

## **The Gender System and Fertility: An Exploration of the Hidden Links**

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### ***Abstract***

Using qualitative data from 110 married couples and 27 divorced men and women, the connections between gender structures and fertility strategies are explored: how does the household division of labour interact with individuals' gender role orientations to influence fertility strategies and how is this mediated by the cultural gender system? And, ultimately, does an egalitarian gender system inevitably result in "precariously" low fertility? The case studies discussed in this article indicate the necessity of conceptualizing gender as operating on multiple levels in order to fully assess the nexus between gender structures and demographic patterns. The findings reveal that women and couples have fewer children than they desire because they have been unable to establish a satisfactory gendered division of labour on a micro level, not because their belief in equality has resulted in a desire for few or no children. The evidence also provides some indication that replacement fertility can be achieved in an egalitarian gender structure.

## Résumé

Les liens entre les structures femmes-hommes et les stratégies de fécondité sont explorés à partir de données qualitatives provenant de 110 couples mariés et de 27 hommes et femmes divorcés : comment le partage des tâches au sein des ménages se répercute-t-il sur les rôles sexuels pour influencer les stratégies de fécondité; et comment ce phénomène est-il médiatisé par la structure égalitaire? Ce système égalitaire aboutirait-il inévitablement à une taux de fécondité précairement bas? Les études de cas examinées indiquent la nécessité de concevoir la problématique hommes-femmes dans ses multiples fonctionnements en vue d'évaluer pleinement le lien unissant les structures femmes-hommes et les tendances démographiques. D'après ces résultats, les femmes et les couples ont moins d'enfants qu'ils ne le souhaiteraient parce qu'ils sont incapables de résoudre harmonieusement la répartition du travail selon le sexe au niveau micro, et non parce que leur croyance en matière d'égalité les pousse à ne pas avoir d'enfant ou à en avoir moins. Il semblerait aussi que le taux de fécondité de reproduction est réalisable au sein d'une structure égalitaire.

**Keywords:** gender, fertility, family change

## Introduction

It is evident from the recent writings of demographers that the connections between gender patterns and family change are both complex and significant: to understand current fertility, this nexus must be analyzed (for example, see McDaniel, 1996; Mason & Jensen, 1995). This paper utilizes qualitative research methods to explore the impact of gender structures upon the fertility strategies of individuals and couples. There are two primary purposes: first, to demonstrate the way in which gender structures operate on three inter-related levels to lower the fertility of both "traditional" and "egalitarian" women, as well as those who fall between these two orientations; second, to consider ways in which changes in gender structure could accommodate both egalitarianism and replacement level fertility, indicating that egalitarianism will not *inevitably* result in very low fertility. The findings are not intended to provide conclusive evidence; rather, the goal is to raise new questions and spur further study in this direction, looking at complex interactions between the different "levels" of gender.

## **Background**

Demographic studies of fertility have demonstrated the correlation between changing gender arrangements and lowered fertility rates. When women's roles are limited to child bearing and rearing, and when they have limited autonomy, family size remains high (Keyfitz, 1987). As the gender system—that is, the gender division of labour and the societal expectations of women and men—evolves, fertility declines. This pattern has been well documented in both less developed countries (see Mason, 1995) and the developed world (Davis, 1987). In developed countries the trend is a movement away from a two sphered model where women and men are largely involved in separate activities in separate locations, towards a more egalitarian situation where both can expect to be involved in paid work *and* unpaid labour in the home. This evolution has resulted in our current gender system that neither offers support for families where the women remain at home nor facilitates the movement of women into the paid work force. Hochschild has described it as a “stalled revolution.”

The exodus of women into the economy has not been accompanied by a cultural understanding of marriage and work that would make this transition smooth. The workforce has changed. But most of the workplaces have remained inflexible in the face of the family demands of their workers and at home, most men have yet to adapt to the changes in women. This strain between the change in women and the absence in change in much else leads me to speak of a “stalled revolution.”  
(Hochschild, 1989, p.12)

And the movement towards an egalitarian gender system has led to an ongoing pattern of below replacement fertility. This widespread phenomenon has led demographers and others (see Keyfitz 1987) to raise concerns that egalitarian gender relations may eventually lead to population decline.

