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STEPFAMILIES IN CANADA:
Numbers, characteristics, stability and childbearing

Thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of PhD in Sociology.

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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-66669-2
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-66669-2

ABSTRACT

The following thesis examines stepfamilies in Canada within a socio-demographic framework, using the 2001 General Social Survey (GSS) on families, and is divided into three main sections. First, there is an extended literature review on family theory and the emergence of stepfamilies. This section provides the background for a discussion of why stepfamilies are still often perceived as problematic and, therefore, stigmatized; we also define different stepfamily forms. The question of how to measure stepfamilies is a major concern in this research. Indeed, depending on whether one takes a residential or an inter-residential perspective, the number of households involved in stepfamily life changes substantially. We first present a cross-sectional perspective by describing the stepfamilies examined at survey. The main focus here is to compare stepfamilies with intact and lone parent families in order to see the extent and nature of the differences between them. Our results suggest that stepfamilies do not differ as much as expected from intact families with regard to certain socioeconomic variables, such as income. The next stage involves an analysis of stepfamilies in a longitudinal perspective in order to better understand stepfamily dynamics. In doing so, we focus on stepfamily instability and the likelihood of having a common child, applying the method of event history analysis. In this longitudinal perspective, we find that stepfamilies face a high risk of experiencing a separation and that this risk increases substantially over time; we also find that stepfamily couples living in a common-law union have a higher risk of separation than those who are married. The arrival of a common child within a stepfamily appears to be determined mainly by the age of the mother and of existing children. The younger the mother and the younger the children, the more likely a stepfamily is to witness the arrival of a common child. The most compelling finding of this research lies in the differences observed in the outcomes of male and female respondents with regard to their stepfamily dynamics.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse approche d'un point de vue sociodémographique l'étude des familles recomposées au Canada, à partir de l'Enquête Sociale Générale (ESG) rétrospective (2001) sur la famille. Elle est divisée en trois parties. Elle présente d'abord une revue de la littérature sur les théories de la famille et la progression des familles recomposées. Cette section forme la base d'une discussion sur les différentes raisons qui expliquent pourquoi les familles recomposées sont encore souvent perçues comme ayant des problèmes particuliers et font l'objet de réprobation; nous tentons également de définir les différentes formes que peuvent prendre ces familles. En effet, selon que l'on adopte une perspective résidentielle ou inter-résidentielle, le nombre de maisonnées impliquées dans une famille recomposée peut changer considérablement. Nous adoptons tout d'abord une perspective transversale pour décrire les familles recomposées au moment de l'enquête. Le but de cet exercice est de comparer les familles recomposées avec les familles intactes et monoparentales afin de voir l'étendue et la nature des

différences qui les séparent. Nos résultats indiquent que les familles recomposées ne diffèrent pas autant qu'attendu des familles intactes en regard de certaines des variables socioéconomiques, tel le revenu. Dans l'étape suivante, nous adoptons une perspective longitudinale pour mieux comprendre la dynamique des familles recomposées. Nous examinons l'instabilité des familles recomposées et le risque qu'elles ont d'avoir un enfant commun, adoptant pour ce faire l'analyse des transitions. Ici, nos résultats montrent que les familles recomposées sont à haut risque de vivre une séparation et que ce risque augmente de manière substantielle avec le temps; nous trouvons également que les couples en union libre sont plus susceptibles de se séparer que les couples mariés. L'arrivée d'un enfant commun dans une famille recomposée semble être principalement déterminée par l'âge de la mère et des enfants déjà présents. Plus la mère et les enfants sont jeunes, plus il y a de chances qu'un enfant commun naisse au sein de la famille recomposée. Les résultats les plus étonnants en ce qui a trait à la dynamique des familles recomposées portent sur les différences observées entre les répondants de sexe masculin et féminin.

This dissertation is dedicated to Kathrin Martin and Alexander Heintz. Their warmth, confidence, patience and unconditional support gave me the strength and the courage to finish this project. I owe you my deepest thanks.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On a beautiful September day, I was walking along with Céline Le Bourdais when she turned and said: "Wouldn't you like to do a PhD with me?" I was very moved and proud to receive such an offer. Indeed, I enjoyed working with her, I am very interested in family research, I loved speaking French and I was very happy in Montreal; all in all, there seemed to be many good reasons to accept the invitation and meet the challenge. Although I was returning to Germany soon after, my mind was already made up: I wanted to return to Montreal to start the PhD program, to study stepfamilies and be supervised by Céline Le Bourdais.

After two years of paperwork and one MA degree later, I enrolled as a PhD student at the Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS) and the Université de Montréal, and later followed Céline Le Bourdais to McGill University. When starting out on this adventure, I had no idea what it would entail, but I was highly motivated. It is this motivation which bolstered my determination to complete the course.

First of all, this research would not have been possible without generous funding from a number of sources: I wish to acknowledge the support of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Centre interuniversitaire québécois de statsitiques sociales (CIQSS), the INRS, the Université de Montréal, McGill University and Céline Le Bourdais.

But personal motivation and determination alone would not have been enough and there are many people whose support, friendship and help were invaluable while I was living in Montreal. The first person I met was Philippe Pacaut; his help, support and company made it easier to cope with all the numbers which form the basis of most demography courses, with the language (all classes were in French) and with the new academic environment. I would also like to thank Magali Girard who was always more than willing to read drafts and provide

insightful comments. She even managed to convince me to take some English classes with her and her constant enthusiasm for sociology often provided a refreshing boost to my own motivation. I also want to thank Victor Levant, Lara Pascalli and Caia Miller who provided much help by editing and proof-reading my English when I first arrived at McGill. Thank you for all the time you spent turning my German English into something readable for all concerned. After completing the course requirements, I started the analysis of the data. Here, I wish to acknowledge the support of Statistics Canada who gave me access to the data and of the CIQSS for providing the infrastructure to carry out the research. It is at the CIQSS that I did 'la cuisine des données' ('data cooking'), as it is sometimes called; two people in particular provided invaluable help for this process: Paul-Marie Huot and Heather Juby. Paul-Marie Huot's constant help with programming and his careful eye for detail and Heather Juby's constant moral and intellectual support helped me find my way through the jungle of data without loosing sight of the final goal: to analyze stepfamilies. I know it was not easy for either of them, and I am very grateful to both for their patience and encouragement. The staff at the CIQSS also helped by providing not only the necessary infrastructure for the analysis of the data but also a warm and welcoming workplace.

A number of people have been acting on my behalf in the background, and I know that their support was crucial to my research. Although all cannot be named, I am very grateful for their discrete support.

I wish also to thank Sara Pimpaneau for correcting my English and providing readers with a document in which my German thought process did not hamper understanding. I would also like to thank Andrea Saunderson who kindly agreed to take on the task of final editing with all the pressure that this entails. Many thanks also to Geneviève Brunet-Gauthier who helped me format the dissertation and ensured that I did not jeopardize my work with a messy presentation. For support and help during my internship at the INRS and for her

warm and practical welcome to a student recently arrived in a foreign country, I wish to thank Monique Provost. I would also like to thank Évelyne Lapierre-Adamcyk; I was very lucky to be with her when I made my first presentation at the Canadian Population Society (CPS) meeting in Winnipeg in 2004 and at the meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA) held in New York in 2007. Her support and advice on personal as well as academic issues were invaluable. I also wish to thank Melinda Mills: in teaching me data preparation with Canadian data for my MA thesis, she gave me the tools and enthusiasm to start data analyses on stepfamilies for my PhD. Many thanks also to Jack Sandberg and Amélie Quesnel-Vallée for their insightful comments and advice during the dissertation process. Of course, my office colleagues at McGill, Dana Hamplova and France-Pascale Ménard, were very patient and supportive and their easy manner made a working day all the more enjoyable.

To thank a supervisor is difficult as supervising a dissertation covers many issues besides the academic: there are practical issues, organizational requirements and, sometimes, personal concerns. I was more than lucky to have Céline Le Bourdais as my supervisor and she gave me unstinting support. Thank you for all the time and patience you devoted to me. Occasionally, when I felt a little tired, we would have a discussion and I would walk out of your office afterwards with renewed motivation, more ideas and convinced once again that I would get the work done. Thank you also for showing so much confidence in me and for the invitation to join you at McGill. Improving my knowledge in two languages, French and English, and dealing with three languages, it was often quite a challenge to try to complete the program, set up the research and write a dissertation. Despite whatever time constraints you had yourself, you were always there when I needed help and for this I thank you too. I am also very grateful to you for sharing with me your enthusiasm for research, and family research in particular, and for teaching me the tools necessary to continue on this academic path.

During my time in Montreal, I was fortunate to be able to keep in touch with my friends at home, especially Regina Decker, Alexandra Horn, Miriam Mayer, Anja Sturhan and Petra Metzenthin. Thank you for all the time you spent with me on the phone and visiting me, for your support when I was homesick or when things did not go as planned, and more generally for your confidence. I also want to thank the Knöner and Vortisch families, especially Dagmar Vortisch: I would never have been able to pursue my studies in Canada without your support and friendship when I was growing up.

Thank you to all my friends in Montreal for all the good times and for including me in your entourage. Particular thanks to Sabine Henry, Nathalie Mondain, Katerina Maximova, Yoko Yoshida, Marie Josée-Lessard, Patrick Charbonneau, Véronique Michaud, Julien Choisnard, Sylvie Jamault and Isabel Mohn: they provided me with a home away from home, always opened their door to me and I feel very lucky to be able to enjoy their friendship. A special thank you to Tomas Howlin: our regular tango lessons meant that I could return to the challenge of academia with renewed energy.

I also wanted to thank my parents, more particularly for teaching me how to balance serious study with a good social life. My father taught me how to be organized and determined in my work and encouraged the fundamental curiosity required to pursue research. My mother, on the other hand, taught me laissez faire, an indispensable tool for dealing with discouragement and finding one's way back to happiness. I also want to thank my father for his visits and for the comfort of his weekly calls. Thank you also to my brother and sister: it was an exceptional treat to have you both here at the same time!

INTRODUCTION

The dissertation presented here is about stepfamilies. After examining the consequences of parental divorce in Canada in my master's thesis (Martin, 2003) and while reading some articles on stepfamilies during an internship at the INRS (Institut national de la recherche scientifique) in 2001, I became the interested in studying stepfamilies. The first question that emerged was what might have happened to all the divorced individuals studied through the course of the MA. Second, reading articles focusing on stepfamilies further aroused an interest in this topic because the literature on stepfamilies often points out how complex these families are and how little we know about them, despite the fact that their number is steadily rising. It seemed that the next logical step was to choose stepfamilies as a focus for further research. Being German and having been brought up in Germany, my view of Canada is that of an outsider, so I was also interested in trying to understand how Canadian society is organized, what demographic changes had taken place in the last few years, where stepfamilies fit in to this broader picture and whether they could constitute a suitable topic for research. Indeed, it is only if Canada displayed the same high separation rates we see in many Western countries that the subject of the re-emergence of stepfamilies would be of interest for in-depth research to highlight the particularities of the Canadian context.

Before we turn to the theoretical assumptions surrounding the topic of families, we will first discuss family changes over time and the re-emergence of the stepfamily. We will also discuss in detail the definition of stepfamilies because a common definition has yet to be established among researchers and, given the high complexity of stepfamilies, confusion can arise quickly.

The organization of the first part of the dissertation is as follows: in order to explain demographic changes over time, we will start by introducing the concept of the Second Demographic Transition (Chapter I, section 1). We will

then show how families have changed over time (Chapter I, section 2), demonstrating that there is definitely a re-emergence of stepfamilies (Chapter I, section 3) and explaining why stepfamilies are often labeled as problematic (Chapter I, section 4). This review will naturally lead us to a discussion of these labels, of how stepfamilies are defined and the difficulties inherent to such definitions, depending on one's perspective (Chapter I, section 5 and 6).

Coleman and Ganong wrote an article in 1990 summarizing research on stepfamilies in the 1980s which gave some suggestions as to where further stepfamily research should be heading. Their first argument was that the number of stepfamilies is greatly underestimated since only stepfamily households are taken into account and not stepfamily systems. In fact, this is a major problem, also affecting the Canadian data. There are also problems with measuring stepfamilies, since most of the children are in shared custody and, depending on where they are living at the time of the survey, the household is counted as a stepfamily household or not. The Canadian surveys underestimate stepfamily households, so conversely, single households or households without children might be overestimated. In the Canadian surveys, people are asked where their children stayed the previous night; consequently, if a man is living with a woman and her children, he might report that the children had not been at home the night before if they had stayed with their biological father, and this would be counted as a household without children instead of a stepfamily household. Here, we shall try to provide an understanding of such shortcomings in the data by taking into account the stepfamily environment as a whole in order to evaluate how much the number of stepfamilies might be underestimated.

Stepfamilies have often been studied from two perspectives. The first focuses on an analysis of what they call the "between family structure" (Coleman and Ganong, 1990, p. 927) which involves comparing stepfamilies with intact families, highlighting their differences. The second perspective is the so called "normative-adaptive" one (Coleman and Ganong, 1990, p. 927) which focuses

solely on stepfamilies and their dynamics. The authors note that researchers tend to rely too heavily on a cross-sectional and "between family structure" perspective. The consequence is that stepfamilies are treated as a uniform group and crucial variations are ignored, such as children's ages at the time of the remarriage, duration of stepfamilies, number of siblings, age of partners at remarriage, different types of stepfamilies, etc.

The idea that stepfamilies are an "incomplete institution" (Cherlin, 1978), is very common when we look at the literature on stepfamilies. However, this approach labels stepfamilies as problematic in comparison to the nuclear family, itself the implicit norm of evaluation, and ignores the diversity and complexity of stepfamilies (Coleman and Ganong, 1990). Even where the dynamics of how stepfamilies function were analyzed in terms of how intact families function. In addition, the positive aspects of stepfamilies were put aside and the focus was on the problems they face. Visher and Visher (1990) pointed out that stepfamilies are too different in their histories for straightforward comparisons with those of intact families. They argue that the reason stepfamilies often fail to function might be precisely because their expectations of family dynamics are based on those of intact families, thus increasing the likelihood of disappointment when such expectations cannot be met. So when we aim to study stepfamilies, it might be better to seek approaches which are less focused on comparisons with intact families but which try to explain today's family dynamics compared to the past and the challenges that these families face now.

Coleman and Ganong (1990) claim that more longitudinal studies are required to get a better idea of stepfamily dynamics. They also argue that stepfamilies should be analyzed without assuming *a priori* that they are problematic. But the difficulties with many longitudinal studies seems to lie in the inadequacy of the data required to establish stepfamilies retrospectively. This might explain why such studies are still relatively rare.

These same authors further argue that frameworks such as systems theory, development theory or exchange theory would be more helpful to analyze stepfamilies, since these perspectives are adaptive and do not assume that stepfamilies are inherently problematic. In Chapter II, section 1, 2 and 3 of the dissertation, we will introduce family theories briefly and show why some of them, such as the sociology of the life course, might be more helpful than others to study stepfamilies.

In previous research, I was interested in the impact of parental union instability on children and examined whether their own unions would be more fragile than those of children whose parents did not separate. Bearing in mind that most stepfamilies today are formed after a separation and less often after the death of a partner (Saint-Jacques, 1998), I chose here to focus on the unions of stepfamilies. With at least one of the partners having already experienced a separation, I wondered whether the risk of experiencing a disruption was particularly high in complex families such as stepfamilies and what the circumstances might be surrounding that break up. For example, does having a common child hold stepfamilies together? What other factors might be at play? What is more, the question of instability in stepfamilies in Canada had been analyzed previously by a number of authors in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, but recent research is missing (due, perhaps, to the relative complexity of data analysis on stepfamilies). This study will contribute to updating research in this country. Chapter II, section 4 will provide the theoretical background to the study of stepfamily instability and we will elaborate on related research hypotheses.

The arrival of a common child is also of interest. Since stepfamilies have their own dynamic and history it might be interesting to see which circumstances led them to have a common child. The impact of having another child has been the focus of a number of European studies since the beginning of the new millennium (e.g. Vikat et al., 1999; Henz, 2002; Thomson et al., 2002); our own

research aims to complement this literature by describing the Canadian situation. Chapter II, section 5 provides a detailed discussion of the theoretical assumptions related to the arrival of a common child in a stepfamily and develops related research hypotheses.

The data and methods will be presented in Chapter III, looking in particular at how (step)families were identified at survey time (Chapter III, section 2). We will then turn to a longitudinal perspective and the construction of our stepfamily sample will be discussed thoroughly (Chapter III, section 3); indeed, this aspect of the research formed the bulk of our work for the dissertation. We will also discuss the method we used, namely event history analysis (Chapter III, section 4). As we will see, this method is particularly suited to a framework based on the sociology of the life course. In Chapter III, sections 5 and 6, we will present the covariates we used for the analyses at survey time (section 5) and for the longitudinal study (section 6). Chapter IV will present and discuss the findings of stepfamilies at survey time and Chapter V the findings on stepfamily dynamics. A final discussion and conclusion will be presented at the end of this dissertation.

In our research, we have tried to take into account both perspectives: we look at what distinguishes stepfamilies from intact and lone parent families in Canada today, but also analyze the particularities of their structure and dynamics. In the cross-sectional study, our main focus is on taking into account the entire stepfamily environment to get a clearer idea of whether the number of stepfamilies is underestimated and by how much. Although many studies mention that the number of stepfamilies is often underestimated, research on this particular point and the scale of the problem is lacking (Coleman and Ganong, 1990).

In the longitudinal perspective, we solely analyze stepfamilies and their dynamics: consequently, we do not compare them with intact families. So far, no research has brought together these two perspectives. In Canada, a lack of data on

male family histories has meant that it is usually only the female perspective that is taken into account. In the first part of our analysis, we attempt to identify all the household units that are involved in stepfamily relationships. However, the rest of the analysis is restricted to stepfamily members living under the same roof, due to a lack of information on children who do not live with one of their parents on a regular basis. We are also able to distinguish between men and women reporting their stepfamily episodes which give us an even better understanding of stepfamily dynamics. The very different outcomes when analyzing men and women raise interesting questions on selectivity effect in our data.

Visher and Visher wrote in 1990 that stepfamilies need to fulfill six criteria in order to function effectively: the grieving process must be over; they must have realistic expectations of their family life and expect it to be different from the intact family model; the couple must have a strong uniting bond; they must be flexible and willing to adapt to new situations; the relationship with the stepchildren must be good; and, finally, the former partners and their new households must try to cooperate. This is quite a lot to ask of one family. In order to help de-stigmatize stepfamilies and perhaps highlight their variety, without ignoring the difficulties they still face, we hope to show with this dissertation that although stepfamilies might be unstable, this is not a family type we can neglect simply because analyzing them seems too difficult. On the contrary, we should be curious about how an increasing number of individuals deal with the experience of setting up stepfamily homes.

I. STEPFAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY CHANGE: PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTCS

Introduction

In the following part of the dissertation, we will describe demographic changes in the second half of the 20th century and present some theoretical frameworks that try to explain these changes. First, we will introduce the concept of the Second Demographic Transition since it offers explanations for the decreasing marriage rates, increasing rates of cohabitation and decreasing fertility rates observed in Western societies. We will then briefly discuss whether the Second Demographic Transition has occurred in Canada and within what kind of social structure. Second, we will then focus on some aspects of rational choice theory, since they also offer an explanation as to why the meaning of marriage changed and why divorce has increased. Third, we will show that authors emphasizing gender equality offer different answers to the increasing divorce rates. Last but not least, we will show that female entrance into the labour market is interpreted differently in the approaches presented earlier. We will then look briefly at how family issues have changed over time, see whether we can observe a renaissance of the stepfamily and how such families can be defined. The aim of this section is to give a broad overview of the macro changes in families and some possible explanations of these changes.

1. A theoretical framework to explain demographic changes: The Second Demographic Transition

A number of major demographic changes concerning marriage and divorce, as well as cohabitation and fertility, have taken place over the last two centuries. The *Second Demographic Transition* is a theoretical framework which offers an explanation for these changes. It helps us understand why families are what they are today. The particular changes that this perspective addresses are a decline in fertility and a change in the pattern of marriage with an increase in divorce and

cohabitation. The theoretical concept of the so called *Second Demographic Transition* was introduced by Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa in 1986[1] and was further developed by van de Kaa, Lesthaeghe and their colleagues (Lesthaeghe, 1983; Lesthaeghe and Meekers, 1986; Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 1988; Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2002; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2002; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004; Lesthaeghe and Neidert, 2006).

There are two approaches which attempt to explain changing fertility patterns: a more normative or cultural approach and the rational choice approach (Friedman et al., 1994). The Second Demographic Transition belongs among theories that emphasizes normative and cultural factors, in contrast to the rational choice approach which focuses on economic considerations. However, in addition to emphasizing cultural shifts, Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa also take into account the economic factors that lie behind broad changes in the family (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2002, for a discussion on value and cultural shift, see Lesthaeghe, 1983).

The first manifestations of the Second Demographic Transition were observed in Western Europe in the 1970s, then in Southern Europe in the 1980s and, finally, in Central Europe in the 1990s. As the authors observed the same demographic pattern overall, they suggest that the Second Demographic Transition is valid for all Western societies (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2002; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004). We will first focus on the general concept of the Second Demographic Transition, but we have to start from the beginning with a short overview of the First Demographic Transition. Then we will see whether Canada can be said to be following the same pattern as European countries and going through a Second Demographic Transition.

[1] Since the original title has been published in Dutch, we refer here to the key English language article concerning the Second Demographic Transition written by van de Kaa in 1987. The original title where Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa introduced the idea of the Second Demographic Transition is: Twe deomgrafische transities? In: LESTHAEGHE, Ron and VAN DE KAA, Dirk J. (eds.) *Bevolking: groei en krimp,* pp. 9-24. Deventer: Mens en Maatschappij, 1986 book supplement, Van Loghum Slaterus.

CHAPTER I – STEPFAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY CHANGE: PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

The First Demographic Transition

The First Demographic Transition could be briefly described as a transition from high to low mortality and fertility levels. In Western Europe, the period identified as the First Demographic Transition starts in the 18th century and Lesthaeghe defines its end as the moment when one can observe "an older stationary population and stable population corresponding with replacement fertility (i.e. just over 2 children on average), zero population growth, and life expectancies greater than 70 years" (Lesthaeghe, 2007, p. 4123). In Western Europe, the First Demographic Transition ended between the two world wars.

This first period of transition has a number of distinct characteristics. Cohabitation was not a prevalent type of union; indeed, it was barely recognized and was perceived as something deviant (Van de Kaa, 1987). Rates of remarriage after the death of a spouse were high and divorce was rare. Lower fertility rates can be explained by declining child mortality and the changing role of children (Lesthaeghe, 2007; and Ariès, 1980).

The family began to turn away from the outside world toward a private world in which affection for children becomes important. What is more, having smaller families made upward mobility easier and "seeing that one's children got ahead in a climate of social mobility was the deep motivation behind birth control" (Ariès, 1980, p. 647). Society thus becomes more "child oriented", as Ariès puts it (Ariès, 1980, p. 647). This new orientation is also explained by declining infant mortality: with more children surviving, fewer births were needed to achieve the desired family size. The decline in fertility during the late 18th century can thus be partly explained by a cultural shift in attitudes towards children and family. With ongoing industrialization, the role of children in society also changes during this period: they are perceived less and less as cheap labour and become something *precious* to raise. Nor are they expected as often to

support their parents as they get older or to help their parents financially (Van de Kaa, 1987)[2].

During the First Demographic Transition, societies underwent important demographic changes. According to Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002), one can also observe other societal developments relevant to individuals during this same period. First, there is a preoccupation with material needs (e.g. income, housing, work conditions). Second, despite the first wave of secularization, the church, alongside the state, remains a strong normative body that regulated people's lives. Third, gender roles are less and less segregated. Last but not least, an *ordered life course transition* emerges with a dominant single family model. In the context of our study on stepfamilies, this last point is particularly interesting because life course transitions no longer appear to follow the ordered path established during the First Demographic Transition (see Chapter II, section 3).

From the First to the Second Demographic Transition

Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002) suggest that, compared to the First Demographic Transition, the Second was characterized by opposite trends in terms of the average age at marriage, cohabitation and illegitimacy. First, we must examine, what are the shifts that actually took place and second, we must ask what factors led to the new transition, other than *external* events such as economic crisis or wars.

The Second Demographic Transition has often been characterized as a period in which people became increasingly self aware and the individual becomes more important. In his article, Van de Kaa (1987) provides some explanations as to why people might move away from marriage and parenthood toward a life which is guided more by self-fulfillment. In this context, a sustained

[2] Although Ariès refers mainly to France and Van de Kaa to Europe as a whole, it is worth noting that countries in Western Europe did not change at the same rate or at the same time. However, overall, they follow the same general pattern.

secularization of society or increased individuation might encourage people to leave behind well-known behavioural pattern. Van de Kaa (1987) argues that the differences in norms and attitudes between the First Demographic Transition and the Second Demographic Transition can be characterized by a shift from *altruistic* to *individualistic.* This means that the rationale for low fertility rates alters significantly: from being driven by concern for the well being of offspring during the First Demographic Transition, the emphasis shifts during the Second Demographic Transition towards the rights of the individual and self-fulfillment.

Social and cultural factors play a major role in the changes observed throughout the Second Demographic Transition. In contrast, one could argue that people were more concerned with achieving economic well being in the First Demographic Transition. Once this was achieved, and bearing in mind that the Second Demographic Transition followed the booming post World War Two years, people started looking for new goals that were more related to personal 'inner' values. Van de Kaa (1987) describes several ways in which cultural values change.

First, there is a continuing secularization of society, encouraging people to leave old values behind and to break with traditional behaviour. This is illustrated by an increased focus on self-fulfillment, with people trying to discover their own potential and act in a more individualistic manner instead of being group oriented. Second, he uses the term *progressiveness* to explain the cultural changes observed. Progressiveness is to "embrace the new, look critically at the present and largely disregard the past" (Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 7) and this in turn encourages a shift toward equality and freedom. Van de Kaa refers to *progressiveness* but also argues that all such terms are based on the same observation: "a large change in norms and attitudes" (Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 7). In sociology, researchers also observed such changes in values. They tend to refer to the 1960s and 1970s and see changes in values as driven by the youth and by

student rebellions[3] (Macmillan, 2005). How these changes in attitudes and cultural values affected demographic behaviour can be seen in an increase in levels of divorce, a shift from marriage to common-law unions and decreasing fertility. We will further develop this point below.

The shift from altruistic to individualistic values was accompanied by the replacement of the *bourgeois family* by an *individualistic family* model (Van de Kaa, 2002). The former refers to the nuclear family in which men and women have typical gendered roles. However, the emergence of divorce as a possible outcome of marriage was the turning point for the emergence of the *individualistic family.* From being a strong institution, marriage begins to weaken. Besides increasing divorce rates, Van de Kaa (1987) identifies four major shifts supporting the marked decrease in fertility during the Second Demographic Transition:

1. The golden age of marriage is over and cohabitation becomes more important
2. The emphasis shifts from the children to the couple
3. From being a preventative measure, contraception becomes a tool for planning self-fulfilling parenthood
4. Uniform family households become more diverse

In the following, we will briefly describe the demographic changes that led to the formulation of the Second Demographic Transition theory. We will not focus on the detailed statistics for this period but provide an overview. The

[3] The student movements of the 1960s were not mentioned by van de Kaa in his 1987 article, but have indeed been the focus of observations in many European countries. In France, the student movement at the time was against de Gaulle and the Algerian war; in Germany, it was against the establishment which continued to refuse to face the Nazi past; in Italy, it was against the state, etc. Many young people were rebelling against their parents and (family) models and opting for new living arrangements (such as common-law unions, apartment sharing) which made it possible to afford leaving home. This is particularly noticeable in Northern Europe.

changes went in a north-south direction, with the Nordic countries emerging as avant-garde.

1.1 The changing demographic patterns

Marriage

During the Second Demographic Transition, we observe a considerable decline in the total marriage rate which coincides with an increase in the age at first marriage. Also, there seems to be a reluctance to remarry, with many divorced or widowed men or women preferring not to remarry when entering a new relationship. Van de Kaa (1987) argues that financial concerns might be a motivating factor, since pensions and benefits from a former marriage might be lost when people remarry. A decline in remarriage does not necessarily mean that people remain alone as they may enter into a common-law relationship.

Modell et al. (1978) pointed out that, along with birth and death, marriage has been part of a sequence of status transitions and a cornerstone in everyone's life course. It was identified with a departure from the parental home, the beginning of a regular sexual relationship, a move to parenthood and the establishment of an independent household from the 19th century until the 1940s. But, with the improved living conditions provided by the welfare state, the status of marriage began to decline and fewer younger people married. Although Van de Kaa (1987) does not specify how the welfare state improved living conditions, it is clear that support for students in the form of loans or social benefits, unemployment insurance, sick leave arrangements, minimum wage, etc., are likely to alter the context in which people decide whether to (re)marry or not. During the same period, divorce became easier and accessible to more people. In Northern and Western Europe, laws changed to allow mutual consent as a reason for divorce. Such changes in the legal system can be directly related to the increasing divorce rates since the 1970s.

Entry into adulthood

The changing meaning of marriage also affected the transition from youth to adulthood. Entering adulthood has traditionally been marked by several transitions: employment, marriage and parenthood, all representing an increasing independence from parents and a commitment toward one's own partner. Kiernan (1986) suggested that marriage can no longer be seen as the main reason why young adults leave home, since they are also simply leaving more and more frequently to set up a common-law couple or to be single, but still the living arrangements are dependent on available housing. She also argued that what were once perceived as final transitions (completing one's education, moving out of the home to marry) have now become more fluid and less permanent states (more people return to education in adulthood than before, living arrangements alter more frequently, including returning to the parental home for extended periods of time). It was in Northern countries (Denmark and Sweden, in particular) that a new emphasis on cohabitation among young people emerged first. They left their parental home to move in with people of their own age. From being seen as something deviant, cohabitation has become by and large a social institution itself (Van de Kaa, 1987). Van de Kaa also argues that marriage and common-law unions are two sides of the same coin even if their stability and fertility patterns are different (common-law couples seem to be less stable and to have fewer children). Cohabitation might be an alternative to marriage that is more attractive because it requires fewer (legal) constraints and is easier to leave if the relationship is not satisfactory. Additionally, the sexual revolution of the 1960s altered people's perception of couples. Cohabitation no longer carries as much disapproval (Bumpass, 1990) and lost its status as something unconventional.

