strategies, 1890-1940," 230-44, in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*, uses oral testimony to show that this "domestic ideal" of male breadwinner/stay-at-home wife was very influential in working-class families in London in this period.

with their means? Did women, for example, interpret "respectability" as signifying, first and foremost, caring for their children in any manner that achieved that end, even if it meant working outside the home or sweated labour within?<sup>51</sup>

As was the case in other industrializing nations, Bradbury's findings about Montréal reveal that the wage contribution of children grew while that of wives decreased, as industry expanded. The reliance of employers in certain sectors on women and youths resident at home depressed male wages generally, all the while offering families the opportunity to counter a father's low earnings. Bradbury argues that "there was nothing inherent to the process of industrial growth itself that determined that some jobs should be viewed as male and others as female and remunerated accordingly. Workers' struggles, employers' decisions, and local family income needs all played a role in fashioning local divisions of labour, in determining the proportions of men, women and children employed." (31) Local traditions regarding family employment may also have had some influence on the reorganization of some industries, resulting in the generation of particular types of employment opportunities for women.<sup>52</sup>

The new importance of children to the family economy had its necessary effects on intergenerational relations, and on the life course of sons and daughters. Children's earning power was "a point of potential cooperation and of strain, a challenge to the power relations within the family." (118) How these family obligations were negotiated, how young people interpreted the constraints and opportunities inherent in their familial roles at various points in the life cycle in relation to those of other family members, all contributed to the tensions, conflicts, and cooperative relations that Bradbury depicts. As more jobs became available for teenagers, the family economy was reshaped, as were their own working lives. And in the process, "the contours of youth were reshaped in different ways for boys and girls." (131) In particular, daughters seem to have been caught in the web of loyalty to family, entangled in the discrepancy between the obvious need for their assistance to their mothers and their own desires and ambitions.<sup>53</sup>

Bradbury suggests that the lower rate of labour market participation of teenaged girls (about half of 16 to 17 year olds in Sainte Anne worked outside the home by the 1880s) refutes the Marxist depiction of industrialization as indiscriminately drawing all ages/sexes into wage labour. (141) Her own evidence tends rather to support the latter contention, however. The growing reliance on female and child labour meant that, as she acknowledges, half these girls were drawn into wage labour, while half were at home contributing to the reproduction of labour power necessitated by the onward march of the factory system. (143) The point is that whatever the nature of their contribution, all were contributing necessary

<sup>51</sup>Sec, especially, E. Ross, "Labour and Love," in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*; Hudson, Lee, "Women's Work and the Family Economy," 11-4.

<sup>52</sup>Rose, "Proto-industry, Women's Work, and the Household Economy," 190-2.

<sup>53</sup>Gittins, "Marital Status, Work and Kinship, 1850-1930," in Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*, 250.

labour, and, as never before, all were potential wage labourers, to be drawn upon according to need.

The state is also an active participant in the process of social reproduction in the way that its interventions, through law, welfare policy, and programs for economic development, reproduce and uphold patriarchal and capitalistic relations while ensuring the continued supply of labour.<sup>54</sup> Bradbury discusses the state's earliest direct forays into this arena by means of the protective legislation limiting the employment of children. She contends that these state efforts "neither reshaped the experience of young people in general nor radically changed the behaviour of the minority of families who sent their young to work." (128) Perhaps what is significant here is not so much the behavioural effect of this early legislation but its implications: the state was clearly beginning to accept that it had a direct role to play in social reproduction. By protecting a small sector of the most vulnerable potential or actual workers — women and children — it was claiming its stake in the replenishment and reproduction of labour power, and ultimately, of the working class. The state's attempts at legislative protection for working women tended to preserve traditional work forms and reinforce the belief that married women should be in the home.<sup>55</sup> Not surprisingly, these notions about womanly roles became increasingly encoded in our legal and socio-economic systems.

The working-class family experience reflects the contradictions inherent in capitalist production and social reproduction. Families are obliged to contribute to both in myriad ways, as Bettina Bradbury has revealed. The extent, nature, and "cost" of their contribution is contingent upon the family's class position as well as upon its members' individual positions in the family hierarchy, wherein they are subordinated by reason of age and gender. But she also shows that the other side of family life is equally, and at times, even more important for the lives of those involved and for historical understanding of those lives. Families are important supportive institutions for their working and nonworking members, not only in the basic material sense, but also in the sense of nurturance and solidarity. Families are at once exploited and exploitive, oppressive and protective.

More than anything else, Bettina Bradbury demonstrates that working-class families in 19th-century Montréal were working families. They worked in the obvious sense, and they also worked in that they managed to hold together against the often tremendous challenges posed by industrial capitalism to their unity and

<sup>54</sup>See the essays in Dickinson and Russell, eds., *Family, Economy and State*, especially Eli Zaretsky, "Rethinking the Welfare State": Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy*, examines the state/family/class interconnections in Canadian history more than anyone else to date; also D. Chunn, *From Punishment to Doing Good: Family Courts and Socialized Justice in Ontario, 1880-1940* (Toronto 1992); and Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*.

<sup>55</sup>See S.B. Kamerman, A.J. Kahn, P. Kingston, *Maternity Policies and Working Women* (New York 1985), 15; also Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*, and for Canada, J. Ursel, *Public Policy, Private Lives*; Golz, "Family Matters," and Jean, "Family Allowances and Family Autonomy."



even to their continued existence. She effectively depicts the family as neither victim nor agent of change, point-blank; it was an adaptive and flexible institution, at times relying on old customs, at times formulating new approaches. The result, in *Working Families*, goes far toward achieving an understanding of family as a dialectical process within a larger dialectic.

Most working-class families survived and continue to survive. The glimpses that Bradbury has given us of their daily struggle make one wonder at the costs of that survival, costs that were imposed upon them and extracted from them, no matter how, or how hard, they worked. It is not without reason that a sociological survey of contemporary working-class family life focuses on those costs that cannot be adequately measured, nor adequately viewed through most instruments of historical analysis. Lillian Rubin's 1976 study draws its title, "Worlds of Pain," from a poem by the largely forgotten poet-laureate John Masefield. Written in 1912, that poem tells the story of the marginal in London from the point of view of one who has fallen to the bottom.<sup>56</sup> It very much captures what life was, and what family meant, from that perspective, and especially through the eyes of a woman of that class:

To get the whole world out of bed  
And washed, and dressed, and warmed, and fed,  
To work, and back to bed again,  
Believe me, Saul, costs worlds of pain.<sup>57</sup>

Ultimately, within the system that creates these worlds of pain, the only truly successful strategy for men, women, and children of the working class is to escape it.

<sup>56</sup>L. Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family* (New York 1976).

<sup>57</sup>J. Masefield, "The Everlasting Mercy," in *Collected Poems* (London 1912).