While the link between egalitarian gender arrangements and very low fertility has been found repeatedly, the underlying issues have been less thoroughly investigated. Empirical studies undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s (see Wrigley and Stokes, 1977; Wicks and Workman, 1978; Turner and Simmons, 1977; and Beckman, 1979, for a sample) assessed the correlation between gender role orientation (also known as sex role orientation or sex role attitude) and fertility. Using a scale to locate respondents on a continuum from traditional to egalitarian, these researchers found a consistent pattern correlating egalitarian gender orientations with lowered expected, desired, and actual fertility. Other studies, which emphasized women's “gender roles” and used their labour force participation as a proxy for egalitarian behaviour (see Spitz 1988 for an overview), found a similar pattern. Increased labour force participation is clearly linked to lower levels of fertility. While these patterns provide strong evidence that the gender arrangements are linked to fertility patterns, they do not prove

that an egalitarian gender system will inevitably result in very low fertility. The reasons this conclusion cannot be supported are threefold:

1. When measuring the connection between gender role orientation and fertility behaviour it is essential to consider the context in which those choices are acted out: is the individual's partner equally egalitarian? Does their household division of labour reflect her beliefs? What kind of constraints are imposed by the larger gender system?
2. Using labour force participation as a proxy for egalitarian gender roles only measures half of the division of labour. If we want to assess the link between gender roles and fertility we must include an assessment of the roles within the home. Working wives, as the literature shows (see Thompson and Walker, 1989), continue to be primarily responsible for the majority of household labour—thus they are not simply women leading egalitarian lives choosing to have fewer children, they may be egalitarian women who have not achieved a truly equal division of labour.
3. Labour force participation should not be used as a proxy for egalitarianism because many women who work outside the home do so out of financial necessity rather than a desire to achieve equality. Their lower fertility may be a result of necessity—they cannot afford to have more children— and not a reflection of their egalitarian stance.

These concerns raise a significant issue—we must understand the nature of the connection between the gender system and fertility patterns before we draw conclusions. Why do more egalitarian women have fewer children? While some studies show that voluntarily childless women are more egalitarian (Beets and van Hoorn, 1991), this appears to be a strategy for attaining equality with their partners. These women perceive that having children inevitably results in traditional male/female roles. Other research indicates that even the most egalitarian women do not desire below replacement fertility—they indicate that two children is ideal (Matthews and Beaujot, 1997). Apparently, while individuals may hold egalitarian gender orientations, they see reducing fertility not as desirable in and of itself but as a means to an end (Matthews, 1994). As McDonald (1996) describes it, we do not currently have an egalitarian gender system and the conflicts between educational and career opportunities on the one hand and the parental obligations women experience on the other result in “precariously low” fertility levels. In fact, there is some evidence to indicate that when the gender system is organized to enable parents to combine their work and family responsibilities fertility rises to above replacement levels. For example, in a cross national study the more egalitarian gender system in Sweden

has been linked to an increase in child bearing (Pinelli, 1995). To understand the causal nexus, then, we must consider gender in a more sophisticated fashion: how does the household division of labour (referred to here as the micro structure) interact with individual's gender role orientations to influence fertility strategies and how is this mediated by the cultural gender system (referred to as the macro structure)? And, ultimately, does an egalitarian gender system inevitably result in "precariously" low fertility?

## **Data**

To assess the connections between levels of gender and fertility strategies, an in-depth qualitative data set is essential. It is necessary to disentangle the multiple influences and a standard survey would not suffice (Kamazura, 1989). The Family Life Study provides the necessary breadth and depth of data. It includes a series of questions on attitudes about marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and children, as well as demographic information on family behaviour, labour force participation, and religious affiliation. The bulk of these interviews consisted of semi-structured, in-depth discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of marriage and children, individual goals and achievements, and the roles of men and women in the family setting. The data was collected in 1988-89. A total of 444 respondents were included in the larger sample, but for the purposes of this analysis, the focus was on the 110 couples in the sample (those who had been living common-law for at least 24 months were considered as equivalent to married). Husbands and wives were interviewed separately to gain insight into their individual gender role orientations as well as their joint arrangement. In addition, 27 currently divorced male and female respondents were also included. The sample drawn in Southern Ontario was stratified to represent the urban/rural and income differentials within Canadian households.<sup>1</sup> The data from these respondents indicate that an interactive link between the macro and micro levels of gender not only exists, but has profound implications for fertility strategies and family life more generally.<sup>2</sup>

To measure the individual respondent's gender role orientation a scale of seven statements was administered.