To conclude, during the Second Demographic Transition, the most relevant changes have been an increase in the age at marriage, a decrease in the number of people who choose to marry, an increase in divorce and an increase in

the popularity of common-law relationships. The transitions that punctuate the life course of individuals become more flexible and multiple life styles emerge.

Declining fertility

Fertility in Europe continues to decline, and is below replacement level in most countries[4]. This led van de Kaa (1987) to state that the era of the "*king child*" is over and that we are moving toward an era with a "*king pair with a child*" (Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 11). This refers to the idea that adults now choose to enter parenthood and that they do so for the immediate reason of self-fulfillment rather than with the view of establishing some support for themselves in old age, for example. Couples actually plan the timing of having children and since both partners often want to pursue a career, they tend to favour a smaller size of family. Increasingly reduced family size can also be explained by the costs of raising children, in particular in relation to education which requires both money and time: parents wishing to offer a good education to their children will, therefore, usually opt for having fewer children. Also, childlessness is increasingly recognized as a legitimate positive choice. In addition, the age of parents at the birth of the first child has increased and modern contraception has allowed couples to plan their children more precisely. "Contraception shifted from a measure used primarily to prevent births that would reduce a family's well being and standard of living to a means toward achieving greater self-fulfillment" (Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 26). Van de Kaa (1987) does point out that a decline in fertility would have been observed even without better contraception, since birth control has always been available, but what is new is that the timing and pace of the Second Demographic Transition can be attributed to new contraceptive methods, namely the Pill. The Pill also represented a form of liberation for women since it enabled them to decide if and when they wanted children; marriage was no longer a prerequisite for a legal sexual relationship. Finally, one

[4] Below replacement level means less than 2 live births per woman, 2 being the limit to keep the balance between birth and death in the overall population.

can observe a rise in extramarital fertility as more and more couples who cohabit are becoming parents.

1.2 The increase of divorce

Rising divorce rates and decreasing rates of marriage have been explained differently depending on the theoretical background adopted. The theory of the Second Demographic Transition recognizes economic factors (Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2002) and increasing female labour market participation as one of the reasons for changing attitudes toward divorce. However, their emphasis lies more on the importance of changing values, especially of the growing importance of self-fulfillment, personal growth and self expression for individuals of both sexes. Still, economic factors and female labour market participation seem to be of key importance to explain increasing divorce rates. In order to take those into account, we will focus on some authors who elaborated more extensively on economic factors and female labour market participation and offer therefore additional explications.

The idea of not only focusing on changes in values but to also look at economic changes has been well developed by the economist Becker (1981) within the larger theoretical framework of rational choice theory. In order to understand why the meaning of marriage changed, we have first to explain how the ideal functioning marriage was explained by Becker. Here, the idea is to take into account the costs and benefits of being married, since the interest lies in the economic aspects of everyday life. With regard to marriage, his main assumption is that people will take into account the costs and rewards of a marriage and divorce. Becker argues that people get married when they expect to gain more from a marriage than from remaining single. Similarly, they will separate if the utility of remaining married "falls below the utility expected from divorcing and possibly remarrying" (Becker, et al. 1977, p. 3). Obtaining information on a potential partner before marriage plays an important role: if the information is

insufficient and falls short of their expectations, people might consider divorce. But it is only during a marriage that people are likely to gain extensive information on their partner. In other words, if the costs of a marriage were higher than its rewards, people would not marry. In general, rational choice theory assumes that people act rationally, always taking into account costs and benefits, their own personal preferences and the maximum they can gain from acting in a particular way.

Now, as divorce rates rose, Becker and colleagues (1981 and Becker et al., 1977) explained these by the greater participation of women in the labour market which, according to them, has a negative effect on marriage. They assume that, in a marriage, each partner invests his/her special skills; in their conventional view of marriage and gender roles, the skills of women are associated with child rearing, household management, and domestic activities, while men contribute by earning money. With women entering employment, specialization decreases and the joint gains from a marriage are reduced (Becker et al., 1977). Men with high earning potential would be the ones who gain most from a marriage, as opposed to those with low income potential, since they are likely to marry women who are also willing to specialize in domestic activities. Both sexes would thus gain from the marriage by specialization of their human capital and increasing productivity. His conclusion was that higher education has an "ambiguous effect on the probability of dissolution" (Becker et al., 1977, p. 1156). Because education decreases the division of labour between men and women, marriage becomes less attractive to women (Becker et al., 1977). Becker and colleagues are not assuming a shared division of labour, in the sense that men and women would contribute equally in the labour market and in the home.

In short, Becker would argue that the increased labour market contribution of women would lead to increased divorce rates because of a loss in the gains associated with marriage. Before, men and women acted in accordance to their ascribed specified roles (the male breadwinner and the female housekeeper).

According to him, if the roles between men and women change and become more interchangeable, less specialized investments into human capital would decrease the household productivity. Additionally, competition between men and women might become a problem. However, we know that things have changed and that more and more couples seek equality in the division of labour inside and outside the home. It seems that women have not been particularly satisfied with the type of division of labour described by Becker, since working outside the home has become increasingly important for them. Hence, explaining increasing divorce rates with decreasing gains from a marriage due to female labour participation is coherent with Becker's assumptions. However, other authors provide different approaches to the issue. We may say that rational choice theory suggests that people evaluate their relationships in economic terms while the Second Demographic Transition emphasizes the value changes. It might be the interplay of all of those factors, some more rationally driven, some more driven by values that led to the increasing divorce rates.

Oppenheimer (1994) critically examines the assumption that female employment alone can explain demographic changes such as decreasing marriage rates or declining fertility. She argues that the focus on female labour market contribution ignored two important issues. First, the fact that child mortality decreased dramatically and that family size has shrunk. Where women used to be devoted to and specialized in bearing and rearing children, they now have much more time to spend outside the house and enter the labour market. This has led to a change in the meaning of marriage. Second, she argues that the role of men in the family and the labour market has been largely overlooked. This means we lack information that would help explain how changes in men's traditional roles affect fertility and marital behaviour. Oppenheimer would argue that deteriorating employment opportunities for men since the 1970s, irrespective of their educational achievements, also reduces their likelihood of marrying and, we may add, of having children. The interesting point in Oppenheimer's argument is that she highlights the importance of not simply focusing on the changing role of

women and its consequences. She suggests one should emphasize equally the changes affecting men which also help explain demographic changes. In other words, Oppenheimer shows the necessity of examining both sides of the coin in a process involving both sexes, namely, union formation, union dissolution and child bearing, even if one might argue that women initiated the course of change.

Scholars emphasizing gender issues offer alternative explanations as to why family structure has undergone so many changes since the late 1960s, with higher divorce rates and increasing female labour market participation.

Research focusing on gender equality tends to support the argument that female labor market participation helped women to gain more (economic) independence and, consequently, gave them the ability to leave unhappy marriages (England and Farkas, 1986). England and Farkas argue further that men might find it easier to leave unhappy marriages if they know that their partner is an independent woman who can support herself. Additionally, if women are more independent because they work, marriage is no longer as necessary as a form of economic security (Manting, 1996). To some extent, this latter argument ties in with the cost-benefit argument put forward by Becker. However, here the focus lies on the advantages of working and of economic independence for women.

1.3 A Second Demographic Transition in Canada?

In the beginning of this chapter we asked where Canada might be placed within a framework of the Second Demographic Transition and if Canada might have witnessed a Second Demographic Transition. Let us, therefore, briefly present Canadian demographic changes during the past decades. Additionally, in order to better understand families and stepfamilies in Canada and where they are today, we need insight into the overall context in which they have evolved over the years. Therefore the Canadian social structure will be discussed briefly before we focus on *step*families in particular.

CHAPTER I – STEPFAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY CHANGE: PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

In Canada, since the Divorce Act of 1968, the divorce rate has increased steadily. Of the marriages formed before 1960, 10.5% ended in a divorce in the 20 years following the ceremony; this percentage rose to 35% for the couples married during the 1960s, and to 43% for those married in the 1970s (Wu and Schimmele, 2005). Accompanying this trend was also a decline in the rate of people marrying. In 1981, 83% of families (having children or not) were married; however in 2001 70% of the families were married (Wilson, 2005). Remarriage rates, which were relatively high during the 1960s, have been falling continuously since then, with couples more likely to choose to cohabit rather than remarry following a divorce.

Over recent decades, cohabitation as a form of union has increased all over Canada, but particularly in Quebec where it has become an acceptable form of union not only to start conjugal life but also to raise a family. Cohabitation is now seen as providing an alternative to – or as being indistinguishable from – marriage in Quebec; elsewhere in Canada, it is still considered a testing ground for marriage, but is on its way to becoming an alternative to marriage as it appears that this type of union tends to last longer (Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2004). The occurrence of common-law unions in Canada has hit the news very recently with the release in September 2007 of Statistics Canada's new census, which suggests that Quebec has one of the highest proportions of common-law unions in the world with as much as 34%, while for the rest of Canada it is only 13.4%. Quebec has even passed Sweden with 25.4%, and Sweden has always been viewed as a leading country for common-law unions (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Low fertility is a preoccupying issue for Canada as it is for many Western European countries (Beaujot, 2000; Beaujot and Muhammad, 2006); France might be named as an exception here, as it is for western societies in general. In Canada in 1998, the total fertility rate was approximately 1.6 births per woman compared to 3.1 children in 1965 (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000), a rate similar to

that of Quebec. So Canada follows the trend of declining fertility which has been observed within the framing of the Second Demographic Transition.

Canada also exhibits cultural and religious differences across regions. English Canada is predominantly Protestant, while Quebec was, until the mid-20th century, devoutly and uniformly Catholic. During the 1960s, the rise of the feminist movement also contributed to significant change such as: the massive entry of women in the workforce, especially of mothers, the legalization of divorce and contraception, and last but not least, the decline of marriage and the drastic increase in cohabitation as an accepted form of family life. Given these facts, an increase in divorce, an increase in cohabitation, mostly in Quebec, as well as a decline in fertility, we may argue that Canada also went through a Second Demographic Transition. For Quebec, Piché and Le Bourdais argue that it has experienced a "véritable révolution, faite non pas d'une mais de plusieurs transitions, que le Québec a connue au plan démographique au cours du XXe siècle[5]" (Piché and Le Bourdais, 2003, p. 22). Here, with respect to common-law unions we may even say that Quebec is an avant-garde like many Northern European countries and it differs strongly from the rest of Canada. Previously, we argued that secularization has been one reason for changing values and changing behaviour. In Quebec, the Quiet revolution[6] during the 1960s has launched a beginning secularization process (Pollard and Wu, 1998) and this secularization in

[5] During the 20th century, Quebec has experienced a genuine demographic revolution made not only of one but multiple transitions.

[6] Since the late 1950s, "Quebec continued to be characterised as a rural traditional society" (Pollard and Wu, 1998, p. 336). Between 1960 and 1966, the 'rattrapage' or the so-called 'quiet revolution' took place: "The political, institutional, administrative, and ideological structures in Quebec were no longer compatible with the values of the population" (Pollard and Wu, 1998, p. 336). The quiet revolution was driven by the idea to "keep up" (Pollard and Wu, 1998, p. 336.) with the modernisation in North America. As a consequence, the Quebec government transformed the province from a rural, religious, agrarian-based society into an urban, industrial metropolis by modernizing the political, economic, and educational infrastructure (Pollard and Wu, 1998, p. 336). The quiet revolution was often characterised by "changes of mentality, attitudes, and value" (Pollard and Wu, 1998, p. 336). Therefore, we can assume that there was a shift in attitudes toward family formation behaviour. The low marriage rates since the seventies in Quebec are often attributed to the effects of the quiet revolution.

turn may account for the value change that Lesthaeghe (1993) describes in order to explain the changing demographic patterns.

This chapter has shown us how the First Demographic Transition and, in particular, the Second Demographic Transition led to changes in the family size, changes in values and has helped us to see the demographic patterns in western societies. Furthermore, we saw that the outcomes and implications of the rising divorce rates have been explained differently: some authors emphasize changing values and attitudes toward marriage and divorce (scholars advocating the Second Demographic Transition theory), others emphasize more women's entrance into the labour market as the starting point toward increasing divorce rates. And here once again, some scholars view this as liberation for women, because women can afford to leave unhappy relationships; others however, view women's entrance into the labour market as an abandonment of the traditional roles within marriage and interpret high divorce rates as negative consequences of this process. In the following section, we will concentrate on changing families with more of a focus on the re-emergence of the stepfamily and the changing pathway to stepfamily formation.

2. The emergence of new partnership and family issues

From an historical perspective, stepfamilies are nothing new, but the circumstances leading to their formation and their household composition have changed in important ways. As we have seen, these changes, in part, are related to the deep transformation of marriage and the nuclear family.

With the end of the 19th century the meaning of marriage changed from the institutionalized marriage to the companionate marriage: "le concept d'amour et de mariage par choix personel" (the notion of love and freely chosen marriage) became the basis of conjugal life (Saint-Jacques, 1998, p. 6). Afterwards, marriage shifted toward an individualized marriage, here the emphasize lies on

personal choice and self-development (Cherlin, 2004). The individualized relationship of modernity was also discussed by Giddens (e.g. 1992) and Castells (2004). Both authors focus on the increasing role of personal independence and satisfaction in couples and the fact that relationships are no longer held together via institutional bonds such as marriage. Giddens (1992) refers to the idea of the "pure relationship" (Giddens, 1992, p. 58), a relationship which relies on personal satisfaction and equality between the partners. Those relationships are often not stable since either person can leave if he/she is no longer satisfied: these relationships are formed for their "own sake" (Giddens, 1992, p. 58). Castells's discourse goes in the same direction. He examines the transformation of relationships, arguing that patriarchy has come to an end and that relationships are characterized by "networks of support, increasing female-centeredness, a succession of partners and patterns throughout the life-cycle" (Castells 2004, p. 287). Both scholars emphasize that relationships are guided more by self-fulfillment and that if self-fulfillment is no longer guaranteed, couples might leave. While Castells emphasizes female-centeredness others would argue that women became conscious (Tong, 1998, see also Castells, 2004) of the possibilities outside marriage and child rearing, and started leading self-determined lives. Some authors (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) noticed that as people became more and more individualized, the use of the term individualization needed some clarification. The authors do not mean an individual as part of a free market. They are actually referring to the German term of *Individualisierung,* leading to the question of how individuals "can demystify this false image of autarchy. It is not freedom of choice, but insight into the fundamental incompleteness of the self, which is at the core of individual and political freedom in the second modernity" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. xxiii). Individualization also means an "institutionalized imbalance between the disembedded individual and global problems in a global risk society" (ibid.). In conclusion, the authors further clarify that individualization does not mean a selfish individual who puts his or her own interests first. It is first and foremost an institutional change that gives individuals more choice, which, in turn, makes it

difficult for them to become part of a family or partnership. They explain rising tensions in families today by the fact that, in an individualized society, people try to "seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. xxii), meaning that equality between men and women is difficult to create in an institutional family structure which "presupposes and enforces their inequality" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. xxii)[7].

Of course, because divorce became more accessible, marriage became more of a choice rather than an obligation: people sought different rewards within marriage (personal happiness instead of financial security or status). The concept of love has not been mentioned by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa; they refer more to the idea of self-fulfillment. However, the factor of love should not be neglected, since love might be of major importance to self-fulfillment. This emphasis on love and its fleeting character is closely associated with the rise of divorce observed in most Western countries. Couples can choose to separate if love does not last, and, consequently marriage has become more easily revocable. Cherlin (1978, p. 634) wrote that families today are "held together more by consensus and mutual affection than by formal, institutional assumptions".

As the meaning of marriage changed, families also underwent important transformations throughout the 20th century. During the years 1945 to 1965, which Théry (2001, p. 495) refers to as the period of the "vingt glorieuses" (the twenty glorious years), the "intact family" was the norm; this period was characterized by low divorce rates, high fertility, a clear division of roles between

[7] This assumption refers to Germany, where the role of the male breadwinner is still supported by the state even though individuals might favor having careers and therefore two incomes. As well, the tax system in Germany favours marriage, whereas in Canada the partner with the higher income (usually the men) is favoured. Nevertheless, recent, new divorce laws in Germany encourage women to stay in the labour market, despite being married while the possibility of paternity leave encourages men to stay at home. The outcome of these new laws has yet to be observed, since they only came into effect in 2007. In societies where equality between men and women has more government support, tensions in families, such as those described, might be less. Still the negotiation within a couple about household tasks and child care/rearing, (in other words, the new roles and the division of labour in couples that are a result of more women in the labour market) could be the same anywhere.

the sexes, and limited female participation in the labour market (see Van de Kaa, 1987; Skolnick, 1991; and Coontz, 2000). In the 1970s, families began to change as women started to enter the labour market in massive numbers. The introduction and widespread use of effective contraception enabled women to better control their fertility and led to a substantial reduction in the size of families. The role of children also changed as they progressively stopped contributing economically to the family through their work and started spending more time in prolonged education. With their newly acquired economic independence, an increasing proportion of women opted for a common-law union rather than marriage to ensure their economic future. The reason for men to opt for common-law might be different in the sense that their future is more uncertain hence they prefer common-law toward marriage (Oppenheimer, 1994) since it requires fewer obligations and constraints. In addition, we saw that the improved living conditions that come with the welfare state mean that the necessity for marriage declined. This movement away from marriage, which Théry (2001) calls "le démariage", appears to be one of the main consequences of gender equality.

Another aspect of two more recent issues related to families and their changes might be the changing meaning of time balance in families and the new role of fathers. Since women work more outside the home and since the service economy often requires shift work, (e.g. in many call centers most work is done around the clock which results in evening and shift work) the type of work and the time it demands has changed (Presser, 1994). Looking at more recent publications one can see that the issues related to balancing work and time become more prevalent as a topic studies (e.g., Hochschild and Machung, 1989; Bianchi, 2000; Silver, 2000; Rapoport and Le Bourdais, 2007). Authors, such as Bianchi (2000), would argue that working women spend as much time with their children as homemakers do but the quality and distribution of the time is different. Spending *quality time* with children is of concern. This suggests that women working outside the home try to spend time with their children after work or on weekends where they actively do something together. The boundaries between

playing or entertaining children and working beside them at home might be more flexible/nebulous for women who stay at home; hence it might be more difficult to measure the *quality time* they spend with their children. These issues are at the center of many debates and many researchers find evidence that supports their position in the debate.

Additionally, because men and women both work, the organization of time, time sharing and time balance, has become an interesting issue. The core interest is mainly, do women who work find support in child rearing and housework from their partners? Or do women now both work at home and outside the home, whereas for men nothing has changed? So as a consequence, a new form of inequality would be found. Therefore, the focus is to understand what has changed with regard to time allowance, how time is organized and how couples manage time.

Since the role of women has changed, the role of men has also changed. Firstly, there are more fathers who do not live with their children, as the children usually stay with their mothers after separation. It would be interesting to examine how fathers organize their life around their children's visits; how they experience family life as a temporary phenomenon; how they organize new relationships, etc. Secondly, for single fathers who live with their children permanently how is their life organized and experienced since it is rarer than that of single mothers? Thirdly, how do fathers who live with their partners who are working women experience and organize a more equally shared daily life? and how do they find contributing more to the home domain? seeing as they might not have experienced this with their own fathers. In other words, it might be interesting to see if the role and behaviour of fathers has changed, according to the fathers themselves.

More recently, studies show an interest in understanding a subject which has been often neglected: fathers, their role involvement and time spent with

children (e.g., Furstenberg, 1988; Presser, 1994; Brayfield, 1995; Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998; Carlson, 2006; Juby et al., 2007). One major outcome of such studies is that the involvement of the father, separated or not, is important to the child's development (e.g. Carlson, 2006). Presser (1994) and Brayfield (1995) would show that gender roles have become more equally shared. Furthermore, an interest in fathers and their involvement in the family has emerged especially in cases where parents have different work schedules. In other words, if women are at work, and men are not, do men become more involved in family life?

The scholars who focus on these emerging family issues can provide additional explanation as to why families have changed and continue to change. Even though they are interesting and relevant issues related to families, such as time allocation, gender equality within couples, and the new role or perception of fathers, we focus solely stepfamilies. In the next step, we will concentrate on the re-emergence of the stepfamily and we will see to whether stepfamilies are one of the consequences of the changes we discussed previously and how these changes might affect our perception and understanding of stepfamilies.

3. A renaissance of the stepfamily?

Stepfamilies are not a recent phenomenon. Remarriages were common and well documented from the 16th to the 19th centuries, so also during the First Demographic Transition, but the reasons for their emergence was different from what they are now. High mortality rates, especially for women during childbirth, often ended unions prematurely, and widows and widowers were encouraged to remarry quickly after the death of their spouse due to economic constraints and to keep the family system intact (Teubner, 2002). With the decline of mortality, the sheer number of remarriages began to fall in the beginning of the 20th century, but it increased momentarily in given periods, such as in the years following the Second World War in which a high number of men died (for a discussion, see Saint-Jacques, 1998).

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Death is no longer the main cause for remarriage; it has been replaced by divorce (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). We must recall that in most European countries, as in Canada, divorce laws and reforms were introduced during the sixties and made divorce possible and more easily accessible. These new legislations combined with women's new earning capacities made it possible for them to leave unsatisfactory marriages, thus leading to a rise in divorce. As marriage ceased to be seen as a social obligation, the number of common-law unions and children born within this type of union increased, as did conjugal instability. The rising number of divorced and separated parents led to an increasing number of lone parents. These lone parents, in turn, were candidates for entering new unions and consequently for forming stepfamilies (Juby et al., 2001). In other words, the rise of separation and divorce paved the way for the renaissance of the stepfamily.

If stepfamilies have always existed, what is new about them? The greatest change is undoubtedly related to the fact that no longer is the death of one biological parent at the root of the formation of a stepfamily. Nowadays, both biological parents are usually alive even if they no longer live together in a common household with their children. Following separation or divorce, both parents can maintain a separate relationship with their children, regardless of the custody and living arrangements that they have. The fact that both their biological parents are alive often means that children have to share their daily lives between two households, and that they enter into an increasing number of new relationships. Children of separated parents might indeed have a stepmother *and* a stepfather, who might both bring along stepbrothers and sisters into their lives.

Stepfamilies formed by separation or divorce are interdependent households. They are related by chains that extend from one household to another, with children being the links of these chains (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). In daily life, the parent who formed a stepfamily with a new partner has to organize and maintain contact between the children and the other biological parent. If the

latter lives in a stepfamily unit as well, weekend organization might become relatively complex, as it might also involve members from another linked household. In other words, any change in the schedule of activities of one household is likely to provoke a series of adjustments in a chain of interdependent households. As Théry (1987) wrote, the new stepfamily does not replace or substitute itself to the disrupted family unit, but rather transforms it by bringing along new family members who increase its complexity and heterogeneity.

4. The stepfamily: problematic or stigmatized?

In societies where the nuclear family model was dominant, the stepfamily has always been seen as very different from the "normal family" (Bien et al., 2002). Indeed, stepfamilies have different past family experiences and they face challenges that differ from those of nuclear families. Stepfamilies are often seen as being dysfunctional or problematic. This section gives a brief overview of what might be at the root of such perceptions. However, we will analyze this in more detail in our discussion of the dynamics of stepfamilies and their instability, in particular (see Chapter II, section 4).

Negative myths about stepmothers abound in the literature of the past (Saint-Jacques, 1998). In fairy tales, the stepmother was often seen as a cruel "marâtre" with evil intentions (see the Grimm's tales of "Hansel and Gretel", "Snow White" or "Cinderella"). Théry (1987) remarks that remarriages were particularly stigmatized in the 19thcentury when a Victorian attitude and more rigid social and moral codes were applied throughout the Western world; the main argument was that the children would suffer at the hands of a stepparent who would favour his or her own children.

Until recently, there has been a lack of empirical studies on stepfamilies based on large data sets. The data available came predominantly from clinical psychological studies and thus contributed to reinforcing the negative image of

stepfamilies, as only families with problems are likely to seek psychological help (Desrosiers et al., 1994).

Stepfamily members face distinct difficulties and challenges. They have to learn new roles that are not well defined and still remain "incompletely institutionalized" (Cherlin, 1978). Both the stepmother and stepfather must adapt to new "parental" roles (Saint- Jacques, 1990). They often have to assume parental responsibilities (e.g. providing food and guidance) without being recognized as having any legal rights, and they might have expectations that compete with those of the absent, but living, biological parent. This might create tensions or problems between stepfamily members. Children entering a stepfamily also face important challenges. They must learn to accept the new partner of one of their parents, maintain a relationship with a possibly absent biological parent, and learn how to adapt to switching residences and to step-brothers and sisters. They now have to deal with two "mothers" and/or "fathers", towards whom they might experience conflicting feelings of loyalty, and there might be far more people intervening in their upbringing. On the other hand, a remarriage can be a positive event in pulling the household out of a difficult economic and/or psychological situation, and in making a family unit complete once more. In sociology, the stepfamily has often been seen as an "abnormal family" (Théry, 1987, p. 125); this abnormality is perhaps rooted in the higher "complexity" of this form of family (Saint-Jacques, 1990, p. 11).

5. How should we name stepfamilies?

In the French, English and German literatures on stepfamilies, various terminology has been used to refer to this type of family. In the French literature, the term 'famille recomposée' is most often found, but the terms 'famille reconstituée', 'famille composée' or 'famille remariée' have also been commonly used; in English, the terms used include 'stepfamily', 'blended family', 'reconstituted family' or 'remarried family'. The various terms partly describe

different realities that have evolved through time, but they are often given different meanings or are used inconsistently across different studies, leading to a certain ambiguity (Théry, 1987; Juby et al., 2001). The French language is particularly poorly equipped to analyze the complexities of current families; hence, the word "beau-père" refers both to the new partner of a child's separated mother (the stepfather) and to the father of one's spouse (the father-in-law).

Since 2000, the expression 'patchwork family' can now be found in German dictionaries. It was introduced as an attempt to replace the term "stepfamily" to which a negative connotation was attached. One can argue that the new name better reflects the realities of these families with their high level of variability and complexity. Unfortunately, it is not commonly used, nor well understood in either the Anglophone or Francophone literatures.

6. Definitions of stepfamilies

The most commonly used definition of stepfamilies usually refers to one parent living under the same roof with his or her own biological (or adopted) children and a spouse or partner who is not the biological (adoptive) parent of at least one of these children. However, definitions vary greatly across studies.

Most of the early studies analyzing stepfamilies from large survey samples were conducted in the United States and focused solely on remarried families (for example, see White and Booth, 1985; Glick, 1989; Clarke and Wilson, 1994). They often included two very different situations in the same category of 'remarried families': couples without children in which one of the two spouses were in their second legal union, and couples in which one or both partners had children born from a previous union. They did not always differentiate between couples who remarried following divorce and those who came together after the death of a spouse, though the different circumstances leading to remarriage could result in diversified family structures and living arrangements. These studies were

mostly interested in analyzing the stability of the union, and they used past conjugal history and the presence of children to help explain the higher probability of divorce observed among remarried couples, compared to couples in their first union.

It was not until the seminal work of Bumpass et al. (1995) that cohabiting unmarried couples living with at least one child born from a previous relationship started to be counted as stepfamilies in the United States; until then, they were classified in the category of lone parent families comprised of one adult who was not related. By contrast, stepfamily research conducted in Canada and France included common-law couples in the analysis right from the start (see Leridon, 1993; Desrosiers et al., 1995). This is important considering the high prevalence of common-law couples and families in Canada, and especially in Quebec (Pollard and Wu, 1998; Wu, 2000). This literature centered on stepfamilies has devoted much attention to studying the circumstances and processes surrounding the formation of this type of family, its composition and complexities, and the consequences for family life in general, and for children, in particular (for example, see Marcil-Gratton et al., 2000; Bien et al., 2002).

A variety of criteria can be used to differentiate stepfamilies. Undoubtedly, research needs to restrict its focus to the most frequent and significant arrangements in order to yield substantive results. Bien et al. (2002) argued that stepfamily households can be distinguished according to the time that children spend in each unit: the daily family, also called the primary family, is the family in which the children live most of the time, while the weekend family, or secondary family, refers to the family where the children spend their time on weekends and holidays. In each setting children might interact with a stepparent. A 'step constellation' is thus defined as one in which children live on a full or part-time basis with one biological parent and with one stepparent who has an ongoing relationship with this parent (either within a marriage, a common-law

union or as part of an arrangement whereby the couple are together but living apart, the so-called 'living apart together' situation (Levin and Trost, 1999)).

Other classifications have also been put forward to distinguish between simple, composed and blended stepfamilies, depending on the origin and number of siblings present in the stepfamily or on the sex and number of stepparents[8]. In simple stepfamilies, only one partner brings to the union at least one child born from a previous relationship and the family does not include any common children born in the current union. A stepfather family refers to a mother living with her own children and a man who is not the father of her children, and a stepmother family to a father living with his own children and a woman who is not the mother of his children (see Table 1.1). Research has shown that the person around whom the family is organized, the mother or the father, i.e. if the stepfamily is mother-centered or father-centered, greatly affects the future of the family (Ambert, 1986; Desrosiers et al., 1995), thus pointing to the need to take this dimension into account.