1. A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work outside of the home.
2. If a mother of young children works outside of the home it should only be when the family needs money.
3. A married woman should be able to make long range plans for her career, in the same way her husband does.

4. A married man's chief responsibility should be his job.
5. If his wife works outside the home, the husband should share equally in household chores such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry.
6. If a child gets sick, the father should be just as willing as the mother to stay home from work.
7. It is much better for everyone if the man takes the major responsibility for earning a living and the woman takes major responsibility for the home and family.

Three measures were used to assess the couples' gender micro structures: (1) the respondents' labour force participation, (2) an indicator of the division of household chores and activities, and (3) an interviewer rating of the respondents' perspectives on their gendered division of labour. Labour force participation was measured directly. While the actual contribution to household chores was not measured directly in the Family Life Study, respondents were asked

1. How the responsibilities of husbands and wives should be divided in marriage.
2. How the household labour should be divided.
3. How power and decision making should be managed.

Through responses the preferred division of labour becomes apparent. The final measure, the interviewer rating, was based on all the data and additional information obtained during the interviews.

The impact of the gender macro structure was assessed throughout the interviews as respondents were asked to describe their perception of the gender system. Rather than deriving an objective "measure" of the gender system, the couples' perceptions of the opportunities, constraints, and expectations men and women face within the society were explored. They explained in their own words how the gender system influenced their fertility choices.

## **Findings and Discussion**

One of the key findings in this paper is that gender acts on several levels and that there are interactions between the levels. Fertility is not at such low levels simply because egalitarian couples don't want children. A complex of factors has led to ongoing very low fertility. This analysis revealed several types of micro structures negotiated by couples to create an acceptable division of labour given their individual gender role orientations: traditional, modified traditional,

modified egalitarian or egalitarian. More importantly, it revealed that couples in each of these categories experienced difficulties arising from the macro level gender system which led them to reduce their fertility. Bluntly, the current transition away from a two sphered arrangement puts pressure on all couples within their micro worlds. When the three levels of gender do not coincide, there is an additional interaction effect which puts stress on the couple. They must accommodate contradictory pressures which, this study reveals, frequently results in lowered fertility.

Both members of traditional couples believe that "separate spheres" is the most appropriate way to organize the division of labour within the family and have adopted this pattern in their own lives. (3 couples fit this category.) Both hold the same views and endeavour to put them into action, despite the fact that society is not highly supportive of stay at home wives. Thus the changing gender structure makes their choice more difficult.

On the other extreme, egalitarian couples both agree on the desirability of evenly sharing both the paid and unpaid labours. Their gender role orientations coincide and they have organized their family life to suit this agreement (30 couples fit this pattern). They must make individual accommodations within a gender system that is not fully supportive of working parents and, particularly, involved fathers.

In modified traditional families (19 couples) there was some disagreement between gender role orientations and the division of labour in the household. Either the couple desired a traditional pattern but simply could not afford to maintain their family on one salary (thus, the wife works in the paid labour force against her desires and must accommodate her fertility strategy to this reality) or the individuals' gender role orientations are not in agreement. One is more traditional than the other and thus their gendered division of labour in the household is a matter for debate and negotiation— one or the other is less than satisfied because they disagree on what is most appropriate.

In modified egalitarian couples we find another contradiction. Either they both want equality in the division of paid and unpaid work activities but are unable to manage it because of family or work requirements (thus, one partner is not pursuing his or her career fully). Or, there is some disagreement within the couple about whether fully shared roles is desirable.

When gender is conceptualized as active on three levels, insight is gained into the manner in which the levels interact. Even when both partners desire the same arrangement, they are frequently constrained by gender patterns at a macro level.

The following case studies<sup>3</sup> illustrate the stresses families are facing. The gender micro structure is negotiated between the individuals based on their personal gender role orientations and the macro gender structure in which they live. In some cases the husband's and wife's gender role orientations are very similar. They share beliefs about the appropriate roles for men and women and seek to divide their household labour accordingly. Nonetheless, accommodations may

be necessary if there is a discrepancy between the macro structure and their shared gender role orientations. In other cases husbands and wives have disparate views about appropriate gendered behaviour. When this lack of agreement occurs, the gendered micro structure which they create is a compromise between conflicting views. It cannot reflect the gender role orientations of both partners.