Composed and blended stepfamilies mix more than one type of sibling which adds to the complexity of family relations (see Table 1.1). The term 'composed stepfamilies' usually refers to families comprising children born in previous relationships of both the male and female partners, without including children born to the couple; in other words, they comprise both a stepmother and a stepfather. To form a 'blended' or complex stepfamily, the new couple must have a common child who then becomes the half-brother or sister to the children born in the previous relationship of one or both of his/her parents. Juby et al. (2001, p. 170) argue that the birth of a child within the ongoing union "transforms the nature of the stepfamily", in that it creates a genetic link between all family members which was otherwise absent. It thus creates a family that is qualitatively different from stepfamilies with no common children. In discussing stepfamily

[8] One should note that the terminology used is not always consistent across studies (for a discussion, see Juby et al., 2001).

dynamics, and in particular the arrival of a common child, we will focus in detail on this type of bond-building – a complex process that requires close examination (see Chapter II, section 4.2 and the following sections).

It is often argued that the 'true' number of stepfamilies is probably underestimated because only members living regularly in the same household are considered part of the family. This residential definition was adequate in the past when stepfamilies were created through remarriage after widowhood, and when "the new spouse entered the household and, figuratively speaking, stepped into the shoes of the dead parent" (Juby, 2003-2004, p. 5). Today, with the majority of stepfamilies formed by separated and divorced parents, the residential boundary is no longer adequate to reveal the situation of children who belong to two distinct family households, one comprising a mother and a stepfather, the other, a father and a stepmother. The only "step-relatives who make it into statistics" (Juby, 2003-2004, p. 6) are the ones with whom the child lives.

Stewart (2007) asserts that there are two alternate definitions of the stepfamily: a *traditional* one and a *revised* one, and claims that most research still uses the traditional definition even though reality has changed. The *traditional* definition is based on remarriages, co-resident children (where the children were between 0 and 18 years old), the families considered are mostly white, heterosexual, and middle class. The *revised* definition of *stepfamilies* takes into account first marriages, remarriages and cohabitation, children who are co-resident and/or are non-resident, and parenting which happens throughout the life course, including children over 18. Besides the white middle class, stepfamilies are now prevalent in all socio-cultural classes (African-American, Hispanic and homosexual couples). The most interesting aspect of the revised definition of stepfamilies is the residence of the children. Stewart argues that the resident status of children has changed from a static one to a dynamic one: "The new model incorporates nonresident stepchildren living in other households and shifts in residence over time" (Stewart, 2007, p. 14). In other words, Stewart takes into

account what we call the stepfamily environment, where children do not live in the stepfamily household but visit it on an occasional basis.

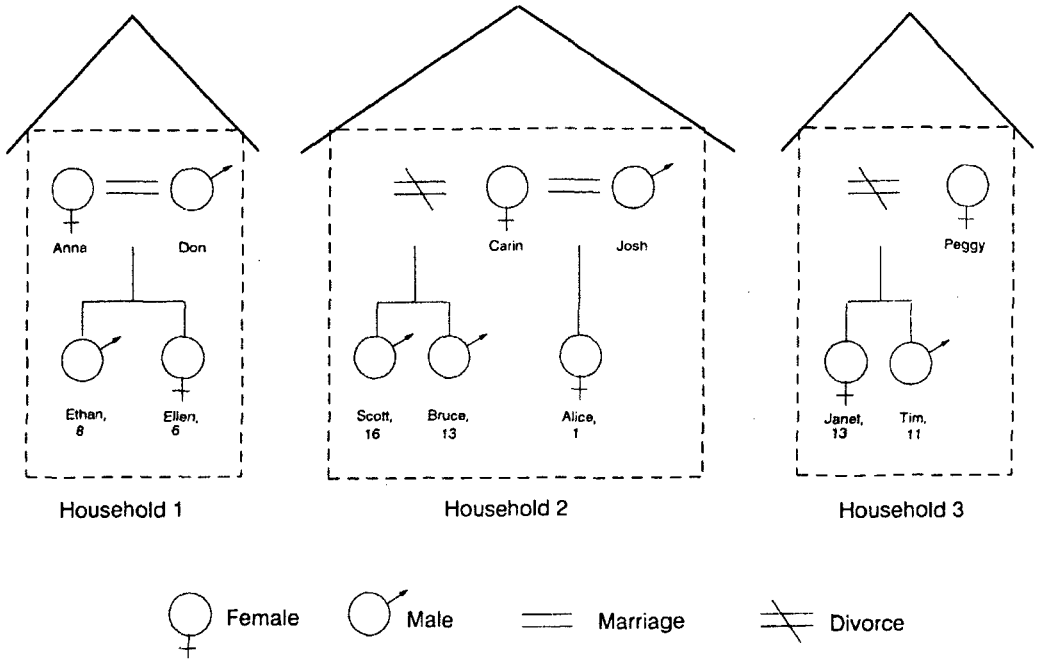
In Canada, cohabitation is much more frequent and accepted as a type of union than in the United States (for the United Sates see Bumpass et al., 1995 or Cherlin, 2004). Stewart (2007) argues that traditional stepfamilies seem to be found among the white middle class. However, if we consider that most stepfamilies are formed around stepfathers, that is, around single mothers who enter into a new relationship, and if we take into account the fact that, as some research suggests, single mothers often face economic hardship, we would expect to find more stepfamilies in the lower classes, unless the hypothesis that single mothers *move up* financially via entering into a new union is true (Holden and Smock, 1991; Le Bourdais et al., 1995). Still, we do not know if those women face economic hardship only temporarily due to separation and would otherwise belong to the middle class, or if they have always experienced economic hardship, in which case the latter might be truer for women who have children without having had any union. From the longitudinal perspective, one could examine if those women face economic hardship solely as a result of single motherhood and separation, or if, in general, those women face long-term economic hardship. Additionally, the measurement of class is not clear in Stewart's argumentation: she does not outline how she defines and measures class. A stepfamily is thus defined here as a biological parent living with children born from a previous relationship, and a partner who is not the biological or adoptive parent of these children (see Table 1.1). A blended family is formed when a common child is born to the couple already living as a stepfamily. Stepfamilies are further distinguished according to the origin of children (maternal or paternal) or, conversely, by the sex of the stepparent (stepfather or stepmother).

Table 1.1: Stepfamily definitions

Family Type	Household Composition
Stepmother family	A father with his biological children and a stepmother
Stepfather family	A mother with her biological children and a stepfather
Stepmother and stepfather family	A mother with her biological children and a father with his biological children
Blended stepmother family	A father with his biological children and a stepmother + common children
Blended stepfather family	A mother with her biological children and a stepfather + common children
Blended stepmother and stepfather family	A mother with her biological children and a father and his biological children + common children

From an empirical point of view, a definition based on the 'roof' or residence is more widely used to collect data on families. However, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1994) point to another way of defining stepfamilies which ignores household boundaries and encompasses instead the family chains that relate households to one another. The diagram below illustrates the importance of 'chains' rather than 'rooves':

Diagram 1.1: Kinship ties due to divorce and remarriage in a network



Kinship ties due to divorce and remarriage in a network Reported by Anne C. Bernstein (1988). "Unraveling the Tangles: Children's Understanding of Stepfamily Kinship." In William R. BEER. (Ed.). *Relative Strangers: Studies of Stepfamily Processes.* (p. 83-111). NJ: Rowan & Littlefield. Drawing extended and adapted by (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994).

We will start by presenting the family arrangements in Household 1 and show further how Households 2 and 3 are involved in their family life.

Household 1

At first glance, Household 1 would not be counted as a stepfamily household but as an intact family household: Don is married to Anna and they have two children, Ethan and Ellen. However, we can see that Don is divorced from Carin (living in Household 2) and they have two sons Scott and Bruce, who live with Carin. However, the periods in which Scott and Bruce live with Anna and Don in Household 1, constitute a blended family in Household 1. This would be the case if Carin and Don had shared custody of Scott and Bruce. In this case, we would expect that the boys live on a regular basis in Households 1 and 2, regardless of the arrangements between Don and Carin.

In the case where Scott and Bruce live permanently in Household 2, Household 1 is an intact family which belongs to a stepfamily environment. If we ignore the fact that Don has children from a former union (Scott and Bruce) and label Household 1 as an intact family we risk underestimating the number of households that are part of a stepfamily environment. In other words, Household 1 belongs to a stepfamily environment, regardless of the current living arrangements. In addition, if we exclude them, we ignore the fact that resources between the two households might be exchanged or that a decision in one household might affect the other household (e.g. moving to another town).

Household 2

In Household 2 we see a blended family: Carin is married to Josh and they have a common daughter Alice. Additionally, Carin's children, Scott and Bruce, from her former marriage live with her, so they are half-brothers to Alice. Like the situation presented in Household 1, if Scott and Bruce didn't live with Carin and Josh, we would consider Household 2 an intact family household which belonged to a stepfamily environment because of Scott and Bruce. Additionally, Josh is divorced from Peggy (Household 3) and they have two children, Janet and Tim. Even if Bruce and Scott did not exist, Household 2 would be an intact family that belonged to a stepfamily environment because of the existence of Janet and Tim. Imagining that Janet and Tim lived in Household 2, we would have the most complex type of stepfamily constellation: a blended stepmother and stepfather family. In other words, both partners have children from former unions, are stepparents, and both have become the biological parents to their common child, Alice.

Household 3

Last but not least, we have Household 3: Peggy lives with her children Janet and Tim. Household 3 is counted as a lone parent household, if the children, Janet and

Tim, live with their mother Peggy; if they do not, one could also count Household 3 as a single person household.

Diagram 1.1 is a good illustration of the complex combinations inherent in stepfamilies, of the different ways in which they can be defined and of the chains that connect all the members. One could argue, in a way, that all members are interdependent: if one member moves to another town, gets divorced or dies, it will affect the lives of all the others, voluntarily or not. The diagram also shows how difficult it is to count stepfamilies, depending on the chosen focus and the ability to measure moves or transitions from one household or another. The diagram would look completely different on different days of the week, depending on where the children (Scott, Bruce, Janet and Tim) are staying.

In our first analysis, when we compare intact families with stepfamilies and lone parent families we try to be aware of such chains. Statistics Canada provides us with information at the time of survey on children not living in the household of interest but who are still reported as being the stepchildren of the respondent. In the chapter on data and methods we will explain how we were able to identify, in addition to other types of family, the said intact families who also belong to a stepfamily environment. One may argue that qualitative studies would be better suited to providing a closer understanding of such household chains than quantitative data as the latter relies on the survey information provided by the respondent, which possibly neglects some facts of interest to us with regard to living arrangements. For example, it would be interesting to know where these children live, how old they are, if they visit occasionally or if they are really not involved in any sense in family life, etc.

Conclusion

In this chapter we presented several theories that offer frameworks for explanation of demographic changes, namely the changing patterns of marriage, divorce and fertility

We saw that the Second Demographic Transition offers a good framework for examining such changes over time. The most notable characteristics observed during of the Second Demographic Transition are: a decrease in the rate of marriage, an increase in divorce rates, an increase in common-law unions and a decline in fertility. Changes in values and attitudes and ongoing secularization are used by theorists adopting the perspective of the Second Demographic Transition to explain such changes. The rising participation of females in the labor market is one possible explanation for rising divorce rates. Becker, an advocate of exchange theory within the framework of the tradition of rational choice theory, would explain female labour market participation with a decline in the gains from marriage. Other more gender-oriented researchers would explain increasing divorce as a result of more women working and women being able to afford independence, therefore choosing to marry or not, or to leave unhappy marriages (e.g. England and Farkas, 1986; Manting, 1996). Last but not least, Oppenheimer pointed out the necessity that we should not forget men, specifically that their changing situation in the labour market over the past thirty decades has influenced marital and fertility behaviour as well. We also saw how families changed over the past decades and that stepfamilies are not something new, but that the circumstances of their formation underwent substantial changes, also here increasing divorce rates are one factor. And, we may even say that the complexity we observe when we try to identify and to define stepfamilies may reflect the changes we observed. Family life today might be seen as much more complex and diverse than it used to be, because the individual is more involved with his ore her own choices to create his or her family life. How complex this identification becomes when looking at the data we will see further on in this work.

CHAPTER I – STEPFAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY CHANGE: PREVALENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

In the next part of the dissertation we will briefly discuss three sociological schools of thoughts applied to families which might be helpful to further explain stepfamilies: 1) system theory, 2) symbolic interactionism, and 3) the development and life cycle approach and the sociology of the life course.

II. STEPFAMILIES DYNAMICS: STABILITY AND CHILDBEARING

Introduction

In this part of the dissertation we will present studies elaborating on the dynamics of stepfamilies and the risk of divorce and the arrival of a common child. Stepfamilies are often found to be unstable and we want to better understand the circumstances why this might be the case, what reasons might lead to instability, and which family constellation or type of union might be more at risk of breaking up. Second, we want to examine the circumstances that led the couple in a stepfamily to have a common child. In addition, we want to see which type of stepfamily might be more at risk of having a common child. We are interested in a comparison between stepfamily types, since each stepfamily type differs with regard to its background. Furthermore, the rationale why some break up or have a common child might be quite different compared to that of intact families. The factors related to increasing divorce rates have been already explained; however for stepfamilies other circumstances might explain a risk of separation or divorce. The arrival of a common child, a topic related to general questions on fertility, can partly also be framed within the context of the Second Demographic Transition, where we saw that fertility is declining and the role of parenthood might have changed. But this does not answer the question what circumstances might drive stepfamilies to have or not have common children since their decisions regarding parenthood might differ from couples having their first child in general. Therefore, if we want a more in-depth understanding of the circumstances that lead to disruption or to the arrival of a common child, especially in stepfamilies, some additional theoretical frameworks are needed.

The theories presented so far have focused more on explaining the external changes that affect families. Now we will look at how these changes affect the dynamics of family life, in particular those of stepfamilies. We will not describe every sociological theory applied to families in detail here, but extract from the literature some that are more helpful in exploring (step)families and present them

briefly, before turning to the discussion of stepfamily dynamics. Of course, there is more than one theory, but despite the fact that families are, and always have been, a basic social institution in every society, there is still no single family theory that stands out, let alone a stepfamily theory. What seems to happen most often is that many other sociological theories are applied to families. When looking for a theory that would best explain family behaviour, one has to decide *what* we want to explain. The three approaches we briefly present are, as mentioned, system theory (section 1), symbolic interactionism (section 2), and thirdly, the life cycle and family development approach combined with the sociology of the life course (section 3). The choice for these approaches is the following: since we saw that stepfamilies are often still seen as something deviant from intact families, stigmatized and described as problematic families, system theory could help us to understand why this is so. Symbolic interactionism might be helpful in understanding the tensions or difficulties stepfamilies have because the definition of roles is important in stepfamilies. Third, the life cycle and development approach together with the sociology of the life course is very useful in explaining transitions people make during their life and why these transitions might occur along different pathways in stepfamilies than the ones assumed for intact families. We will note the difference between the development/life cycle approach and the sociology of the life course. Recently, the sociology of the life course brought to light some interesting conclusions about the idea of the de-institutionalized life course, which might be especially interesting when applied to the life course of people living in stepfamilies. As well, since we are studying the dynamics of stepfamilies from a longitudinal perspective, the life course framework seems to be very interesting.

1. System Theory

System theory focuses on and explains different social systems within a society, in our case on the classic nuclear family (i.e. a mother, a father and their common children). In an ideal system, every part has its function and the *correct* interplay

between the parts leads to the perfect functioning of a system. The idea is that a system has four basic characteristics: first, all elements in a system are interconnected; second, a system can only be understood as a whole; third, systems are affected by environmental feedback; and fourth, a system is not a reality but an ideal (White and Klein, 2002). System theory owes much to Herbert Spencer's (1880) idea of an "organic and evolutionary perspective of society" (White and Klein, 2002, p. 118) in which the principal idea is one of emergence whereby aggregations come together to form "more than the sum of their parts" (White and Klein, 2002, p. 118). This explains the first assumption, that all parts of a system are interconnected: for example, if one family member changes in attitude or behaviour, it affects all other members. It also underlies the third assumption concerning the external environment: e.g. if one family member has to move because of a job, the move will also affect other members.

System theory is reminiscent of the work of Parsons in the 1950s, however he is usually labeled a structural functionalist. In his studies on family, he focused on the function of each family member and the structure that lies behind this function. For example, every member in the family has clear tasks (the housewife is responsible for child rearing, the man is the breadwinner).

This has been described by Parsons and Bales as follows: "We will maintain that in its most essential structure the nuclear family consists of four main role-types, which are differentiated from each other by the criteria of generation and sex" and they continue further saying that: "We will argue that the differentiation of sex role in the family is, in its sociological character and significance, primarily an example of a basic qualitative mode of differentiation which tends to appear in *all* systems of social interaction regardless of their composition" (Parsons and Bales, 1955, p. 22). They claim that in every system every actor has a role which has to have a certain function in order to keep the system intact. Within the family role structures are then as follows: a father, his role is instrumental superior, a mother, her role is expressive superior, and

children (two ideally) their role is instrumental inferior if it is a son, and expressive inferior if it is a daughter (Parsons and Bales, 1955). They take into account the sex segregation between men and women: the father's role is to take care of the outside world, earning money and the mother is responsible for the inner family world, raising and caring for the children. The son will be raised in the spirit of becoming a man like the father, the daughter, like a mother[9]. This strong sex segregation and division of labour between men and women is also thought to avoid competition between spouses, and, we may add, conflict: Becker and colleagues (e.g. 1977) followed this idea with their assumption that labour specialization (here called role specialization) is the perfect model for functioning marriages (and families) since no competition (and hence conflict) arises.

Parsons and Bales theory on family is based on the idea that, first, all members are connected to each other. The second point refers to the idea that a family is a unit and here, the reference is often to the classic binuclear. Third, that families are affected by external influences such as the economy; normally the father would take care of this domain. The fourth assumption refers to the idea that a system is an ideal state which provides a benchmark for understanding what the elements in a system are striving towards. If everybody in this system acts according to his or her function, the system works: in other words, the nuclear family would be a guarantor for a functioning system within a society.

The nuclear family of the 1950s has been the ideal type of a family according to Parsons. This was a model magnified and supported by the American government with generous benefits for education, housing loans and job training in the 1950s (Coontz, 2000). This type of nuclear family has been pictured ironically in the television sit-com named "Ozzie and Harriet"[10] (Coontz, 2000). System theory ignores lone-parent families; for example, they would not consider

[9] Ironically, Parsons and Bales always assume a two-parent family with a son and a daughter. However, this refers to an ideal, regardless of what such an ideal might mean (and, as mentioned, the system refers to an ideal and is not reality).

[10] "Ozzie and Harriet" was a popular television sit-com during the 1950s in the United States, representing a very traditional family model.

a single-parent family as a complete family unit, since one part is missing. In addition, families where the sex role segregation is distributed differently, such as same sex couples, couples where women work, or where men are the homemakers, such models are not taken into account or are viewed as dysfunctional.

However, Parsons' ideas on family are somewhat outdated for current family studies; indeed, roles in families are no longer clearly defined (assuming they ever were) and we know that there are many other family structures besides the intact family. In addition, traditional male/female labour division no longer holds: women are active participants in today's labour market and men are increasingly active in childrearing and caring. We may say that Parsons acknowledges role sharing, but on another level: it was a sharing between actors whereas today it is more the sharing of one role. If we think of stepfamilies and that they are often labeled as dysfunctional or problematic families, one might attribute this to the fact that families are still often compared to intact families. Or that most of the studies examining stepfamilies focus on the ones that are formed after separation, while we have little knowledge of stepfamilies who are formed after one's partners death.

As we will see later, Cherlin (1978) describes the *dysfunction* of remarriage as a lack of institutionalization, meaning that stepfamilies lack role models since everything is compared to the intact family. System theory might not necessarily be a good frame for the study of stepfamilies since their structure is somewhat different from that of the intact family. Consequently, those families are described as problematic or dysfunctional. Also, today families are far more fluid and dynamic than they used to be as family members make their choices based on their individual needs. Here we should remember the theory of the Second Demographic Transition which suggests that today's' people are oriented more toward self-fulfillment and individualism and less inclined to pursue the altruistic family model, as we have already seen. For example, remarriage has

always existed after the death of a spouse hence stepfamily dynamics existed. However, at the time, remarriage was often to reestablish the nuclear family model, since lone-parenthood was not socially accepted. Furthermore, more often it was the women who died during childbirth, so the men needed a new spouse to raise their children. But now remarriage (or repartnering) after separation offers many more combinations and permutations of the family since all previous family members are still somehow involved in family life. In other words, families have always been dynamic, but the circumstances and outcome of such dynamics have changed, consequently, a static approach may be less useful to explain changing family patterns. Divorce or episodes of lone parenting are frequent. Nevertheless, to demonstrate why stepfamilies are still understood as being so different from intact families and why the nuclear family model served as an ideal or model for the family, system theory offers a good explanation. However, the system theory might be useful to contrast the intact family with the stepfamily and to show why the stepfamily is still seen as something different or deviant from the intact family, since the Parsonian family model always served (and still often serves) as the ideal family norm, viewing any other family form as deviant.

Furthermore, the idea that families can be understood as systems is both relevant and useful for family therapists and clinicians in understanding dysfunctional families. Last but not least, we should mention that Parsons model of the intact family and Becker's assumption on the division of labour and its consequences for marriages both come from the same idea: that the classic intact family with a clear division of labour between spouses would be a guarantor of stability. Parsons emphasizes the impact of sex segregation on keeping the (family) system intact and in avoiding competition between spouses. Becker has more in mind the economic aspect of marriage and the cost and benefits within it: his perspective was useful in offering an explanation of increasing divorce rates

2. Symbolic Interactionism

The foundations of symbolic interactionism go back to the meaning of behaviour and expectation mostly elaborated by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer (Preglau, 1999).

The key idea is that behaviour is attached to certain expectations and that "shared behavioural expectations emerge from the process of social interactions" (Stryker, 1968, p. 559). Symbolic interactionism is often applied to families and Sheldon Stryker is a prominent author in this area. The focus lies mainly on roles and their expectations; how each family member deals with the different roles they have in different contexts (being simultaneously a father, a spouse and an employee, for example) and how these roles connect with the roles of other family members. Having several roles encourages individuals to develop particular skills that enable them to adapt more easily to a variety of situations. However, having too many roles can also create conflict since some roles may not be compatible with each other. Stepfamilies offer a unique opportunity in family research to study the role of conflict and how people learn to adapt to new roles. Stepfamily members take on many roles, e.g. being a father, a stepfather, an ex-husband, a husband and an employee. Being both a father and a stepfather can potentially create tension since the feelings toward a child and a stepchild might be very different; yet his partner might expect him to behave in a similar way toward both children. Stepfamilies also offer a very good example of the importance of role consensus and/or role constraint (for a more detailed discussion, see Chapter II, section 4.2). Stryker (1968) points to the important difference between identity salience and role performance within families. He says that the more an identity (in other words 'a role') is real and clear to someone (and consistent), the better he/she can perform and meet the expectations attached to that role. If the role expectations are not consistent and clear, the behaviour can be different from the expectations. For instance, there might be expectations about how a father should act, but he might not meet them (being caring, supportive, understanding etc.).

Here, we can already see that in family forms which differ from the nuclear family role expectations might on the one hand not be very clear hence performance is more difficult. On the other hand, role models or identities might not exist. Furthermore, if one always uses the nuclear family model as a mirror or ideal model, it becomes even more difficult for other family types to try to emulate new role models and to be recognized.

One problem with this approach is that it is not always clear what the boundaries of different roles might be, let alone agreement on the nature of these roles, either among individuals who are being asked to describe their situation or among researchers who are trying to identify different roles. This is particularly obvious when trying to use this approach in quantitative studies: how exactly should we measure role perception and definition or role conflict? Symbolic interactionism does, however, provide a useful framework for the study of qualitative data where it is possible to gather information on the individuals' perceptions of their roles and the conflicts between them. This would be particularly interesting to obtain a better understanding on role definition and self-perception in stepfamilies.

3. Family development theory, family life cycle and the sociology of the life course

In this section we discuss the development/life cycle approach and the sociology of the life course. To our view, these less evaluative explanations of the changes affecting families, their development over time and their interdependence within society, may offer the best answers. They offer a useful insight not only on the evolution of families, but also on their instability and on decisions whether to have children or not. They try to identify both the internal and external events which can affect families. As we will see, the sociology of the life course is also very useful when combined with event history analysis as a methodology, both of which provide the background to our study.

CHAPTER II – STEPFAMILIES DYNAMICS: STABILITY AND CHILDBEARING

We will start by elaborating on family development theory largely developed by Duvall in the 1950s. Development theory is often combined with the family life cycle. The sociology of the life course will be presented in the last part and we will show where the life course approach is thought of as different from the life cycle approach. We will also argue that the family life cycle and life course are not necessarily the same.

3.1 Development theory

It has been argued that family development theory offers an "unique way" (Laszloffy, 2002, p. 206) of studying families, since it takes into account 1) the evolution of families, 2) the developmental tasks facing families and their members and 3) family stress which may occur at each developmental stage.

Family development theory is based on the assumption that *every* family goes through the same development or in other words the same *life cycle*. This model was first elaborated by Duvall in 1957 who identified the following stages:

1) married couple, without children
2) childbearing families (oldest child from new born to 30 months)
3) families with preschool children (oldest child between 2.5 to 6 years old)
4) families with school children (oldest child between 6 and 13 years old)
5) families with teenagers (oldest child between 13 to 20 years old)
6) families are launching (between departures of first child and last child)
7) middle years (empty nest to retirement)
8) ageing families (until one spouse dies) (Duvall, 1957, p. 8).

Why did Duvall define the stages with such a precise age for the children? Perhaps she assumed that at those ages children undergo different developmental stages and indeed if we would be interested in studying child development these precise age groups could be useful. However, since we are interested in using

broader life course transitions to study the family as a whole, one could also summarize stage two and three as one stage since a real transition for families would be from pre-school children to school children.

Every stage in this cycle causes particular tensions for families and the challenge is to incorporate the stressor or possible transitions, in order to move on to the next stage. Some transitions may even be involuntary (e.g. a child moving out or the sudden death of a family member). If a family is not able to change or adapt to these transitions, a family crisis can occur, making future transitions difficult. Many families will adapt, but the idea of a stressor is based on the fact that it is under these particular conditions that a family might become dysfunctional or break up.

Laszloffy (2002) critiques Duvall arguing that 1) not every family develops in the same way and 2) that these stages ignore the individual members as well as multigenerational families. The first argument is a strong one, especially with regard to stepfamilies since their life cycle differs quite a bit from the stages that Duvall proposes. We will elaborate on this aspect in Chapter II, section 4.1, when discussing Cherlin's (1978) suggestion that stepfamilies are an incomplete institution and Jacobson's (1995) processual model. With regard to the second criticism, according to which Duvall ignores the individual person and also multigenerational families, Laszloffy (2002) elaborated the so called "Systemic Family Development Model" (SFD). The Systemic Family Development Model focuses on a "Process-oriented view of families and family development. This view recognizes that all families share a common process of development; however, there is tremendous variation in terms of how this process manifests" (Laszloffy, 2002, p. 207). Laszloffy argues that stressors might occur simultaneously and not necessarily as a family moves from one stage to another, as suggested by Duvall (1957). He argues that, for example, a child might be born just as other children in the household are moving out and a divorce is taking place. More often, it is a complex interplay between several stressors that can be

observed. The Systemic Family Development Model is based on the idea that "the whole is greater than the sum of its part" (Laszloffy, 2002, p. 208), referring thereby to the wholeness and interdependence of families. He uses the example of a cake to illustrate his point, with its ingredients and layers showing how multigenerational families are related to each other. If one layer changes, it affects the others: e.g. if the grandfather dies, it might well affect the children and grandchildren; if the father or the mother loses their job, the children will be affected and help might be needed by the grandparents; etc. This idea of interconnectedness is particularly appropriate for describing stepfamilies. If we recall the diagram of the three families related through a network of stepfamily connections (see Diagram 1.1, e. g. Carin still has a relationship with Don even though they are divorced. Josh has a relationship with Don even though Don is the ex-husband of his current wife because Don and Carin's children connect them), we can easily see how a change in one household would affect all related households. Let us assume, for example, that the family in Household 1 moves to another town; the children of Household 2 are unlikely to be able to visit Household 1 every week-end but may only do so during the holidays. This would affect the entire family organization, not only of Household 1 and 2, but also of Household 3 as their children would perhaps have to alter their visiting arrangements accordingly. Household 2 would suddenly find that it had to spend more time with the stepchildren than had been formerly negotiated by the ex-partners, and all this because Household 1 has moved to another town. One could think up many examples of situations that would highlight the interdependence of these families, despite the fact that most of the individuals in these households are not related to each other by blood. And we have not even begun discussing the complexity of interactions if one took into account a multigenerational sample.

The idea of development is particularly suited to an analysis of (step)families, notwithstanding their complexity, since they too develop and adapt at each stage (a family merging to create a stepfamily, the arrival of a child, children leaving home, etc). Also, the idea of multigenerational families can be

transferred to stepfamilies and used as a parallel for the chains that link stepfamily households together.

Of course, family development theory has been criticized. It has been argued (White and Klein, 2002) that it is difficult to actually identify the various stages and processes involved, because the only fixed parameters are mortality and fertility[11] and the fact that children usually leave their parental home. But even these supposedly fixed parameters are changing as life expectancies extend, new fertility technologies emerge and women are able to conceive later in life. Also, development theory assumes gradual discrete changes that were congruent with life styles up until the post-second world war period; today, however, the pace of life and the speed of change have increased considerably (White and Klein, 2002). For example, regardless of family type, children tend to move back and forth between their parental home and another location, first for the purpose of study and even once they are employed. Thus they are part of the household, albeit intermittently, for far longer than the accepted cut-off age of 21 referred to in most studies.

White (1991, in White and Klein, 2002) argues that family development theory should focus more on *explaining* the transitions. According to him, "development is a process in which the probabilities of a transition change according to the family's current stage and how long it has been at that stage" (White, 1991, in White and Klein, 2002, p. 113). He argues further that family development theory bases its arguments on the fact that families are guided by social norms (e.g. people first get married, and then have children), but that one can observe ontogenetic causes directly linked to the life course itself. Here, he means that development theory defines life cycles with exact points in time as also done by Duvall (1957); for example, a stage can be identified for every age

[11] Here we must be clear about one distinction in particular: according to the developmental approach, the fixed parameters are mortality and death. However we have many parameters to study in several stages of life: entry or exit of union, entry or exit of employment, entry or exit of school etc. The sociology of the life course and within the framework of event history analysis can be more helpful in explaining those stages.

of a child. However, these stages can be longer, shorter, overlap or be reversed: e.g. some children leave the household while others may be born into it after this date. Pre-determined time points are even more difficult to identify for stepfamilies, since children may move in and out and new children might be born in the meantime. Another criticism of development theory is that declining fertility over time, with the increasing age of a woman, is a normal, natural process. A final criticism of this theory is that it suggests that behaviour infers norms, but that norms cannot be inferred by behaviour. However, we can see the opposite effect in society, for example, if everybody starts to cohabit, the norm becomes cohabitation, as might be the case for Quebec and Sweden. In this case, behaviour infers a norm. The other way around is when a norm changes behaviour. For example, a norm becomes established via law, e.g. children are not to be spanked. In this case, behaviour could change in that people who formerly spanked their children do not do so any more.

3.2 The sociology of the life course

As mentioned in the introduction, the 'life course' approach might be even more appropriate for the study of current family changes and particularly so within a quantitative framework. Diewald and Mayer argue that the scientific inquiry of the sociology of the life course targets "the lives of men and women from birth to death" (Diewald and Mayer, 2008, p. 3) and that the sociology of the life course theory should focus on the "individual life course not as expression of an unfolding personality but as regularities produced by institutions and structural opportunities" (Diewald and Mayer, 2008, p. 3). In the end, the life course reflects how individuals embed their lives into the social structure via their participation in social positions or roles. In other words, this refers to the idea that individuals are embedded into social institutions (e.g. the educational system, the labour market) which affect their life course. The main interest of life courses is to analyze the "sequence of participation" in different life domains between life and death, e.g. entry into a union, entry into parenthood, exit from the labour market

etc. Diewald and Mayer further argue that life courses are institutionalized through informal and legal age-related norms. For example, timing of the first child is an age-related informal norm, whereas the age at which children go to school is an age-related legal norm.

More recently we can see a debate about the so called institutionalized life course or the de-institutionalized life course (Brückner and Mayer, 2005). The former one stands for the idea that "normative, legal or organizational rules define the social and temporal organization of human lives" (Brückner and Mayer, 2005, p. 32). The idea behind this is that transitions in lives are regulated via norms and laws. Therefore the life course follows the regular pathways of education, marriage and retirement as sequences of life events, which resembles the life cycle approach.

In opposition to the concept of institutionalized life course is the idea that we have de-institutionalized life courses. This means that "transitions, which at earlier times were clearly differentiated, are being reintegrated of fused" (Brückner and Mayer, 2005, p. 32). The authors are referring here to the example of marriage. Formerly, households were primarily based on marital relationships, while today they are based on marriage and cohabitation. Consequently, it is no longer solely marriage which is related to a joint household and therefore, marriage has become de-institutionalized as has the sequencing of marriage changes since one can cohabit then marry, get divorced and remarry etc. Here we will argue that people experiencing stepfamily episodes would be a good example of being part of such de-institutionalized life courses.

The description of the life course as we have just seen differs from the concept of the life cycle, primarily because more transitions are taken into account as suggested in the classic life cycle suggested by Duvall (1957). This also refers to the idea we saw in the discussion of the Second Demographic Transition that the *ordered* life course transitions have changed over time.

Additionally, one might suggest that the sociology of the life course is more flexible in the sense that it does not presume the strict parameters of life as the life cycle does. Life courses can have many different transitions and forms (multiple union transitions for example). So we might suggest that the concept of life cycle focuses solely on the classic transitions or stages that every family goes through, as was demonstrated in the model by Duvall (1957). Furthermore, this concept takes into account the entire nuclear family and all transitions happen at a specific point in time for everybody: it is an ordered sequence. The concept of the life course also considers individual choices that can lead to certain transitions or not. Since individuals can change behaviour, the life course of one member in a family depends also on the life course of the other member e.g. if one partner decides to leave, the other partner experiences a voluntary or involuntary transition that affects his or her life course. Besides demographic variables such as age or sex, variables which are influenced by social agencies (e.g. being employed or not, level of education or not) are taken into account. Aldous (1990) also criticizes the fact that in family life course and development theory, the two notions have often been used interchangeably, whereas there is actually one key difference between them: the development approach focuses on the family while the life course approach focuses on the individual.

When studying family development and family transitions within the life course framework, the issue of sequence is of major importance. Indeed, family life course theory has often been applied in combination with event history analysis as a methodology. This is also the strategy we have adopted here since the main focus of our study is on the timing of particular events in stepfamilies and what kind of circumstances influence these events (for more details, see the discussion in Chapter III, section 3 and 4). With our data, we have included some personal characteristics of individuals in the model (such as age or employment status), as well as family-related characteristics (such as number of children, marital status), but also a number of characteristics external to both the individual and the family (such as historical period or region). This has made it possible for

us to see how individual changes (such as being out of a job) might affect family dynamics (e.g. resulting in a divorce), or how family characteristics (the number of children) might affect the likelihood of having additional children, or how external variables (such as region) influence certain events.

This approach thus allows us to examine family changes and to explain them in relation to certain variables. For stepfamilies, which might have "life cycles" that are different from those of intact families, we can determine more precisely the timing and circumstances of events, such as the break up of a union, or circumstances of the adjustments required when moving from one stage to the next. What is more, this could provide insights into the kind of support that might be required by stepfamilies or even into possible government policies that might provide a more supportive context.

Time and history are crucial in explaining family changes and are integral to the life course approach. The passage of time is what enables us to see, for example, how long after the formation of a family, a family is at high risk of breaking up. History, on the other hand, makes it possible to take into account the overall context of a family's development, such as generational (or cohort) characteristics or the impact of historical events (war, the introduction of certain family laws, e.g. the 1968 Divorce Act in Canada which was a cornerstone for family change , etc.).

As we have seen above, the strength of this approach is that 1) the evolution of families can be taken into account (historical aspect), 2) the individual characteristics such as age and sex, or even employment status or education, can be considered, and 3) family transitions can be taken into account related to a time line and to the developmental stage at which they might occur. In major longitudinal studies and quantitative approaches, this theoretical framework fits particularly well.

Last but not least, since families are becoming more diverse (with lone parent families, stepfamilies, multigenerational families, etc., as well as intact families), this theoretical approach allows us to analyze each family type and examine how and when they move from one stage to the next. It makes it possible to identify and explain family changes and the circumstances surrounding each transition. Still, we will focus only on stepfamilies and their different types (e.g. stepfather family, stepmother family, etc.), because the dynamic of intact families and stepfamilies is very different and not necessary comparable. For example, intact families have at their beginning by definition no children.

To summarize, family sociology does not offer a single, unified theory to explain families but actually applies a variety of theoretical approaches, each leading to its own assumptions and research questions. Since we are interested in the dynamic of families and their historical change, development theory and the life course approach seem to be particularly useful theoretical frameworks. Still, Parsons' system theory helps to explain why stepfamilies might still be seen as different. Finally, the theory of symbolic interactionism offers some explanation of role models and the importance of understanding one's role in a stepfamily.

4. Stepfamily Instability

Divorce rates have been high for the past decades. Yet surprisingly, while we find a broad literature analyzing the risk of divorce in stepfamilies in the 1990s (e.g. White and Booth, 1985; Teachman, 1986; Clarke and Wilson, 1994), more recent research has neglected the issue. We will try to close this gap, at least in part. Finally, recent research on the instability of stepfamilies is lacking in Canada.

We will first present a theoretical background (Chapter II, section 4.1), analyzing why stepfamilies are at a high risk of disruption, and then turn to identifying some explanatory variables. Initially, we will discuss the type of stepfamilies and look, for example, at whether stepmother families are more

stable than stepfather families (Chapter II, section 4.2). We will also discuss whether the fact of having had a previous union influences stepfamily instability (Chapter II, section 4.3). The role of having a common child (here an independent variable) within a stepfamily will be discussed briefly (Chapter II, section 4.4), as will the age of the children (Chapter II, section 4.5) and the type of union (Chapter II, section 4.6). The corresponding hypotheses will be presented at the end of Chapter II, section 4.6.

In order to analyze the dynamics of stepfamilies, we used a longitudinal perspective, applying event history analysis. To be able to do so, we had to create stepfamily episodes; this refers to the time a person spends in a stepfamily, defined by the entry into and exit from a stepfamily. In the chapter on data and methods (Chapter III, section 3 and 4) we will explain in detail the event history approach.

4.1 Remarriages and a lack of institutionalization

Finding explanations for the high divorce rates in Western societies is the subject of many publications and a number of theories have been developed. Here, we will focus more precisely on the question of instability in stepfamilies and on some of the factors that lie behind it.

In so doing, one interesting question has arisen: Are the unions of people who remarry or enter into a common-law union after a separation more stable than their first unions or are they more fragile? Hence, the issue of stepfamily instability emerges.

The focus in the present section is on the high risk of break up in stepfamilies, a phenomenon well documented in past research (e.g. White and Booth, 1985; Teachman, 1986; Clarke and Wilson, 1994 or Desrosiers et al., 1995). Some clinical studies report that "people in remarriages are more likely to

be (or to have a partner who is) poor marriage material" (Booth and Edwards, 1992, p. 181), in other words, people who have difficult personalities, e.g. have poor communications skills and problems such as drug use or alcohol abuse. However, this negative outcome of remarriage is then attributed to a selectivity effect: samples were often based on clinical studies that by definition included families with problems or difficulties. But now that divorce is a more common event, it is somewhat inappropriate to explain the risk of a second disruption only with personal characteristics and thus suggest that those who go through a divorce may have psychological problems, even if such problems do play a role in the break up of some relationships. It might be more possible to argue that, as we saw earlier, self-fulfillment and individuation would support the desire to break up or to leave unhappy relationships; in addition, the general values and attitude toward marriage and divorce have changed and these assumptions hold true for every relationship, regardless of which union it is, the first or subsequent ones. Furthermore, stepfamilies are a special type of family with different experiences and histories so that the probability of breaking up could be due to other circumstances, as we will discuss in the following sections.

In stepfamilies, since at least one of the partners has already experienced a union disruption – except in the case of either single mothers who were not previously in a union– one could suppose that he or she learned from their previous relationships and might be more settled, more inclined to solve conflicts, and consequently less at risk of marital breakdown. It is, therefore, all the more surprising to find that past research has shown that stepfamilies are less stable than intact families (see for example White and Booth, 1985; Teachman, 1986; Clarke and Wilson, 1994; or Desrosiers et al., 1995). Some researchers explain these findings by suggesting that people entering a second marriage know divorce is a possible solution and, therefore, are more likely to see it as a way to end an unhappy marriage.

Another argument put forward to explain high separation rates in stepfamilies is that the remarriage market (since we are taking common-law unions into account we should talk of a *common-law market* as well) offers fewer partners, which leads to unions between partners with dissimilar interests and values. But this argument ignores some recent development. First, with increased divorce and separation rates, the "second wave" of available partners with similar values and interests must be relatively high. Second, these people are also likely to share similar experiences (e.g. going through separation and maybe single parenthood) which they do not necessarily want to repeat. On the contrary, one might argue that people may have fewer illusions about marriage and be more selective in choosing a partner the second time round so as to avoid another divorce or separation.

In an early article on remarriages, Cherlin (1978) tried to provide a macro-level explanation for the increased fragility of second marriages. To some extent, in this article, the three theoretical framings we presented previously can be found: system theory, symbolic interactionism and the sociology of the life course. He argued that since social institutions influence people's behaviour, and as there is no institutionalization of remarriages, people entering remarriages lack a social framework and are, therefore, at higher risk of divorce. Social control of reproduction and child rearing gives to the institution of the family several guidelines on how to behave. Family members know how to act and how they are related to each other. The "institutional family unity" (Cherlin, 1978, p. 635) was held together by the patriarchal authority which was virtually unchallenged. Parent-child relationships were clearly defined. The roles between partners were clear: there was the male breadwinner and the female housekeeper. This reminds us of Parsons's ideal family model mostly present in the 1950s. But these roles have undergone several changes, and today, household tasks are more likely to be regulated by negotiation between partners than they were twenty years ago. Nevertheless, family behaviour is still "habitualized action which is accepted as typical by all members – that is, it is institutionalized behaviour" (Cherlin, 1978,

p. 636). Cherlin refers here to the discourse of Berger and Luckmann on the relationship between human activity as habitualization and the relationship between habitualized actions and institutionalization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). This refers to the idea that human behaviour becomes habitualized (and that a relationship exists between habitualized actions and institutionalization).

Even if roles have changed and men are no longer the ultimate "agent of social control" (Cherlin, 1978, p. 636), intact families continue to rely somewhat on defined roles and habits within the couple as well as in parent-child relationships. These roles and habits are not so readily available to stepfamilies. The idea of habitualized action reminds us also of symbolic interactionism, where we saw that role expectations and role performance can be a source of conflict in stepfamilies. Habitualized action can also be seen as an expected role performance of someone or as a common agreement on expected role behaviour.

The phases of the family life cycle in intact families is also clearer: courtship, union formation, birth of children, raising children, children moving out, and empty nest. Since cohabitations became a possible type of union or a period experienced before marriage, the intact family life cycle became somewhat less clear: there might be children born within a common-law union and marriage might follow or not. Couples may live as common-law without children and have them later after they marry, etc. Even if roles and expectations have changed, the family life cycle for intact families is still similar, except that children are born later in a couple's life and women work more outside the home. For intact families, but even more for stepfamilies, the life course instead of the life cycle perspective as elaborated by Duvall (1957) may be more appropriate because this concept is not predetermined by sequences: individual trajectories can have repeatable events and the historical context is taken into account. A typical stepfamily life course would be: a couple deciding to get together, the children may move in and out on a regular basis or stay constantly within the stepfamily, and common children might be born in between. This refers also to the idea that

the *ordered life course* might not hold true any more for members of stepfamilies. Or, as we have referred to the framing of Brückner and Mayer (2005), the life course of stepfamilies might be de-institutionalized. Constant contact with ex-spouses might be necessary to negotiate child care and stepchild/stepparent relationships must be developed. In other words, a stepfamily is a fragile/fluid construction which may need constant communication and negotiation between its members, whether the latter are actually living within the household or not. Cherlin (1978) provides further examples of why stepfamilies face more problems than intact families. He points out that stepfamilies must solve problems which intact families do not encounter, such as how to address/what to call a stepparent, since there is no fixed terminology, or how to argue with/discipline stepchildren.

Money transfer between stepfamily members might also be a source of conflict. Partners who left their spouse might resent having to pay for children who no longer live with them and stepparents may be unwilling to support stepchildren financially. More generally, as children can also move in and out on an irregular basis, agreements may be difficult to reach.

In his 1995 article, Jacobson critiques Cherlin's explanation for high divorce rates and identifies four of his arguments as particularly weak. First, Jacobson argues that it is empirically unjustified to assume an institutional model according to which social norms concerning families and household relationships are uniform. Second, he claims that it is analytically too complicated to offer two distinct explanations for the dissolution of first and second marriages. He suggests using a single model instead, the so-called processual model. The processual model recognizes union formation as a process in which a couple constructs a common understanding of the world "in terms of which they make sense of themselves, their actions, and those of others" (Jacobson, 1995, p. 8). Third, he argues that the hypothesis of cultural inadequacy in the institutional model is not supported by the facts. He applies this third point to Cherlin's argument about the difficulties surrounding naming and addressing stepparents, arguing that there are

a variety of terms of address available to refer to relatives by marriage, such as stepmother, stepfather, but also first names or even the family name. People vary in their use of these terms and it is not only that terms "justify enactment" of roles (Cherlin 1978, p. 643), but that "behavior also justifies the use of role terms" (Jacobson, 1995, p. 6).

Cherlin and Jacobson use opposite arguments to explain behaviour. The former argues that behaviour conforms in relation to the use of a certain term e.g. if someone is labeled as a stepfather he will act as such. In Cherlin's institutional context, terms are defined and an expected behaviour follows. Parental status would then be seen as ascribed. For example, he supposes that a child calls his mother's new partner stepfather and that the term makes role expectations clearer between the two.

However, this assumption could be wrong; firstly it seems strange that a child would address the partner of the mother as *stepfather.* The term *stepfather* might make some role expectations attached to the term stepfather clearer since he has some ideas about how a stepfather should act. But it would be difficult for a child, depending on his age, to have expectations of a special term or labels attached to a stepfather, unless the child is (negatively) influenced by the myth of the bad stepfather in fairy tales (though, in this case, it is more the stepmother who considered bad) or by peers. Additionally, to call someone literally stepfather seems awkward. However, Jacobson argues that it is behaviour that defines a term, and that parental status is thus achieved rather than ascribed. For example, if a loving relationship develops between a stepchild and a stepparent, the child might feel closer to the stepparent by using his or her first name, instead of saying stepfather or stepmother[12].

[12] A side-point is that, of course, neither Cherlin nor Jacobson take into account the very different sets of kinship terms available in different languages and cultural contexts, a study of which might provide insight into how step-relationships are negotiated elsewhere. Needless to say, this is not the subject of our dissertation or even appropriate in demography studies.

Jacobson's fourth and final criticism is that Cherlin argues that there is a lack of legal constraints to structure stepfamily relationships. Jacobson shows that there are several rules and laws to regulate family responsibilities after divorce (e.g. custody agreements) and stepfamily life (laws which can be applied to the sexual behaviour of stepfamily members, for example) but still stepparents remain *strangers* to the child in regard to all other legal aspects and rights. However, on this last point, we must point out that Jacobson cites studies published 10 years or more after Cherlin's 1978 article and those laws might not have existed when Cherlin was developing his argument.

Jacobson (1995) offers a different explanation for why stepfamilies are fragile and at risk of breaking up. He defines marriages as a "sub-world" and families as "mini cultures" in which actions, habits and shared understandings differ from one marriage to another. His model focuses on how to integrate people who come from such different "sub-worlds" or "mini cultures" (Jacobson, 1995, p. 7). He puts the emphasis on the stepfamily household, not just stepfamily couples, since all people within the household participate in forming the stepfamily. If every family develops its own family culture and its own norms, later stepfamily life could be problematic, because the basis on which the previous union was built has to be reworked and a new reality must be constructed. In other words, people must evaluate and dissemble the view of their first marriage and develop a new belief system for subsequent relationships. We may add that in the case of stepmother/stepfather families, it is both partners that have to rework their past beliefs and develop a new belief system. If one thinks in terms of roles, people may be exposed to role ambiguity: the same individual may play the roles of ex-partner, partner, parent and/or stepparent, some of which may be difficult to reconcile.

This concept of role ambiguity in stepfamilies is supported by research in Fine's (1995) article which discusses and reviews the role of stepparents. Role ambiguity is thought to be most prevalent in stepfather/stepmother families

because here, both partners have 1) biological children, 2) stepchildren and 3) a past union. So everybody in this complex structure has his or her own past experiences, and has to learn the new role of a stepparent while maintaining the role of a biological parent. This would suggest a higher instability of stepfather/stepmother families. However, one might also assume that in stepfather/stepmother families, both partners have previous experiences they might not want to repeat. They might be more careful with the new relationship to avoid past conflict or behaviour patterns. They might be dedicated to solving problems and to making the relationship work; this would suggest a higher stability of stepfather/stepmother families.

For stepfamilies where only one partner brings children into the union, it might be the first experience of family life for the other partner. This person might have a different belief background for a relationship and might have different expectations than the partner coming from a disrupted union or a lone parent episode. Also he or she might have no experience as a parent. Consequently, one could assume such types of stepfamilies to be more at risk of a separation.

Cherlin (1978) and Jacobson (1995) rely on the concepts of Berger and Luckmann (1966) to explain the construction of social behaviour, although we should note here that Berger and colleagues focused more on how behaviour becomes institutionalized (habitualized action) rather than analyzing normative rules that constitute an institution (social norms).

Jacobson (1995) critiques Cherlin in so far as he relies on Berger and Luckmann's discussion of "habitualized action" and "social norms" (Cherlin, 1978, p. 636), without analyzing the difference between these two analytical constructions. According to him, Cherlin failed to differentiate between "the expectations and standards of evaluation that are developed within and are specific to particular marriages and families (i.e., habitualized action) and those

that are general to societies (i.e., social norms)" (Jacobson, 1995, p. 8). Consequently, Cherlin does not acknowledge the process by which couples develop a mini-culture and a sub-world within the larger context of institutionalized guidelines. This process is taken into account within the framework of the processual model.

Stepfamily instability explained by the processual model

The processual model can be more helpful to explain the instability of stepfamilies than of remarriages without children. Jacobson (1995) argues that children often disrupt the efforts of their parents to reconstruct a relationship. People establishing a new relationship often withdraw from past unions, at least temporarily. Within the processual model, this process of withdrawal is necessary to set boundaries and to establish a sense of togetherness. In a stepfamily, children are at risk of experiencing their parents' withdrawal as a feeling of rejection and could become resentful toward the new partner. This is even more likely to be the case if the children experienced a single parenthood episode, a period when a particularly close parent child relationship might have developed. A new partner would be seen as a stranger and a threat to this closeness. Also, children might be used to and attached to certain family rituals and might need to rely on those rituals at certain ages. A new partner might come with his or her own ideas on family rituals and his or her offers to create new rituals might be rejected.

Both Cherlin and Jacobson's theoretical assumptions to explain instability in stepfamilies make sense and it is difficult to see how one might be 'right' and the other 'wrong'. Of course, institutions do shape and influence behaviour. One must also take into account the fact that Cherlin wrote his article in 1978, in the early days of research on divorce and family instability. Given the fact that stepfamilies were less prominent at that time and that divorce and lone parenthood were certainly more stigmatized than they are today, it could be argued that institutions had a stronger influence on individual behaviour than they do now. In

that same article, Cherlin predicted that remarriage would become more institutionalized and more like first marriages, and he expected that norms specific to stepfamily behaviour would emerge. However, when he reviewed his theories in a subsequent article in 2004, he found that the opposite had happened. It is *first* marriages that had become more like remarriages, and he referred to this as the deinstitutionalization of marriage. Also according to him, marriage, remarriage and even cohabitation are incomplete institutions nowadays. He argues that deinstitutionalization is a form of weakening of the social norms which people used to rely on in institutions such as marriage. People can no longer rely on established social norms and stability because the common understanding of how to act within a relationship has changed. Consequently, people start to question their actions and the action of others, which leads to conflict and, in the worst case, to marital instability.

Jacobson's processual model and Cherlin's assumption on how institutions change behaviour may be dependent on each other and should not be thought of independently. On the one hand, institutions change over time and as society changes, behaviour will be adapted. For example, in the late 1960s, women became more conscious of their role in society (Tong, 1998), their needs in relationships changed and they fought for more independence and equality (change in behaviour). This change in behaviour forced institutions to adapt (e.g. easier access to divorce). On the other hand, changes in institutions can also influence behaviour. As divorce becomes possible and easier to obtain, even traditional people might get used to the idea and take it as a possible escape from an unhappy marriage.

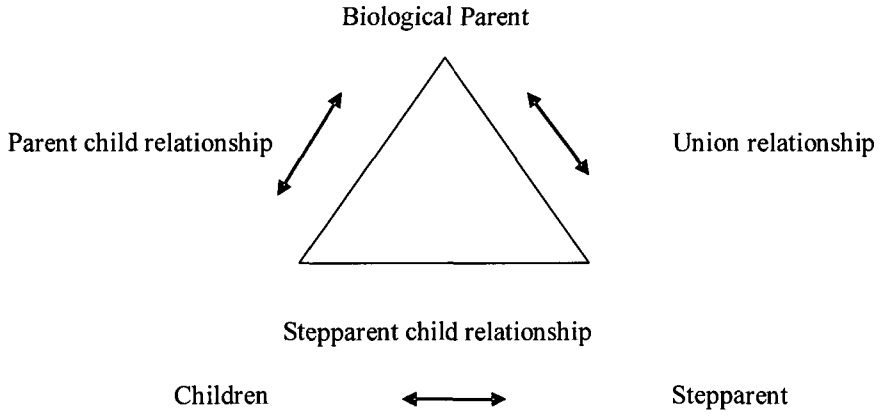
To conclude, Cherlin and Jacobson offer us both a way to understand marital instability from a theoretical point of view and include useful arguments to explain it. We may say that Cherlin focuses more on how institutions affect our behavior, so he looks from outside into the family. Jacobson tries to explain family instability form inside by focusing more on the couple and its need to

adjust to a stepfamily situation. In the following sections, we shall look at two particular aspects related to stepfamily instability, the type of family and the presence or absence of common children.

4.2 The type of stepfamily and its risk of separation

In general we can assume a triangular pattern of relationships in stepfamilies: there is 1) the relationship between the couple, 2) the relationship between the child and the biological parent and 3) the relationship between the stepchild and stepparent[13]. Everybody in this complex structure may influence behaviour (see Diagram 2.1).

Diagram 2.1: Relationship ties in stepfamilies



Pasley and Moorefield (2004) argue that, in the past, stepparent/stepchild relationships have often been described as unidirectional, with stepparent behaviour affecting the children and not vice versa. Stepparents are seen as poor communicators when it comes to dealing with their stepchildren in daily life matters (as opposed to their biological children): they feel less warmth, they do not encourage and support them as much (a finding which is not entirely supported by MacDonald and DeMaris, 2002) and express fewer positive feelings.

[13] And as a fourth type of relationship we should mention the relationship with the other biological parent who lives outside the home; however for now we are only interested in the three relationships.

Consequently, stepparents can be more distant toward their stepchildren and the latter more hesitant to accept the former.

Most studies on stepfamilies were interested in examining the relationships between stepmothers and stepchildren, and stepfathers and their stepchildren. The outcomes are not coherent enough to establish a clear link on which relationship might be more favorable and easier to establish. Some argue that stepmothers face fewer problems than stepfathers since they tend to invest more in the relationship with the stepchild (Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman, 1987; Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley, 1997). Hetherington argues that "concerns about affection and sexuality" (Hetherington, 1993, p. 43) might become a more sensible issue for stepfathers. One could even say that a stepmother might be more understanding of children (stepdaughters) who are growing up since they are not her own: she may have fewer expectations of them and this might improve the relationship. Also Ambert (1986) reported that stepmothers who live with their stepchildren are often very satisfied with their relationship and that they even feel that their partners are happier with them.

Fatherhood is not so firmly associated with child rearing; consequently stepfathers may have lower expectations of themselves. They might be more easily satisfied with their role as stepfather, if they develop a good friendship with the children and/or support their partner, namely the biological mother to the children, financially (so she could work outside the home less or simply decrease her financial hardship). Fine (1995) argues that there are fewer expectations concerning stepfathers than there are for biological fathers to take on the care of their children and responsibility and control over them. Ihinger-Tallman (1988) suggests that stepfathering might be easier in the sense that if they simply show involvement with their stepchildren and if they are legitimated, their level of satisfaction tends to be high. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1994) argue that stepfathering is easier, because a stepfather can occupy a place which is often empty after the biological father left.

Research investigating stepfamilies has examined the relationship between the members more than their stability. However, it might be interesting to examine which type of stepfamily is more at risk of a disruption, stepmother or stepfather families. While studies that analyze stepfamily instability are common (e.g. White and Booth, 1994; and Wineberg, 1992) studies that distinguish different types of stepfamilies are rare (e.g. Teachman, 1986; Desrosiers et al., 1995). The studies that emphasized the type of stepfamily and their instability showed that stepmother families are less at risk of breaking up than stepfather families (e.g. Teachman, 1986; Desrosiers et al., 1995; and Marcil-Gratton et al., 2003). Desrosiers et al. (1995) argue that this may be due to the fact that stepmothers are more wiling to invest in the relationship and therefore these families are more stable. In addition, it might be that stepmother families are families where the biological father is very involved in child rearing, since the children stayed with him after separation and those fathers might also invest more in having a good relationship with their partner i.e. the stepmother. Last but not least, because primarily only a sample of women was examined (Teachman, 1986; and Desrosiers et al., 1995), we have very little knowledge of the outcome of the type of stepfamily when it comes to male samples. Consequently, we might not be able to compare accurately when we have to explain male behaviour. In addition, the studies on family instability are based on retrospective data which is mostly based on female samples, therefore one could expect that those women who reported their past experiences were also the ones who were more involved and invested in their role of stepmother. Analyses including men could show different outcomes, since here it would be the stepfather reporting, we could assume that those fathers who report as a stepfather retrospectively are those who remember this episode and have therefore invested in their role.

4.3 The effect of previous unions on a stepfamily

Most stepfamilies are formed around a stepfather, with a woman who has had a previous union (see also, Juby et al., 2001; Desrosiers et al., 1995). This is not

surprising given that most children live with their mothers after separation (Juby et al., 2001). Stepmother families with a biological father who had no union before are, by definition, not usual (see Ermisch and Wright, 1991). With regard to the stepfather families it might be interesting to see if those stepfather families in which the woman had previously been in a union, are more fragile than families in which the mothers had not been in a union before. One might expect that the stepfather families in which the mother was previously single might be more stable than those in which the mother experienced separation. In the latter case, the child and the mother, who had been living with a father and partner until the stepfamily situation, share the experience of the separation, albeit in a different way: adaptation to stepfamily life might be more difficult. In stepfather families where the mother was previously single and the father was, therefore, more or less absent from daily life, a stepfather might be welcome, not only as a father but also for his financial contribution. Of course, if the children, especially daughters, had developed a very close mother/child relationship during their mother's single experience, it might take time for the stepfather to integrate. Previous research has shown that single mothers after experiencing a separation often face difficult financial situations (Holden and Smock, 1991). This would suggest that women entering into a new union find financial support due to a stepfather, and the fact that a shared household might be cheaper than a single one. For single mothers who had no previous union, this financial aspect might be even truer. This could encourage single mothers in a stepfamily to invest in the relationship since it might be easier to raise children with a partner than alone. Consequently, this might increase the stability of their union. In addition, the mother might have more time for the children and herself if she finds support from the stepfather, which would also be beneficial to their relationship. This might be especially true for women who have had no previous union, because they do not have support from the biological father, either financially or with regard to the time the biological father might spend with his child.