When husband and wife agree on the division of labour, they plan their fertility strategy based on this shared foundation. Where there is disagreement, fertility strategies are affected. First, it may lead to the dissolution of the partnership which could result in fewer births. Or second, they resolve the conflict but have fewer children to avoid increasing the amount of household labour required.

In the modified traditional household, when the gender role orientations conflict, the husband is typically more traditional than his wife. He expects to do very little household labour, and while his wife may work, this does not change his role at home. The couple in this case study clearly demonstrate the impact this situation can have on fertility strategies.

The Hardys are a modified traditional couple. They married at age 17 and are now 30 years old. Cathy spent twelve years at home raising their three children (now aged 5,8,11). While Joe wanted more kids, Cathy refused. They both believe that a woman should be primarily responsible for raising children but their current arrangement is unbalanced. Joe, a truck driver, is frequently on the road. Cathy continues to do all the household and child-rearing chores even though she now works full time. She likes her job but is feeling overwhelmed by the situation and is openly dissatisfied. While Joe is relatively happy and would like more children, Cathy will not have a fourth child which would add to her workload.

Modified egalitarian couples face a different set of conflicts. Rather than contending over whether husbands should participate in the household activities, they agree that his role at home is important, but the wife still finds herself making more "sacrifices." In many cases she believes in full equality and he does not.

Elaine and Dave Rowsell are a modified egalitarian couple. They both believe that women are "theoretically equal," but that someone should stay home with young children. This someone is Elaine. They are both 32 years old and have two young children (3 months and 2 years). Elaine has given up her professional career until the children are in school because she wants to be there for them and would feel guilty if she left them. Dave supports the family with his demanding professional career. Despite their ideal of equality, they are not sharing the roles equally. Dave is immersed in his career while Elaine feels she had to sacrifice hers. While Dave recognizes his wife's dissatisfaction, neither partner expects it to change. They would actually like to have four children but don't expect to have any more. They have lowered their desired fertility because of the sacrifices required by raising children. They don't believe they will be able to reestablish equality with any more children.



Several of the divorced respondents interviewed attributed their marital breakdown to gender issues. They were unable to achieve a satisfactory division of household labour because they had such diverse ideas about appropriate roles for husbands and wives. Christine Tanner and Glynis Sands both had relationships end because of gender conflicts. Neither of these women expect to have children now, because they don't really believe that equality in marriage is possible and they aren't comfortable with planning on children without a partner.

Each of these cases illustrates the importance of a multilevel conceptualization of gender. If we only look at one level, be it gender role orientation or women's labour force participation, we will not capture the underlying interaction between orientations and micro structures. Similarly, if we fail to assess contradictions between micro and macro levels of gender, we misinterpret couples' fertility strategies. We impute lowered fertility to egalitarian beliefs when there is some evidence that the underlying factor is trying to follow egalitarian ideals in a society which does not support them.

When gender role orientations and the macro structure are similar, they reinforce one another and their influence on behaviour is strengthened (witness the 1950s baby boom). But when they are contradictory, individuals are subject to opposing forces. This phenomenon explains why two women with similar gender orientations living in the same gender milieu might behave differently—one believes the overarching pattern is acceptable and the other does not. By the same token, two women with similar gender orientations living in different macro structures, the 1950s or 1990s for example, would have vastly different opportunities and would likely make different choices.

The Connors are 32 years old. They have two children (7 and 5) and they regard their marriage as an equal partnership. They both wanted to follow their careers and raise a family so they devised a strategy of sharing the tasks. For the first four years Tim stayed home while Carol worked full time. Then Tim went back to school and Carol arranged her shifts so that there was always a parent home with the children. When Tim's work became full-time, Carol went back to spending more time with the children. They have structured their work to accommodate their family. They are egalitarian because they do not believe one person's career should take precedence and both make sacrifices by taking turns as primary caregiver. They don't object to making career sacrifices but the reduced income does make a difference. Tim argues that they would plan on at least one and maybe two more children if they could afford it. They strongly advocate job sharing. Tim thinks parenting would be much easier if they could cut back on their hours without losing career momentum and still meet their children's needs. In effect they are talking about changes in the gender macro structure.

While the Connors achieve their egalitarian relationship by accommodating their careers to their parenting needs other couples adjust their family roles. The Clarks are a professional couple in their mid thirties. They married in their mid twenties, had their first child in their late twenties and their children are now

both in school. They believe that both careers and family are important and recognize that career sacrifices are necessary if the job is “weakening and not creating” the kind of family they want. But they are both career oriented. They love their jobs, and neither would wish to stop working and remain at home. Marg said that her maternity leaves were “confining” and she missed the stimulation of her work.