4.4 The effect of a birth of a common child on stability of stepfamilies

Although common children seem to play a major role in stabilizing stepfamilies, little attention has been paid to this topic; few studies have examined the effects of this phenomenon (e.g. Teachman, 1986; Wineberg, 1992; and Desrosiers et al., 1995).

The studies which have looked at this aspect of stepfamily life report that children born within a stepfamily stabilize them. However, the question raised by Juby et al. (2001), is whether it is the more stable couples that go on to having common children, or it is the effect of the common child who creates a bond between everyone and thus unites the family. One might argue that a blended family is more like an intact family. They have at least one child which is linked biologically to all members of the stepfamily and the parents are common parents to at least one child. In addition, if the stepchildren left the stepfamily household permanently, the living arrangement of the blended family would be similar to that of the intact family: two biological parents and a child, with the distinction that there are stepsiblings outside the home. Two facts support the idea that it might be stable stepfamilies that decide to have a common child: blended families are more often the ones in which the couple is married and married stepfamily couples tend to last longer. But it remains a difficult question to answer. Juby et al. (2001) concluded that it is difficult to say whether it is the child cementing the family or the more stable family having a common child: "Both factors may well have a role to play, in that the birth of a child may cement an already relatively committed relationship" (Juby et al., 2001, p. 184). Since we are examining the arrival of a common child once a union is formed, we would assume that the more stable unions are more likely to have a common child. However, this would still be difficult to determine, since there are people who might decide to have a common child and then marry immediately after.

Wineberg (1992) showed that women who give birth in their second marriage have a reduced risk of divorce even though a new child adds "further complexity in an already complex system" (Wineberg, 1992, p. 880). Wineberg showed that childbearing in a stepfamily reduces the likelihood of divorce and he found it intriguing that a child in a *first* marriage may actually weaken the union, yet stabilize it in a second marriage. One explanation for this stabilizing influence may be that the new child links all members of the stepfamily together, thus encouraging stronger ties between them.

4.5 Age of the child (stepchild or common child)

Past research on the instability of stepfamilies often focused only on remarriage (e.g. Booth and Edwards, 1992; Clarke and Wilson, 1994) and there was little interest in the role of children. Some studies included stepchildren (e.g. White and Booth, 1985), but did not take into account their age. However, the age of the children seems to be important in establishing stepfamily life since depending on their age children might react different toward a stepparent. For example, very young children might find it easier to adjust since they have fewer memories than older children of the absent parent. Wineberg (1992) included children and distinguished between different age groups, but he did not find a significant effect of the age of children on the risk of separation. Desrosiers et al. (1995) also included the age of children in their study and their findings suggested that preschoolers reduce the risk of divorce compared to stepfamilies that include children 12 years or older in the household. Studies on stepparent/stepchild relationships may give answers as to why stepfamilies with older children are more fragile than those with younger ones. Pasley and Moorefield (2004) argue that adolescents have more difficulties in accepting stepparents than younger children do and are perhaps more likely to react negatively to stepparent involvement. Also, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1994) suggest that a stepparent who arrives during preschool years might have fewer problems establishing a "parental-like relationship" with the stepchild than if the children are older

(Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994, p. 367). They base their arguments on findings from attachment theory which show that children establish strong bonds of attachment to their parents within their first and second year (Ainsworth, 1982; Weiss, 1982). This attachment reduces with age and strong bonding after this period becomes more difficult.

With regard to stepfamilies, it makes sense that adolescent children face more problems with a stepparent. First, puberty is a difficult age for both parents and children, consequently, one can expect this to be true for stepparents as well (recall Hetherington, 1993). Even in intact families, puberty may create conflict and destabilize the family, and the effect might be that much stronger in stepfamilies. Second, older children may be more aware of the separation and be more resentful toward a new partner who might seem more like a stranger. Third, older stepchildren might be more critical toward the stepparent and of how the other biological parent is treated by the stepparent. Accordingly, one might expect a more conflictual situation between parents/stepparents and the children, which may in turn lead to more conflict between the couple and thus destabilize the entire stepfamily. In contrast, younger children might be less aware of a past separation and less resentful toward a new partner. On the other hand, one could argue that younger children require much more parental attention which could create conflict within the stepfamily couple since they themselves need time and space to establish their own relationship. Here also, the type of residence may play a part: if the children do not live permanently in the stepfamily, this would give more space to the new couple to adjust to their new relationship. However, it could make it more difficult for children and stepparents to get used to each other.

4.6 The type of union

Common-law unions seem to be increasingly common in Canada, especially in Quebec. Broadly speaking, so far the influence of the type of union on stepfamily instability has not been examined in most of the studies available as most past

research comes from the United States and here the focus has been on remarriages while common-law unions have been neglected (see for example: White and Booth, 1985; Booth and Edwards, 1992; Wineberg, 1992; Clarke and Wilson, 1994). Bumpass and colleagues started to acknowledge common-law unions as a type of stepfamily in 1995, arguing that "to define stepfamilies only in terms of marriage clearly underestimates both the level and the trend in stepfamily experience" (Bumpass et al., 1995, p. 425). In Canada common-law couples were included in analyses on stepfamily instability (Desrosiers et al., 1995). Both studies have different outcomes. Interestingly, Bumpass et al. (1995), for example, observed similar rates of separation, regardless of whether the couple was married or living common-law. The authors conclude that selection and causal processes which are associated with the differences in separation rates between cohabitation and marriage in first unions do not hold for people who have already experienced a separation in the United States. However, the findings of Desrosiers et al. (1995) indicate that Canadian stepfamilies based on common-law unions are less stable than married ones.

In general, common-law unions are known to be less stable than marriages (Marcil-Gratton et al., 2000). It is argued that they require less commitment than marriages; that their boundaries are more flexible; and that separation is, therefore, easier than it is for married couples. If one assumes that common-law unions are less institutionalized than marriages, parental roles in stepfamily couples living in a common-law union may also be less established than in married couples (Manning and Lamb, 2003) and this could create conflict which would lead to higher union instability. Manning and Lamb (2003) also argue that cohabiting couples have less legal and social recognition, so the obligations and rights of cohabiting stepparents may be unclear and a source of conflict. However, one may argue that the last argument is country dependent: in countries where common-law unions have almost replaced marriage, such as Sweden (Cherlin, 2004), common-law couples benefit from the similar rights as married ones in

many areas of life, contrary to the United States where common-law unions are less prevalent and less widely recognized.

Hypotheses

With regard to the theoretical assumptions discussed here we are able to construct the following hypotheses:

Even if the findings on the influence of the type of stepfamily on instability are somewhat mixed, we can argue that:

H 1: Stepmother families are less at risk of breaking up than stepfather families.

This is based on the argument that mothers might be more willing to invest in their maternal role and in stepfamily building than stepfathers.

Taking into account the fact that we have two different types of stepfather families – one with mothers who have had a previous union, the other where women have had no previous union – we can argue that stepfather families where the women had no previous union are more stable than ones where the women had a union before given the reasons outlined in section 4.3. Therefore we can construct the following hypothesis:

H 1a: Stepfather families with women who have had no prior union are less at risk of experiencing a separation than stepfather families with women who have had a prior union.

The following hypothesis was constructed in order to test whether the birth of a child increases the risk of dissolution:

H 2: The arrival of a common child in a stepfamily decreases the likelihood of parental separation.

Based on previous findings and on the argument that the relationship between adolescent stepchild and their stepparents are often conflictual, we can construct the following hypothesis:

H 3: Stepfamilies with adolescent children (12 years and older) are more at risk of experiencing a disruption than those with children who are preschoolers (under 5 years of age).

Also, since we know that common-law unions are less stable than marriages, we can expect that stepfamily couples living common-law are less stable than those who marry. Following the assumptions of Manning and Lamb (2003) that cohabiting stepfamilies are less well-established, and based on the overall assumption for Canada (despite the different situation in Quebec) that common-law unions tend to be less stable than marriages, the following hypothesis can be constructed:

H 4: Stepfamily couples living common-law are less stable than those who are married.

The contrast between Quebec and the rest of Canada in the occurrence of common-law unions allows us to test more precisely Manning and Lamb's assumption (2003). We could further assume that stepfamily couples living common-law in Quebec are more institutionalized than they are in the rest of Canada, and that consequently they might be more stable. Recent data from the General Social Survey 2001 shows that first common-law unions in Quebec among people aged 30 to 39 are more stable than elsewhere in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2002a). It would be interesting to also test for this effect in stepfamilies to see if there is any interaction between common-law unions and region.

H 4a: Quebec cohabiting stepfamily couples should be more likely to separate than married couples living in the same province, but the difference separating the two groups should be smaller than outside of Quebec. In other words, the gap separating married and cohabiting

stepfamily couples living in Quebec should be smaller than that observed elsewhere in Canada.

In the next section we will focus on the second aspect of stepfamily dynamics: the arrival of a common child. It will be interesting to see if, for example, the stepfamily types which are assumed to be the most stable are also assumed to be the most likely to witness the arrival of a common child; and which circumstances are important for the decision to have an additional child, other than the circumstances that suppose to influence the instability of stepfamilies.

5. The arrival of a common child: theoretical background and research questions

In this part of Chapter II, the arrival of a common child will be the main focus. Here, common children are taken into account as a dependent variable and we are interested in the circumstances which lead stepfamilies to decide to have a common child. The theoretical background and a review of the literature will be presented in section 5. A discussion on the type of stepfamily will be presented in section 5.1; the age of the mother and the children are of major importance and will be discussed in section 5.2; the number of children (section 5.3) and the type of union upon entering a stepfamily (section 5.4) will follow. Section 5.5 is dedicated to a discussion, first, on the influence the number of children have on the employment status of women and second, on the likelihood of having more children. In section 5.6 we will discuss the issue of sterilization and at the end of the section the corresponding research hypotheses will be presented.

Bearing in mind our previous discussion on the Second Demographic Transition and the changes seen in unions and values (increasing rates of cohabitation, a decline in marriage, steadily rising divorce rates), we could ask the following questions with regard to fertility:

1) At the end of the day, does conjugal instability lead to a lower or higher fertility level? A possible scenario would be that separation interrupts fertility: couples do not have the second or third child as they had intended due to separation. In other words, they do not have any additional children.

2) The other scenario would be that adults who form a stepfamily have an additional child that they would not have otherwise had. This would raise the question of whether with a rising number of stepfamilies, fertility actually increases since couples in stepfamilies want something that will create a bond between all their children;

3) Are the rising numbers of couples, who live common-law contributing to a decline in fertility, since cohabiters have often been found to be less fertile? Alternatively, if we assume that common-law unions are becoming more like marriages, is the fertility pattern of cohabiters becoming similar to that of married couples?

So far we have seen that stepfamilies are fragile family constructions primarily because of their composition. We have also seen that the birth of a common child seems to play a major role in the stability of stepfamilies. With an increase in the number of stepfamilies more children might witness the arrival of a half sibling. It would be interesting to see which circumstances lead to the decision of stepfamilies to have a common child. Considering solely stepfamilies, the fourth question is:

4) Since stepfamilies have a complex structure and history, what might be the key circumstances that lead them to decide to have a common child or not.

5) Do stepchildren substitute for children and consequently people do not have biological children to experience parenthood?

The purpose of this section is to focus on point four as we are interested in stepfamily dynamics and not in a study on fertility *per se*. If we were to do so, we would have to focus on the fertility patterns of intact families as well and these are not directly relevant to the present research. The key difference might be to say that couples entering a stepfamily by definition already have one or more children; however couples starting their first family episode have no children. So the rationale of childbearing is assumed to be different. In section 5.4 we will also emphasize the type of union in stepfamilies, since people cohabiting or those who are getting married might have different rational for childbearing in stepfamilies.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, several European and American studies have analyzed fertility in stepfamilies and focused on the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family (see for example: Vikat et al., 1999; Brown, 2000; Jefferies et al., 2000; Thomson et al., 2000; Henz, 2002; Prskawetz et al., 2002; Thomson and Allen Li, 2002; Thomson, 2004; Vikat et al., 2004; Allen Li, 2006). These studies deal in part with the issue of declining fertility in Western societies and look at how stepfamilies affect this; is childbearing in stepfamilies motivated by different factors than those in intact[14] families?

If stepfamilies are already quite complex and their family members have difficulties adjusting to each other, why would couples in stepfamilies decide to have an additional child, thus potentially making family life and relationships even more complex? One possibility is that there may be a desire to become more like an intact family and thus institutionalized. Cherlin (1978) argued that the norms and role expectations that provide institutional support for intact families are not provided for stepfamilies. With a common child comes a common bond

[14]Griffith et al. (1985) uses the term 'first families' for what is referred to elsewhere as 'intact families'. To avoid confusion, we shall use the term 'intact families' to refer to a couple that is married or living common-law, that does not have children from previous unions but does have children issued from this current union.

and, for this child at least, the parental status would be equal. In addition, the half siblings would share a sibling with one of the parents.

Past theoretical discussion on fertility in stepfamilies focused on three main hypotheses: 1) union-confirmation hypothesis, 2) parenthood and commitment hypothesis, 3) sibling-hypothesis. Griffith et al. (1985) developed those hypotheses for the context of stepfamilies basing her arguments on (her) previous work for intact families and their rational of having (additional) children (Griffith, 1973; Calhoun and Selby, 1980). These articles examine the social pressure couples face in having (no) children and what might be the ideal family size. Griffith's (1973) findings suggest that 2 to 4 children are socially accepted, but more would be not accepted. Calhoun and Selby focus more on the general aspect of voluntarily not becoming a parent. Both results suggest that people who decide not to have children are viewed as more selfish and self-centered and that people, especially women, feel a social pressure to have at least one or two children. A family size of more than five children is viewed by society as less acceptable. Interestingly, women report feeling more social pressure to have children than men do. We may attribute this to the fact that women might talk more about having children and, hence women are more likely to hear the opinion of others about their decision. However, the articles are relatively old, published at a time when women were more likely to stay at home and have children, therefore the social pressure to have children might have been higher at that time. With regard to men feeling less pressure to have children, this could be attributed to that fact that, as mentioned, the articles are older therefore the role of fathers was likely to be that of the breadwinner. In addition, in general men might talk less about wanting to have children or not.

Vikat et al. (1999) applied the hypothesis of Griffith and colleagues (Griffith et al., 1985) even more extensively to stepfamilies by elaborating on, primarily, the parenthood and commitment hypothesis. Their first argument is that childbearing confirms adulthood and marriage. This hypothesis is driven by the

idea that a marriage without children is not a real marriage; in other words a childless marriage is less likely to be perceived as a marriage. Childbearing is seen as strengthening the marriage and as a confirmation of being an adult in society. In stepfamilies, the assumption that childbearing confirms adulthood would only hold for the partner who does not already have a child. The adulthood hypothesis seems somewhat weak since, with the advent of efficient contraception, childbearing has become a decision that is increasingly planned by a couple. This suggests that childbearing is less and less an *ad hoc* event (e.g. Kiser et al., 1968; Koo et al., 1987). In any case, women who become pregnant involuntarily nowadays, whether young or old, are perhaps unlikely to perceive this as confirmation of adulthood. This hypothesis could, however, be valuable in a discussion of people who are moving out of their parental home to form a family of their own and who may indeed see childbirth as a way to prove to their parents that they have made the transition to adulthood. Additionally, we have seen that people's life courses are less and less ordered; consequently the birth of a first child is no longer seen as obligatory in order to reach the next step in the life course. This means a couple might form a family while still being in school (college or university) or living at home. Or people might have had children and go back afterwards to the educational system. Van de Kaa (1987) mentioned that the welfare state also supported the possibilities of a change in life course, as we discussed in Chapter I, section 1.1. Having a child might be a good example: some countries (e.g. Canada, Finland, Sweden, France, and Germany) offer support for maternity, such as maternity leave, flexible work schedules, day care, or even the possibility for fathers to take maternity leave. This allows couples to have children at a stage in their life courses whereas before it would have been too difficult.

The second assumption put forward is the parenthood hypothesis (e.g. Vikat et al., 1999). Vikat and colleagues argue that giving birth to a first child includes a parenthood effect and a commitment effect. For stepfamilies, the parenthood effect does not apply to the partner who already has children, but may

nevertheless be true for the childless partner[15]. Therefore, we may expect stepmother/stepfather families to be less likely to have an additional child, since they both already have children and, therefore, confirmation of parenthood. Except if we assume that couples have the desire to have a *shared* or *common parenthood* and decide to have a child together within their stepfamily. The idea of *shared* or *common parenthood* taken together with the assumption that an additional child might strengthen a couple could hold for stepfamilies in the context of Cherlin's (1978) argument that stepfamilies are not institutionalized. Indeed, in this context, if stepfamilies decide to have a common child, it might be seen as a commitment and engagement toward the new family. So, one might argue that the commitment effect of having a common child does still hold, regardless of the order of the union.

The third hypothesis is that people tend to try to avoid the one child family. Griffith et al. (1985) argue that there seems to be pressure on couples to have more than one child, what they refer to as the "against one child ideology" (Griffith et al., 1985, p. 75). This "against one child ideology" refers to the idea of *the welfare of the first child,* namely to provide a sibling. In her study, people strongly agreed with the opinion that one child might become too spoiled and that being an only child would be "bad for the child" (Griffith, 1973, p. 239). Blake (1974) argues that in questionnaires on fertility intentions, the two child family is chosen the most. However, she argues that this might also be because at the time an anti-abortion propaganda in the United States might have forced people to answer in a socially accepted way (Blake, 1974). Nevertheless we may argue that the two children model is rather general in Euro-Atlantic societies.

Griffith et al. (1985) applied the above arguments to stepfamilies and concluded that stepfamilies with only one child are more likely to have an

[15] We must note here that, in our data, there might be some respondents who declared having entered a stepfamily without having ever been a parent before but who may actually have children with whom they have not or hardly ever had contact. Clearly, we would not be able to identify such situations, even if one can speculate on them being a theoretical possibility.

additional child than stepfamilies that already have two or more children. Many couples separate after having only one child. Consequently, people in stepfamilies with only one child might be very likely to have an additional one and the sibling hypothesis still holds. We should bear in mind, however, that the studies cited by Griffith et al. (1985) date from the seventies. Having more than one child may have been the norm at that time, as opposed to today when some couples might be satisfied with having only one child, judging by the low fertility rates in Western societies.

Vikat et al. (1999) developed their discussion around the sibling effect. Their argument is based on the fact that many couples decide to have an additional child, or a common child in a stepfamily, because they think that siblings are good for child development. They suggest that step-siblings would have the same effect as full siblings. Hence, stepfamilies where both partners bring children into the union would be less likely to have a common child than stepfamilies in which only one partner already has a child. According to this argumentation, the sibling hypothesis would outweigh the idea of shared or common parenthood. For stepfamilies where the partner bringing the children into the union already has more than one child, children already have siblings.

The arguments presented here are fairly theoretically driven. It might be argued that childbearing decisions are less dependent on ideological factors than driven by practical factors such as income, the employment status of women, their age, and the age of the children present in the household, etc. In the following section, some of the main variables will be discussed and more particularly those that appear to be the most important in the decision to have a common child, namely the type of the stepfamily, the age of the mother, the age of the youngest child, the number of children and the work status of women. These variables are mostly life course dependent, e.g. if women enter very young into their stepfamily they might be more likely to have additional children since with increasing age

fertility decreases or because women entering late into the labor market due to longer education might be less inclined to have a lot of children.

5.1 The type of stepfamily and the likelihood of having a common child

The importance of stepfamily type and its influence on having an additional child is supported by different studies. In general, women's childbearing intentions seem to be reduced if they already have children, compared to childless women (e.g. Bumpass, 1984; Wineberg, 1990; or Stewart, 2002). However, this picture may change in a stepfamily context. Since a childless woman in a stepfamily is raising stepchildren, the question then is whether she still intends to have a child of her own and obtain (biological) maternal status. What about men? If they are raising stepchildren, do they also wish to have children of their own and to obtain (biological) paternal status? Once again the question of parenthood shared or not arises here within the context of the type of the stepfamily. Once more, it is much more interesting to compare stepfamily types and their fertility patterns with each other than to compare them with intact families where all the children belong to the same parents.

Thomson and Allen Li (2002) found evidence that stepmother families are more likely to have a common child than stepfather families, arguing that maternal status is more highly valued than paternal status. Results presented by Juby et al. (2001) also suggest that stepmother families have a higher risk of having an additional child than stepfather families. However, when other covariates were brought into their models, the effect of family type on the likelihood of having an additional child became non-significant. In line with these results are those of Vikat et al. (2004) suggesting that stepfather families have a lower propensity of having a common child than stepmother families[16].

[16] Note that Vikat et al. (2004) use the term pre-union children. However, women's pre-union children in our terminology are equivalent to stepfather families. To avoid confusion we therefore use consistently the terms stepmother or stepfather family.

The type of residence seems to be an important factor: One may argue that a man's children do not influence a couple's fertility intentions because his children may not live with him or do so only part of the time. For example, Buber and Prskawetz (2000) showed for Austria that men's children also influence the likelihood to have a common child if they live with their father, but this result only holds if the woman had no children of her own living in the household. In other words, their result suggests a higher likelihood for a common child in stepmother families compared to stepfather/stepmother families.

Toulemon and Lapierre-Adamcyk (1995) reported that the presence of a stepchild increases (even though not significantly) the desire of women to have a child while the presence of her own children decreases the likelihood of having further children. For men, the "presence of a child born before the union" Toulemon and Lapierre-Adamcyk (1995, p. 316) makes them want another child less. This also held true when controlled for age of the respondent, the number of children born inside the couple, and the presence of a stepchild. These results further support the theory of maternal status: for women it might be more important to become a biological mother. The authors reveal some interesting arguments. They suggest that fatherhood might be interpreted differently from motherhood, because men are often involved in child-rearing (of their own children or stepchildren) but in a different way than women. Fatherhood seems to be divided into biological and stepfatherhood, because children more often live with their mothers after separation, the fathers remain for a shorter duration with their biological children. However they still have contact with children via their role as stepfather. In contrast, women keep their children more often after separation so they remain an active biological mother. The authors suggest that while women might have stepchildren from their new partner, the children seldom live with them. In conclusion, over their life time men might be involved with more children biological or not, contrary to women who are involved to varying degrees in rearing their own children and in some cases stepchildren as well. With regard to stepmother families one might suggest that women who observe a father

as engaged with his children would be more willing to have additional children with him because she would feel that the man is committed to the children. Therefore she could expect the same commitment towards their common children. One could further argue that the fathers who live with their children after a separation are more committed to them because they live together. One could further speculate that committed fathers like these might also be likely to have additional children with a new partner.

We should mention here that a subsequent study (Toulemon, 1997) showed that the effect of men's children from prior unions on the fertility of the couple disappeared after controlling for all covariates (e.g. marital status, age at the union, time period during which stepfamily life was experienced).

Vikat et al. (2004) argue that women's children have a stronger impact on the likelihood of having an additional child: since women bear the greater costs of childbearing and if they are already experiencing motherhood, they might be less willing to have additional children and bear the consequent additional costs. Also, since most children live with their mothers after a separation (e.g. Juby et al., 2001; Vikat et al., 2004), stepfather families might already have greater financial costs and be less willing to add further children to the family. If one takes the risk of separation into account, a woman may be more concerned about becoming a single mother and in turn be less willing to have additional children. This may be even truer if she enters into a stepfamily with her own children from a former union; her children having already experienced a separation, she might not want to expose additional children to the same risk.

All in all we saw here that in a stepfamily context women who had no children before entering into the stepfamily are more likely to have children. Perhaps Toulemon and Lapierre-Adamcyk (1995) give the best explanation as to why it might not be as important to men to become a biological father in a stepfamily: Their reason being that because stepfathers are often already involved

in childrearing, becoming a biological father is less important. One could further argue that some men who have biological children not living with them, when they enter into a stepfamily, might not want to have other biological children, since they found it hard to be separated from the children and they do not want to be exposed to the same risk again. In contrast, regarding the men who stay with their children after a separation, a woman might be encouraged by this fact and desire a common child, because the woman sees a committed and involved father and she might expect the same for her child. These reasons would suggest that stepmother families are more likely to have a common child.

5.2 Age of children and women upon entering into a stepfamily

The age of the children already present in the household seems to be an important variable in the decision to have a common child (e.g. Griffith et al., 1985; Juby et al., 2001). One may assume that couples in a stepfamily will take time to decide whether to have a common child or not. The couples might choose to wait until they are settled all together and the ties are strong between the children and the stepparents and among the stepsiblings, if any. This would suggest quite a big age gap between the youngest child in the household and the newborn. However, past research has consistently shown that the likelihood of having a common child increases if the youngest child present in the household is a preschooler (e.g. Vikat et al., 2004). Another reason for the proximity in age between the youngest child and the newborn might be that if the distance between the children becomes too big, women are less likely to extend the period of childbearing and childrearing (Griffith et al., 1985). The lifestyle involved with the arrival of a newborn needs less change when small children are already present than with older children (Juby et al., 2001). The assumption regarding the importance of the age of the youngest child is further supported by Jeffries et al. (2000). In their study, preschoolers had a higher risk of having a new sibling than school age children. That said, the assumption that the age of the youngest child may

influence further stepfamily fertility cannot be discussed without taking into account the age of the mother.

Women's age also influences the likelihood of having another child through biological and social determinants. Women who already have adolescent children upon entering a stepfamily might consider themselves too old for further childbearing. As we have seen, this may be due to lifestyle and career decisions or their biological age. One could assume that since women tend to start their fertility career later nowadays and childbearing intentions seem to decline with age, their chances of giving birth in a stepfamily decrease (Stewart, 2002). Contrary to this we could argue that if women's unions have shorter durations i.e. they separate after less time, they do so not necessarily at higher ages, consequently they would be more inclined to have (further children) in a stepfamily context. However, since, in general, women start their fertility career later (and if they marry they do so later) as we discussed in the context of the Second Demographic Transition, this argument might not be strong enough in a stepfamily context. One would assume that a separation takes time to process (legally and emotionally) and that women might be hesitant to enter a new union too quickly, all of which takes time during which women age. One exception might be women who had their first child without having had a previous union, they tend to end their single parenthood episode faster (Le Bourdais et al., 1995); furthermore they might also be younger compared to those going through separation.

To conclude, the age of the youngest child and the age of the mother seem to be strong determinants for the likelihood of having another child. But, the fact that women are less likely to give birth with age might be less influenced by biological than social factors, such as career decisions or lifestyle. However, since age is a continuum, both age factors are associated with each other, and since time passes as women go through life, biological age and social factors correlate strongly.

Finally, though the age of the youngest child and the age of the mother upon entering the stepfamily episode seem to be prevalent fertility determinants in stepfamilies, they are also key elements for intact families. In the following section, we will focus on one determinant that is more related to stepfamilies and their decision to have an additional child or not, this being the number of children already present in the household, because compared to intact families stepfamilies have by definition already at least one child.

5.3 Number of children

The number of (step)children in analyses of further birth intentions seems to be important for fertility research (e.g. Thomson and Allen Li, 2002). We have seen that the type of stepfamily might be important to the couple's decision to have a common child. In this section we will focus solely on the number of children and how that affects the likelihood of having a common child. As we will see, where the children reside (i.e. with which parent) and the policies of the state seem to play an important role.

Thomson and Allen Li (2002) suggest that childbearing in stepfamilies seems to follow a simple model in which combined parity influences childbearing: "birth risks are lower, the more children, separated or shared, that a couple has to raise, with the greatest decline after a couple has two children, hers, his or theirs" (Thomson and Allen Li, 2002, p. 5). However, we have to take a closer look at this proposition, since there might be other factors, e.g. family-related state policies or the type of residence of the children might influence childbearing decisions in stepfamilies. Also, we have shown that fertility depends on specific constellation of parenthood. Given the importance of the number of children in understanding the different outcomes, some shortcomings and problems with regard to the measurement of the number of children will be discussed at the end of this section (section 5.3.1).

Vikat et al. (2004) elaborated three main assumptions about the likelihood of having common children in stepfamilies, depending on the number of children already present.

First, stepchildren are not equivalent to shared children in affecting a couple's decision to have an additional child. Indeed, stepchildren often require less parental involvement and responsibility from the stepparent than biological children do from the biological parent. Once again this refers to the idea of shared parenthood: regardless of the number of stepchildren a couple might to want experience common parenthood. In addition, this raises the question of whether there might be a full-sibling hypothesis: that couples who have one common child might have a second one in order to provide a full-sibling to the first common child (Vikat et al., 2004).

Second, the key difference between stepchildren and common children is that stepchildren might live elsewhere part or all of the time which may influence further childbearing decisions. However, if we assume that each additional child increases the costs and may thus decrease the likelihood of having an additional child, it might be important to distinguish whether the children live in the stepfamily household or not and the impact of living arrangements on the likelihood of having an additional child. If one keeps in mind the problems stepfamily members might have in adjusting to each other, one may assume that in stepfamilies where the stepchildren live within the household, tensions are higher and the likelihood of having a common child decreases accordingly. The results of Vikat and colleagues (2004) suggest that stepchildren reduce the likelihood of having a common child in the stepfamily and "the reduction is larger with each shared child than with a stepchild" (Vikat et al., 2004, p. 17).

This confirms their assumption that stepparents might be less involved with stepchildren and, therefore, might wish to have a common child. It also confirms, in turn, that with an increasing number of children, the likelihood of an

additional child decreases. They attribute this to the increasing cost of each common child. Furthermore, their argument that a full sibling might be important for the common child has not been confirmed. What was new in their study is that they considered all categories of children as a categorical variable and they did separate analyses of the couple's number of shared children. This allowed them to also analyze the risk of having a second shared birth.

Third, the study of Vikat and colleagues (Vikat et al., 2004) was carried out in Finland and Austria and their results suggest that resident and non-resident stepchildren might have a different effect on fertility intention. However, these effects might depend on the country because of different family-related state policies, as their results further suggest. For example, Vikat et al. (2004) found that the type of residence made little difference to the likelihood of having an additional child in Finland. They argue that Finland represents a social democratic state whose family policy is characterized by the dual-earner family model; generous family allowances; and a universal public child care service. In Austria, a couple's fertility is reduced if stepchildren are present and even more so if they are co-resident. The social structure of Austria is based on the assumption of a full-time homemaker: school schedules, child care services, shopping hours are designed around mothers being at home all day; and family-related policies support a female care model. Paid parental leave with job security does exist but it is lower than in Finland. In Austria families with children have less flexibility for their organization of their daily life than in the Nordic countries.

Buber and Prskawetz (2000) carried out a different study on Austria which also suggests that the more children, common or not, a couple has to raise, the less likely they are to have additional children. Consequently, different results between countries might be attributed to different child support arrangements, of which Finland and Austria are good examples since they have very opposite family policies.

Juby et al. (2001) did not find support for the effect of the number of children on the likelihood of having an additional child in Canada. They argued that interestingly the number of children seems to play a role in intact families but not in stepfamilies, which suggests that different forces are at play. They argue that if stepparents become biological parents with the arrival of the common child the blended family becomes kind of institutionalized.

It is worthwhile mentioning here that with respect to the one-child hypothesis and the number of children that stepmother/stepfather families have, they form a different kind of stepfamily. We could assume different behaviour as by definition they already have one or more children, consequently the sibling hypothesis does not hold. However if we assume that the idea of *shared* or *common parenthood* is valid then, for stepmother/stepfather families having a common child might be valuable. Additionally, we could speculate that since stepmother/stepfather families are already numerous, one or more children added to the family does not change much and that these people are already very child-oriented (so one or two more does not mean much of change for them). Vikat et al. (1999) found evidence that couples are willing to have a common child regardless of the number of stepchildren. This would confirm the assumption of shared parenthood.

So far we have seen that the number of children might influence the likelihood of couples in stepfamilies to have additional children. Reviewing the studies cited so far one can see that there is no common understanding of how to measure the number of children in stepfamilies and stepfamily environments. However, it is crucial for our analysis to give the exact number of children within a stepfamily and to identify to whom this children are related (their biological mother, their biological father or are they already conceived within the stepfamily). The next section discusses some problems and shortcomings related to the measuring of the number of children.

5.3.1 Shortcomings and problems with the measurement of the number of children

The findings from the studies mentioned above with regard to the effect of the number of children and the type of stepfamily on the risk of having an additional child are, as we have seen, somewhat mixed. Even though the definition of stepfamilies in the papers cited so far is identical to the definition used in our own study, comparing these findings is problematic. This is not only because of the different data set used for each paper, but also because the beginning of a stepfamily episode is defined differently. In order to define whether a child is born within or before entering the stepfamily, we have to take into account that some children are conceived before the union begins or a marriage occurs. Consequently, we are not sure if this child belongs to the union which we consider as the beginning of the stepfamily or if the child belongs to another partner. In the latter case, the child would not be a common child because the survey did not ask the respondent if the partner is the biological parent of the child. The point in time that defines a child as being a common child or a stepchild is measured differently in the studies cited so far. In other words, stepfamilies are measured differently in each study[17]. This in turn affects the overall number of children presented and their perceived effect on the stepfamily. As this section deals with the number of children and its influence on the likelihood of the birth of subsequent children, we have to mention some of the differences in the measurement of stepfamilies, even if the more technical details will be discussed in Chapter III, section 3.

Two studies compare the presence and absence of stepchildren in their analyses, those of Buber and Prskawetz (2000) and Vikat et al. (2004). The authors report high variations between men and women in the occurrence of stepchildren and suggest that men may underreport children they already have because they might have lost touch with them (in this context, see an interesting

[17] Also, some studies include sterile women and men in their findings and others do not. We shall discuss this particular issue below.

discussion in Juby and Le Bourdais, 1999; or Toulemon and Lapierre-Adamcyk, 1995). A problem with taking non resident stepchildren into account is that we might not know retrospectively whether this was a temporary or permanent arrangement of residence. But as we have seen, the type of residence of the children seems to have a major influence on childbearing decisions.

As we already pointed out, one problem in accounting for the number of stepchildren is due to the fact that each study tends to have its own definition of the time span between entering a union and a birth which occurred before this date. This definition however changes the number of children considered as common or not in a stepfamily. Even though, in the end, it is more a technical decision as we will see, we will discuss this issue here. Some studies count children born up to 12 months prior to the union as a child belonging to the couple (e.g. Thomson et al., 2000; or Thomson, 2004). Thomson (2004) argues that this rule would recognize that children raised from infancy are usually viewed as shared children even though some might not be the biological child to one's partner. Some use 11 months as a cut-off point (Vikat et al., 1999) mentioning that such a rule may cause problems in cases where the child will be not assigned to the right pair of parents, i.e. that the woman is pregnant with someone else. Griffith et al. (1985) excluded women who had an inter-marital birth six months or less prior to the date of remarriage. This implies that they did not consider those cases as stepfamilies. The rationale for their decision was that the sequence and timing of the birth and remarriage made it impossible to determine "whether the marriage was a result of pregnancy or vice versa, and because differential probabilities of having a birth shortly before or after remarriage would bias the analyses of the timing of the birth" (Griffith et al., 1985, p. 77). Buber and Prskawetz (2000) excluded children born 11 months prior to the union from their sample. In a later article on several European countries Prskawetz et al. (2002) counted as stepchildren any children who were born prior to the union, mentioning that this could overestimate the number of stepchildren.

Others again take into account a six-month period (Desrosiers and Le Bourdais, 1992; and Desrosiers et al., 1994). The rationale for adopting a six-month period being that it was a common method in the 1940s and 1950s, because research suggested that a lot of young women got married quickly after the birth of a child to the father. Additionally, some women gave their child to foster homes, after which they were given six months to establish themselves so that they could get their child back (Desrosiers and Le Bourdais, 1992). The common expression "a shotgun marriage" describes the phenomenon of marrying quickly after conception. All in all there seems to be no single, overarching solution or theoretical rationale or clear rule for these decisions on the measurement. Instead, most of the time it seems to depend on the available data and we must accept that the number of stepfamilies may vary because of this. In other words it seems to be a problem of the operationalization of available data rather than any theoretical framing.

5.4 The type of union upon entering a stepfamily

In Chapter II, section 4.6, we discussed whether stepfamily couples living common-law are less stable than married stepfamily couples. It might be interesting to elaborate on the correlation between the type of relationship in a stepfamily and the likelihood of having a common child. For Canada, this question might be even more interesting since we may expect regional differences between the Anglophone provinces and the Francophone province of Quebec. With regard to common-law unions and their likelihood of having a common child, we are able to identify some interesting questions. In the past, couples living in common-law relationships tended to have fewer children than married couples (Dumas and Belanger, 1997). Consequently, one could have concluded that stepfamily couples living common-law were less likely to have a common child than married ones. However, this picture seems to be changing: in the 2001 census of Statistics Canada, one can see that 12.8% of children aged 0-14 are living with cohabiting parents compared to 6.9% in 1991, and that 68.4% of

children are living with married parents compared to 77% in 1991. Thus, cohabitation almost doubled while marriage decreased (Statistics Canada, 2002b).

In analyzing fertility in cohabitation unions, Raley (2001) suggested that on one hand fertility among cohabiters did not increase *per se*: while the number of cohabiters increased and thus more children were born to people cohabiting, this did not mean that they necessarily have more children. She further concludes that cohabitation in the United States cannot (yet) be seen as an alternative to marriage, because if that were the case, then cohabiters would have the same fertility patterns as married couples.

Brown (2000) advances an interesting hypothesis with regard to common-law unions in the United States. She hypothesizes that having a child within a common-law union could "cement the new relationship, encouraging greater commitment by acting as a barrier to leaving the union" (Brown, 2000, p. 503). Behind the findings that common-law unions are less stable than marriages (e.g. Marcil-Gratton et al., 2000) and that stepfamilies may need something additional to cement their relationship compared to other types of families, one could expect common-law stepfamily couples to be more likely to have a common child than married stepfamily couples.

Brown's (2000) argument is based on data from the United States, where common-law unions are less widely accepted and frequent than in Canada. However, differences do exist between regions in Canada. This is the third point. For example, in the English part of Canada, common-law unions are less frequent than in Francophone Quebec. For common-law couples in English Canada, a common child may thus carry more weight with regard to reinforcing the relationship than in Quebec, where common-law unions have practically replaced the institution of marriage. Kiernan (2002) developed a model of the four stages of acceptance of common-law relationships which has been applied by several authors (e.g. Cherlin, 2004; Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2004). Kiernan

argues that common-law was first seen as an avant-garde phenomenon, then, second, it was considered a testing ground for marriage, also labeled a trial/prelude to marriage (Mills, 2000). In stage three it becomes an acceptable alternative to marriage and in stage four it is indistinguishable from marriage. For example, the Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark can be described as being in phase four whereas Southern European countries such as Greece or Italy still remain in stage one (Cherlin, 2004). In applying those stages of acceptance to Canada, Quebec might be in the fourth stage where common-law relationships are fully accepted, unlike the rest of Canada which might be in the third stage, in which common-law does not yet have the same status as marriage (Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2004).

The last point with regard to common-law relationships is that research in the United States almost never focused on common-law couples in stepfamilies. Several studies focus solely on remarriages and include childless unions and unions with children (e.g. Griffith et al., 1985; Wineberg 1990). A few other studies include cohabiting unions which often precede the formation of stepfamilies (e.g. Thomson and Allen Li, 2002), but they are still largely neglected in most research (e.g. Allen Li, 2006). However, such neglect is often due to a lack of information on cohabitation in the available data (Allen Li, 2006) and not to an unwillingness to include common-law unions.

5.5 The number of children and women's employment status

Women's career decisions may also influence their willingness to have further children because work may provide different rewards such as economic independence (White and Kim, 1987). However, we have little knowledge on women's career decisions and the likelihood of having additional children in stepfamilies because the studies on stepfamily fertility either did not include female work status or it was a control variable which was not further explained. However, stepfamilies face a different dynamic than lone parent families or intact

families and we could expect stepfamily life to be expensive (stepfamilies are larger families, they might require larger housing and have higher costs of living) so the decision to work or to pursue a career in a stepfamily might be based on different assumptions than in couples entering into their first family episode. For women in stepfamilies work might be more of a requirement than an option. However, we should first look at some general arguments on the relationship between women's employment status and their number of children.

For example, Kim and White show that women who are highly educated and very satisfied with their work are more likely to have an additional child contrary to those who are not satisfied. These results are the opposite to what one might expect, since one could assume that women who are satisfied with their work do not want children because they already have fulfilling lives, and that women who are dissatisfied with their work are more open to a change in life style which child birth would imply. The question here is about the satisfaction found or not through work. In general, it is well documented that women who work either have a reduced fertility or they must make arrangements for child care if they do not stay at home (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000). The authors report that women in industrialized countries try to reconcile work and family and as a consequence fertility has fallen as this combination is not always feasible. Before industrialization, nonmechanical agricultural tasks could be combined with child supervision at home. However, since industrialization "childcare and economically productive work" has become difficult to reconcile (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000, p. 217). One reason for this is that the type of work in industrial countries requires being outside the home and often, working shifts. Flexibility on the part of the workers is required which is often difficult to combine with child care. Presser (1994) also emphasizes the difficulties due to the type of working hours (not nine to five, but flexible shifts, including evening or weekend work) that people need to work today which make it hard to reconcile family life and working schedules for couples.

In order to show the relationship between women who work and do not and fertility rates Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) presented fertility trends from data aggregated from 21 selected industrialized countries and showed that in countries where a large proportion of women work, fertility is higher than in countries where women do not work, which seems to be a counter-intuitive observation. For example, in France and Sweden female labour market participation is high as is fertility, whereas in Germany or Italy female labour market participation is low and so is fertility. They argue that the family-related state policies in such countries support families differently. In France and Sweden, support for families is provided to individuals (thus making gender equality possible), but in Germany or Austria, for example, it is the family unit to which support is given. In other words, tax breaks, income support, parental leave, etc., in Germany is geared towards the traditional family model in which men are the breadwinners. This makes it all the more difficult for women to reconcile work and family if they wish to stay in the labour market. In countries such as Italy, the state is not involved in family policy, consequently day care is even less available and makes it more difficult for women to reconcile work and family. As a result, women in countries where it is easier to reconcile work and family might be more willing to have additional children than in those countries where it is difficult to reconcile the two. Interestingly, the studies cited so far (Griffith et al., 1985; Vikat et al., 1999; Buber and Prskawetz, 2000; Thomson et al., 2000; Henz, 2002; Prskawetz et al., 2002; and Thomson, 2004) did not introduce or examine women's work status as a factor that influenced their likelihood of having an additional child. The reason behind this could be that the necessary data wasn't available, or their interest was focused only on demographic factors such as age of the children, age of the mother etc. However, we saw in the study of Vikat et al. (2004) that in the Nordic, countries with their family-oriented and gender equality policies, families are more likely to have additional children than in Austrian where policy supports the female care model. However, it might be interesting to see if the employment status influences the

likelihood of having additional children, especially in Quebec where, in 1997, a new family policy was introduced (e.g. affordable day care) (Baril et al., 2000).

Theoretically, it could be suggested that employed women who benefit from new parental regulations are willing to have additional children since, on the one hand, they are assured of not losing their job because of maternity leave and consequently they remain financially independent. In addition, because of the rising cost of living and the fact that stepfamilies have more members, earning money might be a necessity rather than a choice. However, with regard to stepfamilies, the argument that additional children require a lot of resources, such as time and energy, might be even truer for (working) women, as a result of which they might not be willing to have additional children. However, those women who already stay home might be more in favor of having additional children than those who are employed, since additional children require less of a change in their life style, compared to the women who work.

5.6 The issue of sterilization

If one partner is sterilized, by definition, having a common child is very unlikely. The context of the decision to undergo sterilization has changed: before, sterilization occurred mostly in married couples; however increasing rates of cohabitation, divorce, and repartnering have changed this (Godecker et al., 2001). Couples entering into a stepfamily are affected by this changing context. Since people are experiencing the transition of being in or out of a union (marriage or common-law) more frequently, the fact of being sterilized can affect a partner with whom the decision to become sterile was not made. In addition, being aware that a union might not last forever, the desire to stay fertile could be stronger since one might desire a child in a future/further union. On the other hand, if one often changes partner sterilization would be a definite method of not having a child. Since we are examining stepfamilies and their likelihood of having a common

child, a partner who is sterile before entering into the stepfamily affects this likelihood.

The studies mentioned so far have dealt with sterilized respondents differently. With regard to sterilized respondents, the articles mentioned above by Griffith et al. (1985), Thomson and Allen Li (2002) and Thomson (2004) all include sterilized respondents in their sample size. They argue that one reason for this is theoretical: sterilized couples would have made a clear decision to have no more children and excluding them would introduce "selectivity in motivation to avoid childbearing among those who want no more children" (Thomson, 2004, p. 123). However, if we are in the context of stepfamilies, a partner could have been sterilized in a former union, and, in the union under observation (in other words the stepfamily), regret the sterilization. Alternatively, the sterilization could be a problem for the new partner.

The second reason for including sterilized respondents is to maintain comparability between birth risk and birth desires based on retrospective histories: the information on the date of sterilization is often unavailable, especially for former partners. Consequently, the authors included sterilized and non sterilized couples in their risk pool. In our analyses on the arrival of a common child, we did not exclude sterilized respondents except when doing some sensitivity analyses to see how this would affect our results[18]. During the sensitivity analysis we also ran some analyses that treated sterilization as a censoring event, excluded sterilized respondents, or incorporated a time varying covariate[19] of *sterilization* to see the effect on the likelihood of having a common child.

To conclude, this section discussed in detail the theoretical assumptions and demographic factors that lie behind the likelihood of having a common child

[18] Here, during the sensitivity analyses, we excluded respondents who had been sterilized and for whom we could date this event. As far as the partner of the respondent is concerned, we only have the date of sterilization of current partners (so current episodes) and not for retrospective partners, so we could not take these episodes into account retrospectively.
[19] No effects were observed. Therefore, the results will not be presented.

within a stepfamily. We also saw that some results vary between countries, others less so, in part because of the differences in available data. Comparisons between countries regarding the impact on stepfamilies of the arrival of a common child would be very interesting, but our analysis focuses solely on Canada. However, wherever possible, we will try to embed country specific circumstances in the discussion of our results. The factors discussed above allow us to construct the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses

H 1: Stepmother families are more likely to make the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family than stepfather families.

H 2: The younger the age of the woman upon entering a stepfamily, the more likely she is to make a transition to a blended family.

H 3: Stepfamilies where the youngest stepchild living within the stepfamily is a preschooler are more likely to make the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family than stepfamilies where the youngest stepchild living within the stepfamily is already in school.

H 4: With an increasing number of (step)children, the likelihood of having a common child decreases.

H 5: Stepfamily couples living common-law in English Canada are more likely to have a common child than those who live in Quebec.

H 6: Working women are less likely to have additional children than non-working women.

This part of the dissertation elaborated the theoretical framework of stepfamily dynamics. We saw that system theory, symbolic interactionism and the

sociology of the life course offer useful explanations of the dynamics of stepfamilies. Stepfamily instability and the arrival of a common child were of major interest since our study focuses on the adult perspective and not on that of the child, otherwise the departure of the (step)children could have been an interesting aspect of stepfamily dynamics to examine. The next step is to analyze the research hypotheses we developed. In order to test these hypotheses, we will use the method of event history analysis. However, to apply this approach we need to define stepfamily episodes[20]. During our lives we experience all kinds of episodes which start with an event. We often understand an episode to be a short period of time in a certain context: e.g. a romantic episode, an unhappy episode, etc. during our life. Within the framework of event history analysis, an episode means the span of time an individual experiences under certain conditions that have a defined beginning and end. A stepfamily episode means the span of time that the respondent spends living in a stepfamily with residential children. In order to identify a stepfamily episode, the date of the beginning and the end of the stepfamily is required. In our case, the time of the beginning is determined as when the respondent enters into the stepfamily, and the time of exit/end as being when the respondent exits/ends the stepfamily episode. There are several possibilities that a stepfamily episode will end, for example separation, children leaving the parental home, death of a partner. Those end times can be identified differently as we will see in the following chapter. How we created such stepfamily episodes with the data from the GSS 2001 and the methods applied to them, namely event history analysis, will be discussed in Chapter III, section 3 and 4). We will start the following chapter by first presenting the data and the variables we used for the cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses.

[20] We will refer here to the meaning of an *episode*. The term 'event', also crucial to event history analysis, will be explained in Chapter III, section 4.

III. MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS OF STEPFAMILIES: DATA AND METHODS

Introduction

As we have seen in the previous Chapter I, section 6, stepfamilies are difficult to identify and define depending on what we focus on: the chains of relationships, the household or both. The complexities of stepfamilies seem to be endless. In the following discussion, we will show how we obtained our (step)family samples: one sample at survey time, i.e. comprised of families at a certain point in time, and one retrospective sample. For the family sample at survey time, we will also try to include stepfamilies which are often counted as intact families, although if one looks at the data more closely, one can see that they are actually intact families within a stepfamily environment. In the sample size for (step)families at survey time, we will also include intact and lone-parent families in order to compare them to stepfamilies. However, we will focus only on stepfamilies for the analysis of family dynamics. Thus, our sample only includes retrospective data on stepfamilies, allowing us to study how they change and develop over time, and to look more particularly at their instability and the effect of the arrival of a common child. Here the history and the timing of events will be of major concern. We are interested in a) the instability of stepfamilies and b) the arrival of a common child.

There are three sets of variables which are crucial to identify stepfamilies. First, there are variables that provide information only at survey time. This includes information on the current union and the type of children living full-time or part-time in the respondent's household which helps us identify our family sample at survey time. The characteristics of the families are the dependent variables.

The second set of variables relates to the union and child history of the respondent with retrospective information on the timing of his/her unions, the

unions of the current partner and the timing of the children born to or adopted by the respondent, or, in the case of stepchildren, when the latter joined the household, as well as the date when children leave the parental home. Statistics Canada provides a detailed file for each respondent on their unions and their children. These files allow us to create the episodes we need for the analysis of stepfamily dynamics, i.e. the analysis of the *risk of separation* and of *having a common child,* these being the dependent variables.

Covariates are the third set of variables and they allow us to study differences between stepfamilies and intact or lone-parent families; also, with regard to the dynamics of stepfamilies, they allow us to examine the circumstances which lead to a certain event.

We will start this chapter with a description of the data (section 1). This first section will be followed by a presentation of the variables. Here, we will first present the variables we used to obtain our family sample at survey time (section 2). In section 2.1, we will then discuss the sample size at survey time on a residential basis. Section 2.2 is dedicated to the sample size at survey time, taking into account a stepfamily environment. In section 3, we will briefly discuss how we linked the cross-sectional and the longitudinal perspectives together. The union variables will be presented in section 3.1 and the child variables in section 3.2. These are the variables we needed in order to be able to construct and analyze stepfamily episodes, a process we will describe in detail in section 3.3. The method we applied to analyze stepfamily episodes is presented in section 3.4. Finally, section 5 and 6 present the covariates we used, some of which provide only information at survey time (presented in section 5) and others which also provide retrospective information (presented in section 6).

CHAPTER III – MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS OF STEPFAMILIES: DATA AND METHODS

1. Data

Our analysis is based on the General Social Survey (GSS) that was conducted by Statistics Canada in 2001. The GSS is a cross-sectional survey, run yearly since 1985, in order to gather data on social trends and to provide information for specific policy issues. Every cycle focuses on different themes, such as health, time use, victimization, education, work and retirement, and family. The GSS is well known for its regular collection of the cross-sectional data which is required in the analysis of social trends. It thus provides a testing ground for developing new concepts that address emerging issues (Statistics Canada, 2006). The 2001 survey on family collected detailed information on the composition of households, on the family of origin of respondents, respondents' fertility, and on a series of individual and household socioeconomic characteristics. The GSS on family also comprises a large retrospective component in which the respondents' education and work histories were collected; as mentioned, respondents were also asked to record the history of their unions (marriages or common-law unions) and of all the children they had, adopted and/or raised.

The GSS sample is representative of the population aged 15 years and older living in Canada, however, excluding the residents of Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and full-time residents of institutions. The interviews were conducted between February and December 2001. The non-response rate was 21%, and interviews were completed for 24,310 respondents (Statistics Canada, 2001).

2. Identifying families at survey time

In this section, the variables we used to create families at survey time will be presented. The main file of the General Social Survey 2001 provided by Statistics Canada provides us with the most important basic information to which we added some from the union and child file.

Current Union Status

The creation of family types requires two essential types of information: the union of the respondents and the type and number of children they may have had. In the 2001 GSS, the respondents' union history was collected with both marriages and common-law unions taken into account. Data for up to six unions is available for each respondent. The third section of the questionnaire is about the marital history of the respondent, starting with the current marriage. Section four asks the same kind of questions for common-law unions. In order to create our (step)family sample at survey, we look at the respondent's conjugal status at survey time; in other words, it is the current unions that are relevant. The respondent is asked about his/her current marital status: "What is your current legal marital status? Are you

1. legally married and not separated?
2. legally married and separated?
3. divorced (or did you have your marriage annulled)?
4. widowed?
5. never legally married (single)
6. refused."

With respect to common-law unions, the respondent is asked if he or she is currently living within a common-law relationship. Put together, this information allows us to identify respondents who are currently living in a union, whether married or in a common-law union. Respondents who reported being married but separated from their spouse and living in a common-law union were simply considered within the category of common-law union. Indeed, even if their legal status is that of a married person, their current union at the time of the survey is a common-law union. In short, the data enables us to know whether a respondent has ever been legally married or in a common-law relationship and what his current marital status is.

Type of children and type of parents

The variable 'type of children' (*chdtype*), created by Statistics Canada, provides information about the relationship between the respondent and the child. We know whether the child is biological, adopted or a stepchild. With regard to families at survey time, the GSS provides one variable (*prtchdc)* which informs us of the type of parent the child has in the household where he/she is currently living (e.g. both parents biological, one step- and one biological parent, one adoptive and one biological parent). Together with the variable 'type of children' (*chdtype*), this enables us to identify whether the child is a stepchild or not. For example, a child can be reported in the child type variable as being a biological child to the respondent, but the type of parent variable might tell us that the child also has a stepmother or stepfather, and is therefore living in a stepfamily environment.

It is important to mention that the variable on the type of the parents (*prtchdc*) is only available at time of survey and not retrospectively. For retrospective data, we can only identify the type of parents by relying on the reported birth dates of the child and the union history of the respondent, as we will show below.

Living arrangements

The living arrangements of the children are also crucial in helping identify our family sample. Statistics Canada provides two variables which allow us to draw conclusions about the living arrangements of children.

The respondent is asked ("Does (child 01) live in your household

1. all of the time?
2. most of the time?
3. part of the time?
4. not at all?
5. deceased? "

The reason why a child might be living apart is also asked "Why does (child 01) live in your household only part of the time?

1. shared living arrangement with other partner
2. school related reasons
3. job related reasons
4. other reasons
5. refused."

With answers to all these questions for each child, we are able to identify how many children the respondent has, and if they are still at home.

The two questions on living arrangements are used by Statistics Canada to derive the following variables: household status *(hhldstat)* and a variable that informs us on whether the child is currently living in the household or not *(hhldchd)*. These two variables give information whether the child is living full time or part time with the respondent and whether he/she was present at the time of the survey.

2.1 Family sample size at survey time on a residential basis

To identify families with children under 21 years of age in the 2001 GSS sample, we first identified respondents who were currently married or living in a common-law union at the time of the survey and those living 'alone' (without a partner); second, we used the retrospective information collected on children to identify respondents who had had, adopted or raised children (including stepchildren), and whether they were living with them on a regular basis or not at the time of the survey[21]. Only respondents who had at least one child (biological, adopted or step) under the age of 21 in their entourage at the time of the survey in 2001 were

[21] Two respondents were excluded from our analysis due to a lack of information concerning their children and a further eight respondents were excluded due to incoherent data in their union history.

retained for the analysis. In Western societies, young adults tend to leave their parental home at an increasingly later age compared to earlier decades. So, although 18 is the legal age that defines adulthood, we will use 21 as the age for the youngest child as it seems more appropriate for our study. Also, the most common reason for their departure used to be entering into a legal heterosexual union, but it is now more linked to a desire to enter into a non-family household (Kiernan, 1986; Mitchell, 2006). We further distinguished respondents according to the residential status of all of their children. For each of the children they raised, respondents were asked if the child was living with them on a full-time or part-time basis, or living outside their household at the time of the survey. Our sample size comprised more than 7,709 respondents who live with children in their household on a full- or part-time basis (children not living with the respondent were excluded).

All the information collected with the variables previously discussed was combined: the type of child (biological/adopted or step) and his/her household status (lives in the household or not), the respondents' conjugal status (in a union or not), and last but not least, adding the variable *prtchdc* with information on the type of parents. We were thus able to construct our family variable with four broad categories: 1) intact families; 2) stepfamilies; 3) single-mother families; and 4) single-father families. Lone-parent families are distinguished according to the sex of the head of the family since, as we will see later, they have very different socio-economic characteristics. Stepfamilies were further subdivided into six categories: 1) stepmother families; 2) stepfather families; 3) stepmother and stepfather families; 4) blended stepmother families; 5) blended stepfather families; and 6) blended stepmother and stepfather families (see Table 1.1 for detailed definitions). In most of the analyses that follow, due to the small number of cases in each category, stepmother families are grouped with the stepmother/stepfather families, as was done in other studies (see Juby et al., 2001).

2.2 Family size, taking into account a stepfamily environment

As already mentioned, we were also interested in the stepfamily environment of the respondent. In other words, we wanted to know how many children are not currently living in the respondent's household but who, upon closer inspection, are still part of it through a stepfamily environment. In addition to the variable presented above concerning children's living arrangements (*hhldstat* and *hhldchd*), we needed to get information on the children of the respondent's partner.

Partner's children

In order to be able to identify families that are part of a stepfamily environment, it is important to have information on the children of the respondent's partner. The respondent is asked whether his/her spouse has "any children that you did not raise?"[22] and "how many?" and whether "any of those children are 18 years of age or younger?"; these children would be stepchildren to our respondent. In a research context where there is a risk of underestimating such respondents, these questions allow us to identify children who belong to the respondent's stepfamily environment, even if they are not currently living with him/her and his/her spouse.

[22] This question was asked to the respondent in addition to the general questions on his or her children and the one of his or her partner. Consequently, this question allowed us to identify children who are belonging into the environment of the respondent.

Diagram 3.1: From a residential to an environmental perspective

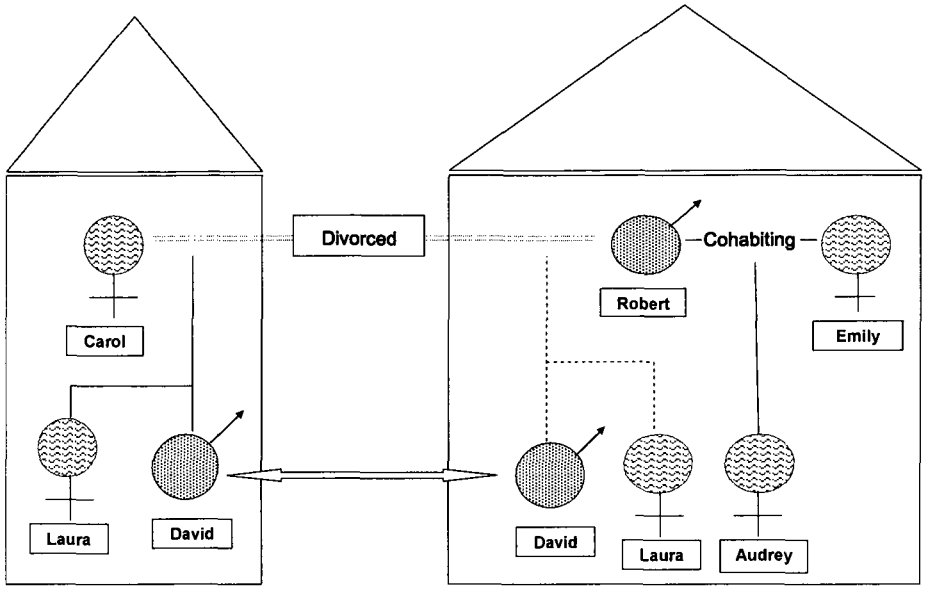


Diagram 3.1 helps to demonstrate how important it is to understand the environment as a whole in order to identify families with a stepfamily component. Robert is living in a common-law relationship with Emily and he is divorced from Carol. Robert and Emily have a common daughter, Audrey. At first glance, Robert and Emily form an intact family. However, if Robert is asked if he has children he does not raise, he would report having two other children, namely Laura and David, who do not live with him and who perhaps only visit on an occasional basis. Laura and David live with Carol, so she forms a single-mother family. If we count Robert and Emily's household only as an intact family household, we ignore the fact that he has two children from a former union which nevertheless belong to his family environment, even if they are not currently living with him.