For the Clarks, combining work and family does not mean lowering career aspirations but it does mean focusing a lot of attention on the quality of their home life. They don’t believe a parent must be at home at all times, and had alternate care givers for their children. But they firmly believe that both parents must have an active role in raising the children. Marg says,

In the high school I am teaching in, I see the deterioration of the family unit. Mostly this is because Dad is not around. Both parents should be there to spend time with the children. He should make a point not to work overtime. He should be at home, especially on weekends. He should not be with the buddies as much. He should be with the family because his children need him.

For the Clarks, the secret of an egalitarian relationship is to have both adults fully involved in parenting so the children receive enough love and attention. This may mean cutting down on non-family activities, but they believe this is necessary to achieve their goals. In light of this, they both believe two children is the ideal family size because it gives them the best of both worlds. They can continue to follow their career aspirations and have a fulfilling family life.

The Clarks and the Connors have egalitarian gender role orientations and have established a micro gender structure which does not correspond to the asymmetrical macro structure. They believe in equal sharing in the home sphere and have made accommodations to achieve this. The Connors have made career and financial sacrifices to raise their children, and make longer-term trade-offs in their career goals. In addition, they have lowered their family size expectations because of these accommodations. The Clarks have combined work and parenting by relying on alternate childcare arrangements and making an intense effort to have both parents involved in family activities outside of working hours. This is not always easy. Ed says,

Marriage means that you make a commitment to the family. This is easier said than done though. There is a balancing act between how having the career helps and hurts the family. You need to balance the financial gain and job satisfaction with how the career can be negative.

For both families the discrepancy between gender on the individual and micro level and the macro gender structure is very much a part of how they have

organized their lives. Egalitarian couples plan their families and work roles based on the assumption that they will have to work hard and make accommodations to pursue these separate goals.

Part of the problem egalitarian couples face is the inflexibility of work roles which make it difficult to combine work with parenting. Egalitarian couples are not alone in making accommodations within the asymmetrical macro structure, though. Traditional couples are also at odds with the macro structure. These families believe that men and women should occupy separate spheres: women should be responsible for managing the home and men should meet all the financial needs. Primary breadwinners can adapt their lives to their work roles and know that their spouse is managing the family's needs at home, so an inflexible workplace is less of a problem. However, the difficulty most traditional families do face is financial. The majority of two parent families in this society have two income earners. In traditional families there is only one income, which may result in a lower standard of living, or the necessity for the breadwinner to work a great deal of overtime to compensate.

There were only three fully traditional, young families in the family life survey; however, there were several "moderate traditional" couples where the wife was fully responsible for the household but she also worked part-time to help pay the bills. These couples had moderated their traditional orientations because of the imperatives of the gender milieu in which they live, not because they believe it is acceptable for mothers to work.

The Fields both have traditional gender role orientations and have a traditional micro structure. They are in their late thirties, they have four children and might still have more. They believe wholeheartedly in the desirability of separate spheres. In fact, Ruth schools the children at home to be sure they learn the appropriate family and religious values. They make no accommodation to the changing gender structure in society. They believe it is inappropriate and follow their own principles. The family lives on Mark's income. For the Fields, any financial limitations they experience as a result of their choices are gladly accepted as necessary to retain their way of life.

The Harrises are also a traditional couple. Both Hilda and John agree that "the man should be working to keep a roof over the family's head." The man has more power because "he is the head of the family." They are in their early twenties, have one child, and hope to have at least three more. John's income as a labourer is quite low. Consequently, in spite of their traditional ideals, Hilda works seasonally as a farm labourer to help make ends meet. They do not like this situation but accept that it is necessary. Hilda is still entirely responsible for the home and their child and they strive to keep their arrangement as traditional as possible.

Joan and Walter Peters are in a similar situation. They believe that a traditional division of labour is best but not always possible. They are 43 and 44 years old, have 4 children and 3 grandchildren. They married very young and began their family immediately. Joan says,

I am not liberated. I have myself a big chauvinist and I like it. What he says goes, he delegates responsibilities and tasks. He doesn't do dishes or vacuuming or laundry. I did jobs at home and [reared the] children and he went out to work and brought home the money so I could do it.