In order to illustrate the number of families with a stepfamily environment, we chose to take these family constellations into account. Consequently, we had many more possibilities of family constellations as if we would have taken into account only the residential base. We were able to identify

no less than 53 different family constellations comprised of at least one child under 21. Here is an example of two similar but distinct constellations that we identified: a separated father lives with a partner and their common child (Robert and Emily with their daughter Audrey), and he has children born in a previous union (Laura and David). If the latter lived with him, his family would be classified as a 'blended' stepfamily, from both residential and across-household perspectives; if they did not live with him (if they lived at Carol's), it would be classified as an 'intact' family from a household point of view, but as part of a stepfamily environment from a wider perspective.

These 53 detailed constellations were grouped into four broad categories: 1) intact families; 2) stepfamilies; 3) single-mother families; and 4) single-father families. Once again, single-parent families are distinguished according to the sex of the head of the family. Like before, stepfamilies were further subdivided into six categories: 1) stepmother family; 2) stepfather family; 3) stepmother and stepfather family; 4) blended stepmother family; 5) blended stepfather family; and 6) blended stepmother and stepfather family (see Chapter I, section 6, Table 1.1 for detailed definitions). Let us recall here that, as in other studies, stepmother families are grouped with the stepmother/stepfather families, due to the small number of cases in each category.

Our 'family' sample which takes into account a stepfamily environment thus comprises 8,426 respondents who are part of a stepfamily, an intact family or a single-parent family network, with respondents distinguished according to the residential status of all of their children. As we already know, for each of the children they raised, respondents were asked if the child was living with them on a full-time or part-time basis, or living outside their household at the time of the survey. Children not living with the respondent were not excluded since they are part of the stepfamily environment.

As we will see later, we have no additional socio-demographic information on the children who belong to the stepfamily environment but do not live with the respondent. For the cross-sectional analysis, therefore, we kept the family sample defined on a residential basis. We should mention here that for the analysis, biological and adopted children are grouped into a single category.

3. From a cross-sectional to a longitudinal perspective

Obtaining the 'family' sample at survey was much easier than doing so for the longitudinal study, since there were fewer missing values and we had more information at the date of survey which was helpful in identifying stepfamilies. Some variables, for example, allow us to identify, at the time of survey, the current living arrangement (full-time or part-time) of the children and the type of parents they have, whereas in a longitudinal perspective, we not only need that information but also need to relate it to the children's date of birth, the date they join and leave the parental home and the dates related to union formation. In the following sections, we will show how we constructed stepfamilies from a longitudinal perspective, stepfamily episodes in other words, and how we obtained the sample size.

3.1 Creating episodes: union variables

The creation of family episodes requires information concerning unions and the children's history of the respondent. The most important information is the date of the unions. Therefore, we are now interested in all the unions the respondents have had so far and when they occurred. Information on a respondent's partner was also collected, and this will be presented in a second stage.

Dates of marriages: respondent

In the survey, all respondents were asked to provide information concerning the month and year in which they were married and their age at that point in time ("In what month and year were you married?" and "How old were you when you were married?"). However, the data for our study, as provided by Statistics Canada, only shows the age of the respondent when he/she got married, with one decimal, and not the actual date of the marriage[23]. When asked about their current marriage, respondents had to answer a number of questions: whether the respondent and his/her current spouse lived "common-law before entering into this marriage", "in what month and year did you and your current spouse begin to live together?" and "how old were you when you and your current spouse began to live together?" The same questions were asked for all previous marriages if the current situation was not a first marriage. For example, if the current marriage is the third, the respondent will then be asked about his first and second marriage as well. Respondents are also asked to state the reason for the ending of the first and subsequent marriages, as well as their age at the time and the date of the divorce, separation or death.

Dates of common-law unions: respondent

Following from their marital history, respondents are asked about their common-law unions. The logic of the questions is the same as for marriages. First, the respondent is asked about his or her current common-law union and then about previous ones if this is not the first. Here too there were questions aimed at identifying the beginning and end of the common-law union: "in what month and year did you and your current partner begin to live together" and "how old were you when you and your current partner began to live together". But once again, we were only provided with the information concerning the age of the respondent

[23] As we will see below, this is a common feature of our data and the more detailed information was not available for this study.

at the time and not the actual dates of these unions. The respondent is also asked when and at what age he or she started to live in his/her first common-law union and subsequent ones, if applicable. The marital status of his/her common-law partner is asked, as is his/her date of birth and age upon entering the common-law relationship with the respondent. The type of ending and its date, if applicable, is also reported. We thus obtain information on whether the respondent separated from his or her common-law partner, when this happened and what it was due to, death or separation.

Dates of unions: partner

As already mentioned, information on the spouse is collected for each union. The dates provided are important for us and the respondent is asked "In what month and year was your spouse born?" and "How old is your spouse?" Here too we were only provided with the information concerning the age and not the year or the month. The same questions are asked for common-law partners.

The respondent is also asked about the conjugal history of his or her partner: "what was your spouse/partner's marital status before entering into this marriage" or whether his or her spouse/partner has "lived with anyone else before entering this marriage/union". Both questions are asked in the section on marriage and in the one on common-law unions. These questions are important because they allow us to identify whether the partner has had a previous union or not.

With this information, we know the age of the respondent at the beginning of his or her unions and the time these unions ended either due to separation, death or divorce. With regard to the end of marriages, it is the date of separation and not the date of divorce which is taken into account. Married respondents could actually be separated and have started a common-law relationship while still being legally married to a former partner. In those cases, it is the common-law union, which is the union of interest for our study.

3.2 Creating episodes: child variables

As already mentioned, the 2001 GSS collected information on all the children of the respondents. In order to identify a stepfamily episode, we need four basic variables: the type of children (biological, adopted or step), their date of birth, the age of the respondent when the child joined the household, and the age of the respondent when the child left the household.

Stepchildren

In the section of the questionnaire on children, the respondent is first asked "Have you ever raised stepchildren?" By stepchildren we mean children from a former union of a spouse or common-law partner. If the answer is yes, the following question is: "How many step-children have you raised?"

Adopted children

The respondent is then asked: "Have you ever adopted children (exclude any stepchildren reported in the previous question)?" and "How many children have you adopted?" Only then is the respondent asked whether he has fathered (or whether she has given birth to) a child and how many.

Date of birth and date of joining and leaving the parental home

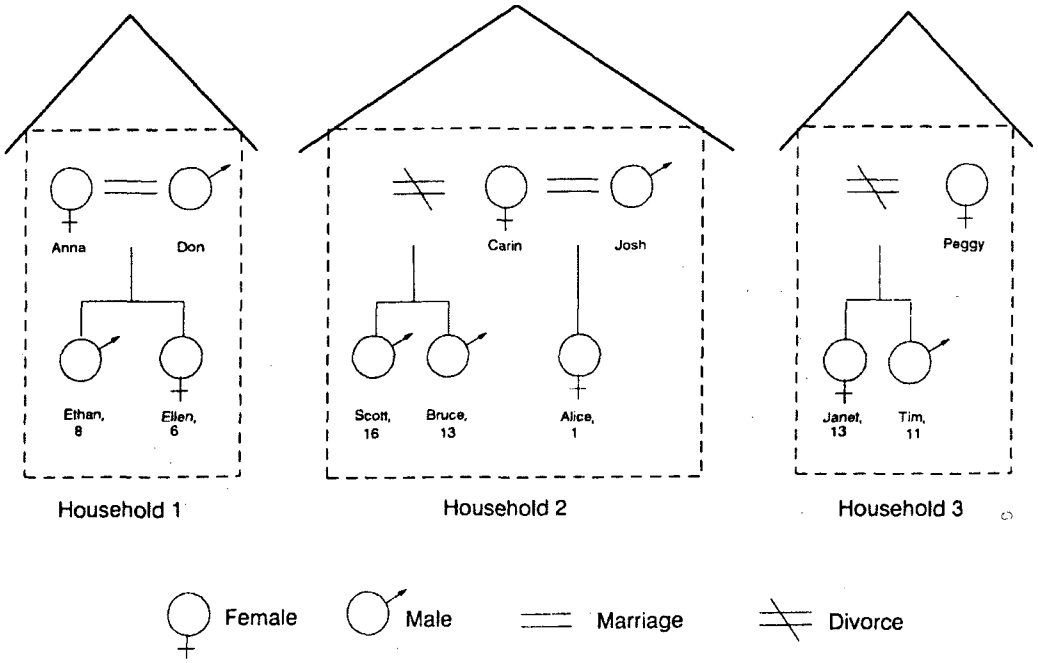
Information concerning the age and sex of any child, as well as his or her month and year of birth is also requested from respondents (starting with the first child and up to thirteen children). If the respondent reported having adopted children or stepchildren, he/she is asked in what month and year and at what age these children joined the household. The date when they join the family is when a child arrives in the household through adoption; or, in the case of stepfamilies, it is the beginning of the relationship between parent and stepparent or after the union has

been formed. The same issue concerning the availability of data emerged here: Statistics Canada did not provide the dates of these events, but only the age of the respondents when the children were born, when they join the household or leave the parental home.

3.3 Constructing and analyzing stepfamily episodes

Since creating stepfamily episodes is somewhat technical, we will go back to our example of the stepfamily household from Chapter I, section 6 in order to demonstrate different pathways of stepfamily formation. This will help understand the meaning of a stepfamily episode. Even if the following section may resemble more of a narrative at times, hypothetical family stories will help illustrate how complex the process of "becoming a stepfamily" can actually be.

Diagram 3.2: Kinship ties due to divorce and remarriage in a network



Kinship ties due to divorce and remarriage in a network Reported by Anne C. Bernstein (1988). "Unraveling the Tangles: Children's Understanding of Stepfamily Kinship." In William R. BEER. (Ed.). *Relative Strangers: Studies of Stepfamily Processes*. (p. 83-111). NJ: Rowan&Littlefield. Drawing extended and adapted by (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994).

Looking at the example provided by Bernstein (1988) (see diagram above), we can see that Don and Carin were married when they were both 22 years old. Scott and Bruce were born within the first four years of their marriage, the parents being 23 at Scott's birth and 26 at Bruce's birth. After Bruce's birth Don left Carin and the two boys.

Shortly after separating from Carin, Don met Anna and they got married a year after. Don was then 28 years old. Within a couple of years, Don and Anna had their two children, Ethan and Ellen, Don being 31 at Ethan's birth and 33 at Ellen's birth. With the birth of Ethan, Bruce and Scott now have a stepbrother and with the arrival of Ellen, a stepsister. Theoretically, the beginning of the stepfamily episode for Dona and Anna starts before the birth of Ethan, that is, when Don and Anna started living together. However, the beginning date might vary depending upon whom between Don and Anna responded to the survey. If Don was the respondent, the stepfamily episode starts when he began living with Anna, except if he reported that his children, Bruce and Scott, had definitively left his household earlier on. If Anna was the respondent, the episode starts at the time she mentioned that Bruce and Scott joined her household. Let us recall here the importance of the concept of stepfamily environment. With Bruce and Scott living with their mother's, Don and Anna form an intact family from a residential perspective, though they clearly live in a stepfamily environment, even though in the analyses of stepfamily dynamics we do not focus on the stepfamily environment. One important point to mention here is, that the distinction between a residential and environmental approach is not always clear cut from a retrospective point of view, as we do not have fine data on the living arrangements of children throughout the episode.

Carin did not remain single either: after several years of being a single mother she met Josh who moved in shortly after they met. She was 36 years old at the time. Josh became a stepfather to Bruce and Scott and the stepfather family episode started when he moved in. After two years, Carin and Jon had a daughter,

Alice. With the arrival of Alice, the stepfather family became a blended stepfather family.

Josh had also had a conjugal past before he met Carin: he lived in a common-law union[24] with Peggy with whom he has two children, Janet who is 13 and Tim who is 11. With the arrival of Alice, Janet and Tim acquired a stepsister even if they do not live with her.

This example allows us to see how stepfamily episodes emerge. But although the survey provided information on the presence of other family members, it is only for the respondent that we have extended information on his/her conjugal past and the age at the time of particular events, enabling us to identify the beginning and end of his/her stepfamily episode. For example, if Carin had been the respondent, we would know her conjugal history and the dates of birth of those children reported as hers, namely Scott, Bruce and Alice.

One way in which a stepfamily episode might begin has not been mentioned so far as it is not illustrated in the diagram: a parent who did not have custody of his/her children, but they join him/her at a later date. Let us illustrate the case with the following scenario from Peggy's perspective:

Peggy lives alone because Janet and Jim stay with their father Josh. At the time of the divorce, Peggy was only 30 years old. She wanted to go back to school in order to finish a degree and did not have the money or time to look after the two children. Peggy and Josh decided that he would have the children full time at his place and she would spend some weekends and holidays with them. Over the following years, she maintained good contact with the children. After a while, she met Peter and they moved in together after they both finished their degrees and obtained a job. They were both 33 years old at the time. When Peggy turned 35,

[24] In the original diagram, common-law union was not mentioned, but to reflect today's family diversity, we decided to add this as a type of a union.

she and Peter decided, in agreement with Josh, to have Peggy's children full time in their house. Peter thus became their stepfather. The stepfamily episode started the moment the children joined the household of Peggy and Peter, when Peggy was 35 years old. However, we should mention that with the information provided by the General Social Survey, we would consider the beginning of the episode when Peggy formed her union with Peter. Since the children are biological children to her and Peggy is not asked when they join her household, only when they left her household. Nevertheless this fictive example shows us another possibility of the beginning of a stepfamily episode.

We know that the stepfamily episode for Carin and Josh started when Carin was 36 and we know their type of union: they are married. We also know when Carin's former family broke up, when she was 27, and we know that the reason her intact family episode ended was due to divorce (and not the death of the partner) since Don is still in the picture. In order to identify the type of ending we know that Statistics Canada provides us with the information on why a union ended which tells us that Don is still alive. If we assume that Carin is the respondent, she would have been asked about the reason for the end of her union. We also know the date of Alice's birth, so we can identify the date of the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family. From these diagrams, we can deduct the families' past and the beginning of the "new families". However, we do not know when or how these families will end. Diagram 3.2 provides a snapshot of stepfamily reality at one point in time. What becomes of these households later and what further transitions they go through we cannot foresee. It is therefore useful to speculate on possible outcomes and, even if our study focuses on stepfamily instability, it is also interesting to see that there are other types of endings. However, we can only imagine different scenarios. Although the diagram shows the complexity of the relationships, in terms of actual data, we only have answers for one respondent, Carin. We can thus trace her stepfamily episode and speculate on possible endings for her stepfamily household.

Story I (from blended to intact)

Carin and Josh live together, Scott moves out at 20 when Carin is 43, and Bruce leaves the parental home when he is 19 when Carin is 48. Their blended stepfamily episode ends with Bruce's departure. However, Alice is still there, so this family would be seen as an intact family, though, for the purpose of our study on stepfamilies, we would end our observation with Bruce moving out.

Story II (from blended to step)

Bruce and Scott decide to live at Carin and Josh's home during their university years, since the faculty is close and they like living at home. However, as soon as she is 18 (so when Carin is 56), Alice decides to move to do a college degree abroad. With her moving out, the blended family episode ends and the family would be considered a stepfamily, since the common child of Carin and Josh has left the parental home, but Josh's stepsons, Bruce and Scott, still live with them.

Story III (from step to single mother)

After several years, Josh finds it too difficult to get along with the two boys, Bruce and Scott. He is continually fighting with them and his relationship with Carin is suffering from the constant conflict. He is very much attached to Alice but decides to leave her with Carin when he splits up with her, Alice now being 5 years old. Carin is thus 43 years old when her stepfamily episode ends due to divorce and she becomes a single mother of two sets of children.

Story IV (from step to single father)

Carin and Josh have, overall, successfully managed their family life. However, at 46, Carin got a serious form of cancer and died when Alice was 8 years old. The stepfamily episode ends then due to the death of one of the partners. The family continues to have a 'step' element, if Bruce and Scott live with Josh and Alice,

but according to our definitions, this is no longer a stepfamily but a single parent household.

Story V (ongoing episode)

Carin and Josh stay together until the end of our observation which is the date of the interview.

So far, we have seen that a stepfamily episode is defined by either the beginning of a union with pre-union children (the case of Carin and Josh or of Anna and Don) or the arrival of stepchildren within a union (the fictional example of Peggy and Peter). We have also seen that the end of a stepfamily episode can be defined by separation, death, the date of departure of the children or it can be ongoing when we end our observation. The identification of stepfamily episodes is quite a complex task because one needs information about the union history of the respondent and to combine this with the number of children reported for the respondent. Missing values in variables providing information on union and child history often cause major problems in the identification of stepfamily episodes, since it is then difficult to pinpoint the beginning and end of a stepfamily. The aim has been, despite missing values, to gather as many stepfamily episodes as possible, without compromising the quality of our data, and in this way be able to run survivor analyses.

We started constructing these episodes by first extracting information on the union histories of respondents, including the type of union (whether it was a marriage or a common-law union) and their age at the beginning and end of each union; if the union is ongoing at the time of the survey, the age of the respondent at the time of the survey will also be of interest and taken as the end of the observation. In some cases, the date of the beginning or end of a union is missing or not available in chronological order and we had to eliminate or impute those cases. The following example of a union history is based on the questionnaire

results and will illustrate our point. We will only look at the union history; potential children are not of concern at this moment.

Anna starts her first union when she is 19; she is not married but lives in a common-law union until she is 25. After separating from her boyfriend, she lives alone for a couple of years until she meets her new boyfriend, Albert. Anna and Albert live in a common-law union until Albert leaves her when she is 34. At age 41, Anna decides to marry Jeffrey to whom she is still married at the time of the interview. From this example, we now know several important points: Anna's age when she started and ended her unions (which allows us to calculate the duration of each union), the type and number of unions she has had so far, as well as the type of ending (e.g. her second union ended due to separation and not because of Albert's death).

In order to know if Anna has experienced a stepfamily episode, we need to know whether she has given birth to, adopted or raised any children and when these children were born. Looking at the children Anna has had so far during her life and combining this information with what we know of her union history, we will be able to identify which child belongs to which union. We therefore extended our example of the case of Anna by adding the children she reported to her union history. Thus, the example provides the combination of a child and union history. So far, we know that Anna has had three unions, the last one ongoing at the time of the survey and being one of marriage.

During her life, Anna has had three biological children and one stepchild; we obtained this information from the variable *chdtype*, as explained previously. When Anna was 24, she gave birth to Bruno but, as we know, this union did not last and when she separated one year later, she remained alone with Bruno until she met Albert when she was 28, when she entered a common-law relationship with him. They formed a stepfather family since Albert is Bruno's stepfather. Anna gave birth to Jane at age 29. Albert now has a biological child himself and

the stepfamily becomes a blended stepfather family the moment Jane was born. When Anna turned 32, their second common child, Harry, was born. Anna left Albert when she was 34 years old and became a single mother with three children from two different relationships. Anna then met Tom when she was 41 and they married. Tom brought his daughter from his previous relationship into the marriage. Anna became a stepmother to Tom's daughter. Anna and Tom live with four children under one roof. Since both brought children from previous unions to the family, we have a stepfather and stepmother family. This example shows that a respondent can have several transitions from being in a union to being a single parent and back again, etc. For the purpose of this dissertation we are only interested in Anna's fist stepfamily episode, consequently her union with Albert.

Indeed, in this study, we will only analyze first stepfamily episodes since a different theoretical framework would be required in order to include a second stepfamily episode. In later stepfamily episodes, the risk of separation or of having a common child could be explained by reasons other than those that can be identified for people entering a stepfamily for the first time. Indeed, the literature mostly deals with the first episode and it could be interesting for future research to elaborate on subsequent stepfamily episodes. One factor explaining why the analysis of subsequent episodes is not taken into account might be linked to missing data. Identifying valid stepfamily episodes is already problematic for the first episode and missing data is likely to become even more of an issue for subsequent episodes.

3.4 The sample size for the dynamics of stepfamilies

The preparation of the data led to a huge reduction in the sample size. As will be shown, a large proportion of cases were dropped simply because respondents had not experienced any stepfamily episode. The initial sample size included 24,310 respondents. We eliminated 4,916 respondents who had never had a union, and were not, therefore, eligible for having experienced a stepfamily episode. A

further 3,590 respondents were eliminated, because although they had had at least one union, they never had any children (either biological, adopted or stepchildren). Another 192 respondents were eliminated because they had only had one union and the date of the beginning of this union was missing, which made it impossible to identify whether it was a stepfamily episode. 12,363 respondents had only intact families, regardless of their number of unions, so they were also left out (for example, a respondent may have had two unions, but only had children in the later ongoing union). 273 children were imputed by Statistics Canada[25] and excluded. Finally, we had 695 cases in which missing values made it impossible to reconstruct a stepfamily episode. These concerned combinations of missing values for the age at the birth of the children, age at their departure and age at the time of the interview (299 cases), a combination of missing values in the unions (37 cases), or a combination of missing values related to the children and the union history (251 cases). Upon closer inspection, a further 108 cases were found to be intact families, despite missing values in their union or child history.

Table 3.1 summarizes the reduction of the sample size from 24,310 to 2,389 respondents who had experienced at least one episode of stepfamily life.

596 out of the 2,389 cases were imputed by us because, although they had missing values in either the child history or the union history, it was nevertheless possible to establish a stepfamily episode (see below).

[25] All in all, *1,960* out of *41,279* children were imputed with data provided by Statistics Canada. The age, sex and type of children were imputed. For all these children, there is no information on their age when they left the household; and for those who are adopted or stepchildren, we lack information on when they joined the household. We eliminated, therefore, respondents who had only imputed children. In the other cases, valid values were available for the siblings (not imputed, therefore) and it was possible to identify an episode.

Table 3.1: Reduction of sample size

Reason for exclusion	Number of cases excluded
No union at all, so no stepfamily episode possible	4,916
At least one union, but no children (biological, adopted or step)	3,590
Only one union, but the date the union began is missing	192
Intact families, only biological children (or adopted) living with their parents in one household	12,255
Respondent has only children with exclusively imputed data on them (see footnote 4 for information)	273
Missing values in all directions (no dates for the beginning or end of a union or dates reversed, no date for children's birth, no date for when children join or leave the household etc., i.e. no identifiable stepfamily episode	695
Number of excluded cases	21,921

We will describe two different situations in order to provide an example of how we imputed cases with missing values, one in which we imputed and a second one in which we defined an end time to the union since it was not reported.

A major problem with our data is that the arrival of stepchildren in the household was not reported by respondents; however, the date when the child left was reported, so we do know whether the children still lived with the respondent despite the fact that it was difficult to establish the beginning of the stepfamily episode. However, upon careful examination of the data, in some cases, we were

able to establish a date when the stepfamily episode began. Imagine the following fictional case:

Britney reports that she has two children, one stepchild and one biological child. Looking at her conjugal history, we can see that she married Frank at age 31. Frank has a biological child that will join his union with Britney. Unfortunately, Britney does not recall when Frank's child, i.e. her stepchild, joined the household during her marriage to Frank. Britney separated from Frank at age 33 and gave birth to her own biological child shortly after their divorce. When Britney is asked about her children, she reported having a stepchild who lived with her even after the separation, but she does not recall the date of arrival of this child. However, Britney reported the age of the stepchild, so we know that he/she was born before her marriage to Frank and when Britney was 22. Since we know that the stepchild lived with her after she and Frank divorced, and since we know the beginning of her union with Frank, we decided to take the beginning of this union as the beginning of the stepfamily episode, despite the fact that the date when Britney's stepchild (Frank's child) joined the household is missing. This means that the date of the beginning of the stepfamily episode was imputed.

The second example will show how we censored data in cases with missing values for union variables. Let us take the fictional example of Mary. Mary lived in a common-law union with Peter from age 20 to age 23 and had one son within this union who was born when she was 22. Mary left Peter when she is 23. Until she married Mark at age 30, she was a single mother. However, she later separated from Mark but did not report the date of her separation. We know that her son is still with her, so we are able to identify her stepfamily episode as starting when she married at age 30. Since we know that she separated but we do not know when, we stopped the observation 6 months after her marriage to Mark. In other words, we were able to identify an entry into a stepfamily episode and kept her under observation 6 months after entry.

We could invent many stories to illustrate the combinations of missing values and how we treated them, but these two examples were the most common scenarios, which is why they are reported here. The example of Mary also shows that we can only use her case for certain aspects of our analyses, as we will see later on.

One last scenario has to be taken into account, cases in which the children were born very shortly before a union. We know that the date of birth is a key variable in constructing stepfamily episodes and in knowing whether a biological child to the respondent is a stepchild to his/her partner, e.g. whether he/she was born before the union under observation. However, if the child was born shortly before the union but not within a previous union, it is difficult to determine whether the child belongs to the union or not, because there are no questions in the questionnaire about who the other parent is. We decided to consider a child born up to 6 months prior to the beginning of the union as belonging to this union, in other words as a biological child to this union, following previous Canadian research (Desrosiers and Le Bourdais, 1992; and Desrosiers et al., 1994; see the discussion in this dissertation: Chapter II, section 5.3.1).

In order to see if there is a difference in the outcome depending on whether one used a 6 month or a 12 month period as the cut-off point (as suggested by some researchers, e.g. Thomson and Allen Li, 2002), we also looked at the consequences in our study by using the 12 month cut-off point to see if this would affect our analysis. In our data, 54 cases would then have to be considered intact families and 36 families would remain stepfamilies, though the start date of their episode would change. Often, in many cases, it is the presence of another child that defines the family as a stepfamily, and not the birth of this biological child[26].

[26] Running the Cox model, no changes in the results could be observed, and we therefore chose to retain the more standard cut-off point of 6 months.

Our aim has been to keep as many stepfamily episodes as possible, even if missing data has caused problems in establishing these episodes. The decision to drop some cases and impute others was the subject of many discussions in order to ensure that each decision was reasonable and did not jeopardize the quality of our data. Compared to the initial 24,310, one can see that this relatively small number of 2,389 respondents is not just a consequence of missing values: more often, it is actually simply because respondents did not meet the criteria for a stepfamily episode.

This final sample size allows us to run our two different analyses on 1) stepfamily instability and 2) the arrival of a common child. A further 309 respondents were eliminated because the children living in the household were over 21 at the beginning of the episode and the cut-off point for the youngest child still living at home is age 21 (for reasons discussed in Chapter III, section 2.1). We thus obtained 2,080 respondents.

For the second analysis, on the arrival of a common child, we also eliminated cases in which women were older than 42 at the beginning of the episode because female fertility decreases with age and 42 is the accepted limit (during our sensitivity analysis we ran the data with other ages as cut-off points for female fertility, but the results were not significantly different from those using 42)[27]. The final sample size for the second analysis was, therefore, 1,885 respondents after eliminating 195[28] women older than 42.

4. Methods of analyzing the dynamics of stepfamilies

The empirical analysis was done with event history analysis. This is a very useful method of studying the timing of an event in relation to covariates which may or may not vary over time. An event is a "shift from a mutually exclusive state to

[27] For the treatment of sterilized respondents, see section Chapter II, section 5.6
[28] *(2,080-195=1,885)*

another, and occurring at a specific and known point in time" (Luke, 1993, p. 205). For the first part of the analysis on stepfamily dynamics, the dependent variable is the risk of separation[29]; for the second part, it is the risk of having a common child. The events in the two analyses are 1) separation and 2) arrival of a common child.

Event history analysis combines two types of methods. First, there is the life table or survivor approach. This measures the probability or risk and timing of events, e.g. the risk of divorce at a certain point in time. The second method is regression analysis which examines the effects of covariates on a dependent variable. Proportional hazard models are well suited to the study of the timing of the transition from being in a stepfamily to a separation, in relation to the circumstances under which a stepfamily is at risk of separation. Similarly, for our second analysis, proportional hazard models are also appropriate to the study of the timing of the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family, in relation to the circumstances under which a stepfamily decides to have an additional child.

In event history analysis, four basic elements of information are required to construct an episode file (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995). The first is the time when the episode starts, i.e. entering a stepfamily. The second is the origin state, i.e. being in a stepfamily. The third type of information is the destination state, i.e. the outcome of a transition; for our analyses this includes 1) separation as opposed to non separation or 2) the arrival of a common child. The determining event for the destination date would then be 1) separation or 2) the birth of the common child. The dependent variable for the first analysis is the risk of separation and, in the second, it is the arrival of a common child. The fourth element of information required is the time of ending of an episode. As mentioned previously, there are different types of endings for our stepfamily episodes: 1) separation, 2) death of a partner or child, 3) stepchild leaving the household, 4)

[29] The term *risk* is specific to event history analysis. It refers to the likelihood of something occurring, rather than being associated with any notion of danger as it is in its more common definition.

interview date, union still ongoing, or 5) censored due to missing values (recall the example of Britney and Frank). In our first analysis, the end of an episode is defined by a separation; this means all other types of ending have been censored. For example if a partner died, the respondent is no longer at risk of separation and would be consequently censored. In the second analysis, the ending is the birth of a child, so all other types of ending are censored.