And Walter worked very hard to support his family. In fact, he believes he put in too much time on his job and the family suffered for it. Throughout his interview he referred to the problems of teenagers and runaway children. He says a father

should not work 14 hours a day. I speak from experience here. I did that. My oldest grew up without me. I regret that and everyone will down the road. You cannot redo raising children.

He is not saying that fathers should be at home rather than work, but instead is expressing unhappiness with the gender macro structure that makes 18 hour days necessary for one-earner families. His hard work was necessary to support the family but it clearly had some negative effects. Joan works now to increase the family income. They don't believe this is too much of a problem because their children are almost grown up and don't need her as much. She is able to manage all her household responsibilities as well as her job. Both the Peters made it clear that a woman should only work, though, if the extra income is needed.

Traditional couples are also affected by the disparity between their gender ideas and the milieu in which they live. Our society is structured in such a way as to make it difficult financially to maintain a separate spheres arrangement. Economically, one wage earner families are at a disadvantage. Some families accommodate this by making do with less, as in the Fields' case. Others increase the work load, as Walter Peters did by putting in so many extra hours at work or as Hilda Walker did by working seasonally in addition to her household responsibilities. These choices clearly affected their family life, though maybe their fertility strategies were less affected than other couples', since these traditional couples have childrearing at the centre of their lives and accommodate their work activities to this. From these case studies, it is apparent that the macro gender structure conflicts with the gender role orientations of both egalitarian and traditional couples. For both groups this conflict affects their situations and their choices.

The case studies examined in this article provide clear evidence that gender systems are multidimensional. In examining one level, as earlier scholars have, we gain insight. But to fully understand the impact, gender must be conceptualized as acting on several interrelated levels. In a time of rapid change, such as we are now experiencing, there are many contradictory components to

consider. The current macro gender structure, characterized as a "stalled revolution," cannot be ignored if we wish to understand social patterns which involve men, women, and families. To conclude that egalitarian gender roles will lead to continuing below replacement fertility without considering the context is inappropriate. Thus, the first goal of this research has been achieved: understanding that the interaction between gender role orientations, micro gender structures, and macro gender structures exerts downward pressure upon fertility. The second purpose, a consideration of fertility strategies within an egalitarian gender structure, must now be addressed.

In order to comprehend what influence true equality for women and men might have, it is necessary to consider egalitarian gender orientations and activities within egalitarian structures. While there are no egalitarian societies to consider, it is possible to learn from couples who have made every effort to achieve a fully egalitarian arrangement. The Family Life Survey includes some families who were able to combine their family and career aspirations without having to make sacrifices in either.

The Jamisons created a situation which does not resemble the "stalled revolution" because they were able to establish a work environment to meet their needs. Sheila and Bob Jamison are 44 and 46 years old. They were married for 9 years before they had children and now they have two (aged 11 and 13 years). They believe absolutely in equality. Bob says husbands and wives should have

a true partnership. Both are decision makers. The division of labour should be divided on the basis of enthusiasm, skills, and knowledge but both should challenge the other to learn new skills. My Dad died when I was 9—my mother didn't know how to run the business and it was hard. Each should become skilled and confident . . . so that each partner learns all the roles.

They believe that parenting roles are different. Bob claims that the mother's skills are "innate, but fathers must learn about child rearing." Sheila says,

Children benefit from a shared responsibility and both parents have a lot to give—if you aren't able to deviate from the norm where the man works and the woman takes care of the intrinsic needs of the children then it is bad. It is important that they share equally in the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of the children and family. It is important that *both* parents continue to grow in order to provide stability for the children.

To achieve this equality in parenting and a continued opportunity to grow, the Jamisons rearranged their work roles. Bob was career oriented and delayed having children for nine years. But when they did have children he changed his career. He left his teaching position and became self-employed, working from

their home. This gave him flexibility to meet the family's needs. Sheila went back to paid work after her children were born. She preferred the stimulation of her job to the daily routines of rearing small children, though she added that either parent should be willing to stay home if the children *need* full-time parental care (if they have health problems, for example).

Sheila is a strong advocate of changes in the work world to make it easier for parents. She approves of day care, though not fully funded for everyone, tax breaks, and, most importantly, parental leaves and flexible schedules. She says if time away from work without losing seniority was possible she would have considered having another child.

The Jamisons have been able to achieve a fully egalitarian arrangement. This was mainly because Bob's career was flexible enough for him to work from home. This requires true commitment from both partners and, as Sheila noted, it would be *much* easier to achieve if the workplace was structured differently. Increased flexibility on the job would improve the lives of working parents.

A second couple, Jack and Susan Klassen are 40 and 38 years old. They have had four children in their twenty year marriage. They are committed to equality and believe it is possible to achieve both career satisfaction and a complete family life. The Klassens are both teachers. Susan worked through her pregnancies and returned to work immediately following the births of her first three children. They had non-parental caregivers to look after their children's needs during school hours. At the time of their fourth child's birth, Susan's school closed. So, rather than looking for a new position right away, she took a few years off to spend at home with her young family. Now she is back working full time.

Like the Jamisons, the Klassens are committed to equality in their partnership. They believe that "a man is as capable of being a nurturer as a woman is and he gets as much joy from nurturing as a woman does." They achieved their arrangement by engaging caregivers for their children, and, when Susan's career was at a crossroad, she was able to take a few years off without losing career momentum. Both of these couples were committed to equality, placed a high priority on family, and had the advantage of flexible careers which enabled them to combine work and parenting. While the workplace is still in a "stalled revolution," these couples were able to achieve the flexibility required. And, as these two cases show, their dual commitment to career and family did not result in very low fertility.

## Conclusion

These illustrations certainly do not prove that an egalitarian macro structure would lead to a higher fertility rate. But they do, nonetheless, provide some evidence to suggest that facilitating combined work and parenting roles does not inevitably lead to very low fertility. Most importantly, what they reveal is a

need for a thorough understanding of the complex relationships between gender and social behaviour and further research which takes the interaction between levels of gender into account.

For traditional couples in an egalitarian gender structure there would continue to be conflict. Their beliefs are already at odds with the overarching macro structure and the gap would widen with the movement towards increased egalitarianism. However, depending on the flexibilities which are built into the system, there is no need to assume that their position will necessarily be worse. It could even be improved. If the cultural milieu is restructured in such a way as to facilitate parenting for working people it could certainly have concomitant advantages for homemakers. A brief example: if financial breaks are made available for child care activities, all parents could benefit, whether or not a family member was engaged as the caregiver. An increased emphasis on child welfare and reducing stress for parents could help families regardless of their gender micro structure.

In a world with an egalitarian gender system, both work and family can be accommodated. Women who are avoiding marriage and children because they do not wish to sacrifice their personal goals could in fact do both. Couples who reduce their family size as the best strategy for achieving equality at work and home may have other options. Couples who sacrifice career aspirations to raise their children could find other ways to accommodate conflicting demands.

All the case studies examined provide insight into the interrelated levels of gender. And while the limitations of the data must be considered – the findings cannot simply be generalized to the larger population – this does not diminish the importance of the findings. For these couples, at least, the levels of gender are interrelated, and their behaviour is affected. For some it means making career sacrifices, for others it means having fewer children, and for still others it means avoiding having children altogether. In an attempt to understand why egalitarian women have fewer children, the findings of this analysis indicate that it is because they have been unable to achieve equality in their daily lives. Until it is possible to combine work and parenting in an equitable fashion, reduced fertility is likely to continue as the prevalent strategy.

### ***Endnotes:***

1. The Family Life Study included respondents of all marital statuses over the age of 18 years. However, for the purposes of this research, responses of individuals not currently or previously married were not analyzed. Broadening the analysis to include these individuals, while beyond the scope of this article, will provide further insight into the causal links between gender structures and fertility strategies.

2. There are fewer methodological guidelines for the analysis of qualitative data than there are for the statistical analysis of quantitative data. When Glaser and Strauss first wrote of grounded theory in 1967, they stressed the importance of qualitative data for identifying categories, comparing patterns, and generating hypotheses. Qualitative analysis has become increasingly refined; it is valuable for both generating theory and verification of hypotheses. For comprehensive discussion of the methods of qualitative analysis, see, for example, Miles and Huberman, 1994 or Marshall and Rossman, 1995. The central problem in qualitative research is reducing a massive amount of "raw data" into useable material without introducing bias or losing perspective. The analysis is a process of summarizing and categorizing the data systematically which gives rise to emergent patterns. From these patterns hypotheses can be generated or tested. The actual analysis is both continuous and iterative. As new relationships emerge, the researcher determines whether they can be confirmed by reanalyzing the data.
3. The names for these respondents are fictitious. Where both members of the couple share a single family name, a single name is assigned to them.

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