When applying event history analysis, censoring is of major concern. Indeed, the events we are observing are often censored. This can be either because "the information about the duration in the origin state is incompletely recorded" (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995, p. 34) or because the observation ends with the interview date and before the event actually occurs. Both cases are called right censored. The first case refers to observations where the end is not reported. For example, we are able to identify the beginning of a stepfamily episode but the end is missing. In our study, we took such respondents and observed them for 6 months after entering the stepfamily episode. In other words, we censored them after 6 months (see the example of Mary and Mark reported in Chapter III, section 3.4). Survival analysis allows us to use censored data without biasing the survival estimates (Luke, 1993).

The other kind of right censoring occurs if the observation ends (this is usually the interview date), or if a partner dies or the children defining the stepfamily leave the household before the respondent experienced the event. In those cases, the episode is still ongoing but censored at the date of the interview. This kind of censoring is very common in event history analysis and unproblematic (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995). In our examples, this would mean that the respondent is still in a union at the interview date, in other words he did not experience a separation. In the second analysis, this would mean that a child had not been born to the respondent at the time of the interview, so there was no transition from a step to a blended family.

The other type of censoring is called left censoring. This means that the beginning and the end of the episode occurs before our observations, or that the beginning already happened when we started the observation but the episode is ongoing. However, with retrospective data, left censoring does not apply. That said, there might be cases with missing data where we did not know the date of the beginning of the union or of the arrival of the common child, in which case these were excluded right from the start since the absence of theses dates meant that no episode could be defined.

4.1 A short description of the models

The first step in our study of stepfamily dynamics was to run some descriptive analyses. A survivor function was used, the so-called Kaplan-Meier estimation. This "product-limit method is based on the calculation of a risk set at every point in time where at least one event occurred" (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995, p. 66). The beauty of a Kaplan-Meier estimation is that it allows us to show graphically the distribution of our variable. The survivor function in the Kaplan-Meier is explained as follows:

We assume a sample of N episodes, all having the same state of origin and here one single transition, e.g. being in a stepfamily, and all having the same destination state (e.g. a separation) or being right censored. First, we consider the points in time where at least one of the episodes is marked by an event. We assume x points in time.

$$\tau_1 \quad < \tau_2 < \tau_3 < \tau_4 \ldots . \tau_x$$

Second, we have to define three basic quantities, defined for l=1,…., x, with the principle that $\tau_0 = 0$

E_l =number of episodes with events at τ_l

Z_l =number of censored episodes ending in $[\tau_{l-1}, \tau_l]$

R_l =number of episodes in the risk set at τ_l, denoted R_l (see Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995)

If we have these quantities, we can define the Kaplan-Meier product-limit estimation as follows (Model 1):

$$\hat{G}(t) = \prod_{l:\tau_l < t} \left(1 - \frac{E_l}{R_l}\right),$$

We should note that the implied definition of the risk set allows handling episodes with a starting time greater than zero. The risk set at τ_l includes episodes that are censored at this point in time. This assumes "that a censored episode contains the information that there was no event up to *and including* the observed ending time of the episode" (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995, p. 67). The Kaplan-Meier method gives a simple estimate of the cumulated transition rate in addition to the survivor function:

$$\hat{H}(t) = -\log\left(\hat{G}(t)\right)$$

The second step of the analysis consists in expressing the transition rate as a function of a set of explicative variables and of the time dependency of these variables. Here, the Cox model (Model 2) can be used as follows:

$$H_0^{(t)} \exp(\beta X)$$

The first component $H_0^{(t)}$ represents the underlying baseline hazard function, which varies over time but is left unspecific. The second component contains the parameter (ßi) to be estimated and which measures the effects on the baseline hazard of a set of individual characteristics (Xi), some of which may change over time (Cox, 1972). A time varying covariate in our model is, for example, the type of union. A person can enter a stepfamily episode while living in a common-law relationship and might marry during the observation, thus moving from a common-law union to a marriage during the course of our observation period. Another example would be work status. A person might enter a stepfamily while being unemployed but find employment during the observation period, so the value changes over time.

5. Covariates for the cross-sectional analysis at survey time

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the third set of variables allowed us to construct covariates. They will be explained in the following paragraphs.

The number of children and their age

The variable we were interested in was the age of the youngest child in the household. Since, as already mentioned, the respondent is asked how old he/she is when the children were born, we are able to deduce which child is the youngest and create age groups for the children accordingly. Also, since the respondent is asked how many children he/she has and since we know if the children live with him/her, we can calculate the number of children living in the household.

Duration of the union

The duration of the union is calculated by subtracting the age of the respondent at the time of the survey from the age of the respondent when entering the union which is identified as the one concerning his/her stepfamily.

Age of the parents

The age of the father and the mother, i.e. the respondent and his or her partner, upon entering the family is also included in our research. Since we know the respondent's age for the current union, we know his/her age at survey.

Region

Statistics Canada also provides information on the region where the respondent lives. We will summarize the variable for the ten Canadian provinces in the following two categories: the rest of Canada and Quebec.

Religious affiliation

In the next step, we wanted to know about the respondents' religious affiliations and their participation in religious activities. A respondent could choose from 16 categories[30], but these were summarized by Statistics Canada into a single derived variable with four categories: Protestant, Catholic, Others and no religion. Every respondent is asked about his/her religion and attendance at religious ceremonies (e.g. "Other than on special occasions, (such as wedding, funerals or baptisms) how often did you attend religious services or meetings in the last 12 months?") The respondent could choose from:

1. at least once a week
2. at least once a month
3. a few times a year
4. at least once a year
5. not at all
6. don't know
7. refused

[30] There is: No religion, Anglican, Baptist, Buddhist, Eastern Orthodox, Hindu, Islam (Muslim), Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Sikh, Ukrainian Catholic, United Church, Other, refused. These were the categories the respondent could choose from: this was not an open question.

We put these practicing habits into the following groupings: often (category 1 and 2), sometimes (category 3 and 4), never (category 5).

Income

The next variable in which we were interested was the respondent's financial situation, using the questions on family income. Statistics Canada provides us with information on the size of the respondent's household and with a variable presenting the total household income. With these two elements, we derived a variable combining household size and total household income. Here, we followed the method developed by Statistics Canada for the panel of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth conducted in 1996-97 (Statistics Canada, 1996-97). Broadly speaking, equivalent family income was calculated by relating the total household income to the number of household members. Families were then classified into five categories that characterize the standard of living that they can achieve with their income. These five categories refer to economic conditions that are qualified as: 1) inferior, 2) intermediate inferior, 3) intermediate, 4) intermediate superior and 5) superior. The first two categories were combined here to form the 'low income' category, since we did not have enough cases to treat them separately[31].

Working hours

As we were interested in how many hours a respondent works per week, we also looked at questions in the survey relating to this topic. The respondent is asked: "During the past 12 months, what was your main activity: working at a job or business, looking for paid work, going to school, caring for children, household work, retired or something else". This allows us to know if he or she worked or not. We then obtain information on whether the respondent was self employed or not: "Did you have a job or were you self-employed at any time during the past 12

[31] Due to confidentiality issues, Statistics Canada does not allow us to take out cells with less than 5 respondents in it. Thus we had to summarize category one and two here.

months?" Finally, we are given information on the amount of time the respondent worked, since he or she was asked: "How many hours a week did you usually work at all jobs?" Combining these questions enabled us to create a variable for the average number of weekly hours worked by the respondent during the course of a year. We were first interested in seeing whether the respondent was employed or not and, if so, how many hours he or she worked in a week. We ended up with four categories, ranging from full-time work to not working.

Values and Attitudes

Last but not least, we were interested in some values and attitudes with regard to the respondent's family life and looked at some of the questions he/she had been asked on the subject. The following series of questions were asked: "Overall, would you say that your relationship is

1. very happy
2. fairly happy
3. not too happy
4. don't know
5. refused

and "Do you and your (spouse/partner) often, sometimes, hardly ever or never have arguments about chores and responsibilities?"

The same type of questions were asked about (dis)agreements on issues relating to children and money. In additional, the respondent was asked about his/her level of satisfaction concerning the balance between work and family: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the balance between your job and family and home life?"

As previously mentioned, the answer to this series of questions on values and attitudes is only available for the moment of the survey and not

retrospectively. Therefore, unfortunately, we cannot include these variables in the longitudinal part of our analyses.

6. Covariates for the retrospective analyses: Stepfamily dynamics

For our second and third analyses on the dynamics of stepfamilies, we included the following covariates: the age of the respondent upon entering the stepfamily, the age of the youngest child in the household, the number of children, the type of union, region, religion, the time period during which the stepfamily life was experienced into a stepfamily, education and work status, as well as language at birth. We should mention at this point that initially, education and mother tongue were also introduced in the cross-sectional analysis, but since the results showed no perceivable effect, these two variables were not investigated further.

Age-related variables

The age of the mother and father and the age of the youngest child at the beginning of the stepfamily episode can be derived from the information we have on dates: dates of birth of the respondent, of his/her children and of his/her partner, and the date of entry into the union identified as the stepfamily episode (recall for example the narrative stories of Carin and Josh).

Number of children

Since we know how many children a respondent has had during his/her life, and since we know whether they are with him/her upon entering the stepfamily, we can calculate the number of children at the beginning of the stepfamily episode.

Type of union

As already mentioned previously, we always know a respondent's type of union for every union reported. This means we know what type of union forms the basis of the stepfamily episodes identified.

Religion

We were only able to look at the respondent's religion and not his/her practice, since we do not have that information retrospectively. This is why we adopted the same categories as referred to in the descriptive part of the dissertation, i.e. Protestant, Catholic, others and no religion.

Education

With regard to education, the respondent was asked about the highest level of education he/she ever attained, and we summarized educational background as follows: Less than high school, high school, some college education, college degree or above. We should note that what was asked was the highest level of education attained and not the number of years spent in school.

Region and mother tongue

In order to get a better idea as to whether some effects might be attributed to differences between Quebec and Anglophone Canada, we introduced not only region but also mother tongue as a variable in our study. Note here that we looked at mother tongue as we do not have retrospective information on the language spoken in the respondent's home. We summarized the categories as English, French, English and French, and other.

Work status

Since we were interested in the respondent's work status, we created a variable derived from his/her work episodes. Fortunately, such episodes are collected retrospectively which enabled us to identify the respondent's work status specifically upon entering the stepfamily episode. The respondent was asked when (month, year) and at what age he or she started to work for the first time. Once again, Statistics Canada only provided us with the age of the respondent when he/she started working. In addition, the respondent was asked if, during the first work period, he or she was ever absent for more than three months. If a first work episode was identified, he or she was then also asked about further ones. Up to four work episodes were followed up on, thus allowing us to construct a variable concerning work status. As we will see later on, this variable was created as a time varying covariate with the categories: Never worked, working and not working. We will treat men and women separately, because education and work may well operate differently for men and women.

Sterilization

Last but not least, for the analysis of the arrival of a common child, we were interested in whether the respondent had been sterilized or not. In the section on fertility and family intentions, the respondent is asked if he or she had ever had an operation which now makes it impossible for him/her to have further children and if that operation was for medical of contraceptive reasons. The respondent is also asked when this event occurred. As usual, even though the respondent provided the year and month of the event, we only have his/her age at the time. The same questions are asked of the respondent's current partner, i.e. the partner at survey time. However, this information is not available for retrospective partners, so we can only use the date of sterilization for the respondent.

IV. FINDINGS ON STEPFAMILIES AT SURVEY TIME

Introduction

In the following we will present the findings of families at survey time. The focus is on comparing stepfamilies with intact and lone-parent families in order to get a clearer picture of current stepfamilies. We are interested in whether stepfamilies are a very different form of families or if they are similar in their characteristics on socio-demographic and economic variables to intact families. As we already discussed in Chapter I, section 6, one focus of the results will also rely on the comparison between families taken into account from a residential basis and from an environmental basis. We start by presenting the findings on the numbers of *step*families (section 1), and then the findings on socio-demographic characteristics which compared stepfamilies to intact families and lone-parent families (section 2).

1. Estimating the number of stepfamilies

Table 4.1 presents the distribution of families, based on a residential definition often used in research, i.e. including only respondents who, at the time of survey, declared themselves to be living with children, on either a part-time or full-time basis. Here we take a broader approach than usual by including all children, even if they only live with the respondent on a part-time basis. The rationale for this decision is that, even if the children only live with the respondent on a part-time basis, the respondent must provide them with time, space and money regardless of how much time they might actually spend with the respondent. In addition, even though they only live together part time, we can assume that they affect the family life and planning of the respondent's household. As can be seen in Table 4.1, 10.6% of Canadian families with at least one child under the age of 21 are stepfamilies; 18.5% include a single parent living with children (a single mother

in 13.9% of the cases, a single father in 4.6% of the cases); 70.9% are intact families, i.e. a couple living with their own biological or adopted children.

Table 4.1: Distribution (in %)[1] of families with children under 21, according to the type of family (N =7709)

Type of family	Distribution
Intact	70.9
Stepfamily	10.6
Lone parent	18.5
- Single mother	13.9
- Single father	4.6
Total	100.0

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

Table 4.2 further distinguishes stepfamilies according to the origin and number of siblings present in the household. Stepfather families are the most common type of stepfamilies: 71.2% of all stepfamilies are formed around a stepfather. Within stepfather families we have 42.9% without a common child and 28.3% with a common child. We called the families with a common child blended families; consequently we have here 28.3% blended stepfather families. We can identify 18.5% as stepmother families, hence stepfamilies formed around a stepmother and a biological father. Here we can further see that 11.0% of the stepmother families are without a common child and 7.5% have a common child, in other words we can identify 7.5% as blended stepmother families. The smallest categories are stepfather and stepmother families, which constitute 10.2%. These

families mix two sets of siblings. Within stepfather and stepmother families we can identify 9.3% being without a common child and 0.9% with a common child. This last type of stepfamily, also known as blended stepmother/stepfather families is the most complex in our sample: it mixes three sets of children, his, hers and theirs.

Table 4.2: Distribution (in %)[1] of stepfamilies with children under 21, according to the type of family (N=815)

Type of family	Distribution
Stepfather family	71.2
- without common children	42.9
- with common children	28.3
Stepmother family	18.5
- without common children	11.0
- with common children	7.5
Stepfather and stepmother families	10.2
- without common children	9.3
- with common children	0.9
Total	100.0

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

The blended stepfather/stepmother family is the least prevalent type of stepfamily in Canada, and it is certainly less common than is often assumed by

the media (Bien et al., 2002). By contrast, stepfamilies formed around a mother and her children are the most frequently observed type of stepfamilies.

The number of households and individuals involved in stepfamily constellations is undoubtedly underestimated when measured, as it was here, from a residential point of view. On the one hand, a small fraction of children only visit the household of their non-custodial parent on an irregular or occasional basis; consequently, they are not counted as members of that household[32].

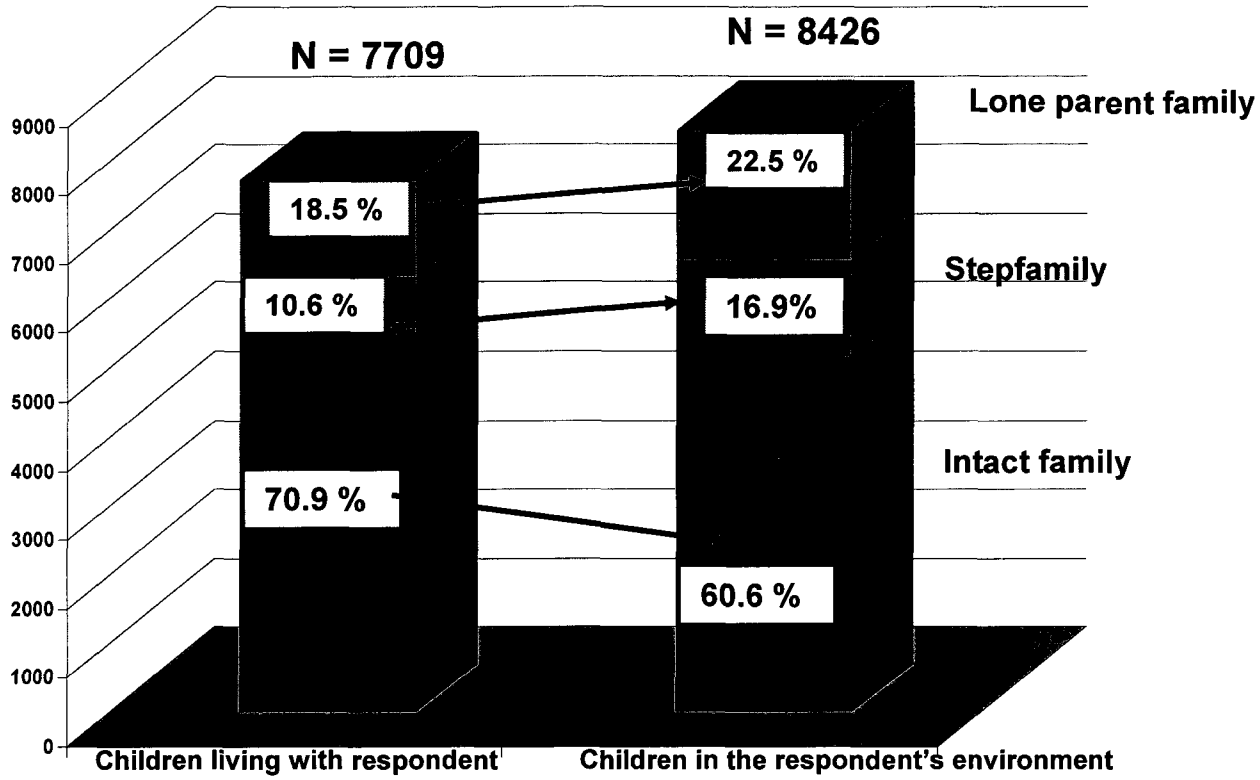
In order to obtain an estimate of all the households that are involved in a stepfamily constellation, even if only on an occasional basis, we first kept all respondents who had children under 21, even if they did not live under the same roof on a full-time or part-time basis.

We should recall here, as we explained in Chapter III, that we counted only children living full time or part time with the respondent as belonging to his/her household, since it was confirmed that they live with him/her. However, we can assume that children who are not living on a full time or part time basis with respondents may live with them on an occasional basis and are still part of their life; consequently, we included them in their family environment (see Diagram 3.1 in Chapter III, section 2.2 and the story of Robert and Emily). So the respondent still has to provide time, money and possibly space to those children.

This inclusion raised the number of respondents with children from 7,709 to 8,426, and quite substantially modified the distribution of parents across the different types of families (see Figure 4.1).

[32] A number of lone parents might be involved in an intimate relationship with partners who reside in a separate household, that is, in a *LAT* (living apart together) relationship (Levin, 2004); consequently, the children who belong to these lone-parent families are likely to interact with a "stepparent", even if only on an irregular basis. Approximately 30.9 % of single fathers and 27.9% of single mothers living with children aged less than 21 on years old reported to live in a LAT relationship. When these single parent families with a *LAT* partnership are reclassified as being part of a stepfamily environment, the proportion of stepfamilies strongly increases; it raises from approximately 10% to 15% (results not shown).

Figure 4.1: From a residential perspective to an environmental one



Source: Adapted from Martin, V. & C. Le Bourdais, 2007, Stepfamilies in Canada and Germany: a Comparison. Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family

Figure 4.1 shows quite clearly that when respondents who do not live with their children are added to those who do live with their children, the percentage of intact families drops from 70.9% to 60.6%, while that of step- and single-parent families increases: 16.9% of respondents with children are found to live in a couple and to be involved in a stepfamily constellation, and 22.5% are the single parents (i.e. not living with a partner) of children with whom they might not live. The decrease in the number of intact families and, conversely, the increase in the number of stepfamilies, mainly concerns couples who live with the children they have had together and in which at least one partner has a child from a previous relationship who does not reside with them. From a strict residential perspective, they form an intact family but are linked to a stepfamily network. Similarly, the increase in the number of lone parents, predominantly lone fathers, includes

separated parents who do not live with a partner, and who do not reside with their children either.

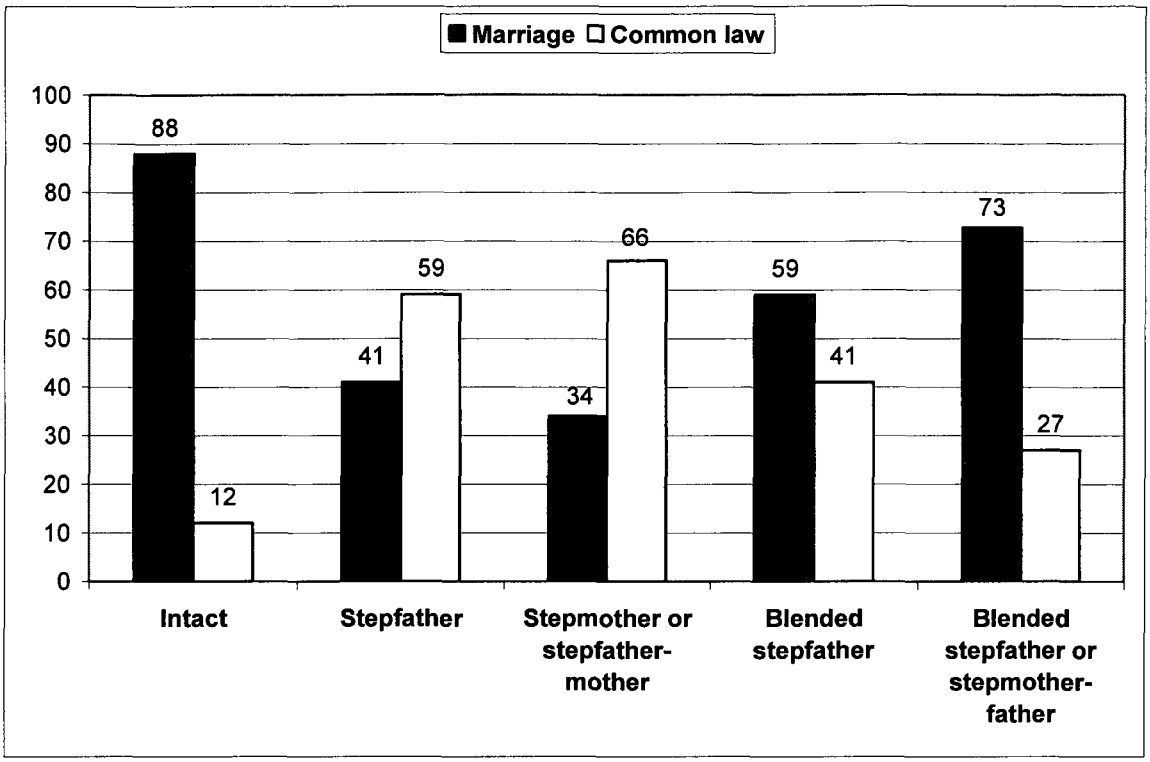
As we have seen, when one includes the children or adults who take on, perhaps only occasionally, the roles of parents/stepparents, children/stepchildren, the number of households and individuals involved in stepparent family constellations greatly increases. Not only does the number of these individuals increase, but the living arrangements and economic conditions of the families to which they belong are likely to differ markedly from those of individuals who are not part of such extended family environments. So although stepchildren are not always physically present in intact family households, economic and other resources may very well be diverted towards the household in which they live. Policy oriented research focusing on the well-being of children and families would thus be well advised to study large family constellations rather than household based families. Unfortunately, we cannot adopt this approach here, due to the lack of information on individuals who are not part of the respondents' households. Therefore, the following analysis is restricted to the 7,709 families defined according to their household boundaries.

2. Comparing stepfamilies with intact and lone- parent families

Common-law unions are frequent in Canada and are increasingly seen as providing an acceptable environment in which to raise a family. However, as shown in Figure 4.2, the likelihood of couples being in a common-law union depends to a large extent on the type of family in which they live. Couples living in an intact family are far more likely to be married than cohabiting, with nearly 90% of them having contracted a legal union. By contrast, couples who live with children in a second family, after the collapse of a first union, are much more likely to opt for a common-law union rather than marriage: approximately 60% of couples living in a stepfather and/or stepmother family are in a common-law relationship. Blended stepfamilies, who share with intact families the presence of

common children, and with simple stepfamilies the presence of stepchildren, stand in between these two figures: roughly 60 to 75% of stepparents living with a common child are married. As Juby et al. (2001) argued, blended stepfamilies do appear to differ qualitatively from simpler stepfamilies; the presence of a common child seems to increase the desire of parents to legalize their union. But still the question remains, did those blended families legalize their union after the common child arrived or did they already legalize their union and then decide to have a common child. As well, we have to keep in mind that the blended families started first as a non-blended family, hence as a stepfamily. So if we assume that the blended family is closer to the intact family, this would come only with the arrival of the common child. This idea would support the idea that a common child links all family members together and that this child might be a bonding factor and as a consequence closer to the intact family (recall the discussion Chapter II, section 4.4). In addition, we should mention here that the non-blended families have two variations: there might be stepfamilies in our sample at survey time which will become blended families but *they did not have the time* to do so before the date of the survey. There might be other stepfamilies who decide not to have any further children. In our analysis on the arrival of a common child, we will further see *what circumstances* support stepfamilies having a common child. This will help us to explain which types of stepfamilies are more likely to become blended families.

Figure 4.2: Distribution (in %)[1] of two parent families with children under 21, according to the type of union (N = 6236)



Source: Statistics Canada, *2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family*
χ^2=990.57 p =.000
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

Not only are variations observed in the proportion of couples living in common-law unions across family types, but there are also regional differences, with common-law unions being much more widespread in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada (Le Bourdais and Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2004). As can be seen in Table 4.3, according to the 2001 GSS, the percentage (14.2%) of stepfamilies among two-parent families with children under 21 is slightly higher in Quebec than it is in the rest of Canada (12.8%), but the gap separating the two regions is not statistically significant. The proportion of common-law couples among two-parent families with children does, however, vary greatly between the two regions. In Quebec, 35% of all couples with children under the age of 21 are cohabiting rather than married, compared to only 11.4% in the rest of the country. If one takes all stepfamilies in Quebec into account, without distinguishing

different types, nearly three couples out of four live in a common-law union, whereas slightly less than half do so elsewhere in Canada.

Table 4.3: The distribution of families with children under 21, according to the type of family and the type of union in Quebec and in the rest of Canada (N=6236) [1]

	Quebec	Elsewhere in Canada
% of stepfamilies among two-parent families with children	14.2	12.8
% of two-parent families with children and living in common-law unions	35.0***	11.4***
% of stepfamilies living in common-law unions	72.7***	47.0***

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
***p=0.01
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

The living arrangements of children and the time they spend in the household varies considerably across the different types of families. By definition, almost all children of intact families live with their two parents on a full-time basis; only a very small fraction of them were found to live only part-time with their parents and this was mostly because they were away from home to attend school or college. Children living in step- and single-parent families formed around mothers are also much more likely to live in the household on a full-time basis, when compared to those who are part of a family formed around fathers (Table 4.4). Over 80% of simple and blended stepfather families and of single-mother families include children who all live at home on a full-time basis. This percentage is much lower (just above 40%) among families centered around fathers; these families are more likely to comprise only children who live in the household on a part-time basis or to combine siblings who have different living arrangements (i.e. some living in the household on a full-time basis, and others

who do so part-time (see Table 4.4). These results are, of course, related to the higher propensity and chances of mothers obtaining the custody of their children following a separation or divorce.

Stepfamilies differ from other types of families in terms of composition and age distribution, as can be seen in Table 4.4. The age distribution of children tends to be younger in intact families, as well as in blended stepfamilies: roughly 70% of the latter and 45% of the former include at least one child under the age of 6. Single-mother families present an intermediate age distribution pattern with roughly a third of them equally distributed in the three age groups considered. This intermediate distribution comes from the fact that these are both families with young mothers who gave birth to a child outside a union and families with mothers who became single parents following the disruption of an intact family. Finally, stepfather families and single-father families are amongst the oldest, with less than 20% of these families including preschool children. Among the former, this result is not surprising, given that mothers usually take longer than fathers to form a union after a separation and thus have older children with them when they start living with a stepfather; as single parents, more separated fathers tend to have custody of older children than do mothers.

The number of children is larger, by definition, in blended stepfamilies that mix at least two sets of siblings. These families comprise between 2.6 and 2.9 children, that is, on average, approximately one more child than single-parent families and simple stepfamilies.

Table 4.4: Distribution (in %)[1] of families with children under 21 by family type, according to the living arrangements of children, age of youngest child, duration of union, and age of parent upon entering the union

	Type of Family						
	Intact	Stepfather	Stepmother or stepfather-mother	Blended stepfather	Blended stepmother or stepfather-mother	Single mother	Single father
Living situation of children (N=2220) [2]							
Full-time		82.6	42.2	83.8	43.0	83.4	43.4
Part-time		12.0	44.3	*	*	12.4	52.7
Full-time/part-time		5.4	13.5	16.2	57.0	4.2	3.9
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
χ^2 = 624.94 p = .000 * insufficient number of cases: included in the full-time/part-time category							
Age of youngest child in household (N=7709)							
0-5	45.2	13.4	23.6	70.2	71.6	36.3	18.3
6-11	29.7	39.5	37.6	22.6	21.4	34.6	50.4
12 and older	25.1	47.1	38.8	7.2	7.0	29.1	31.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
χ^2 =363.71 p = .000							
Number of children (N=7709)							
Number	1.9	1.5	2.1	2.6	2.9	1.6	1.4
Duration of union (N=6236)							
Years	13.4	4.2	3.7	6.1	6.5		
Age of father upon entering the union (N=6093)							
Less than 25	36.8	10.1	3.7	22.0	*		
25-29	38.3	13.2	14.3	30.4	32.9		
30-34	16.6	20.0	23.6	24.9	28.1		
35-39	5.7	19.8	25.2	15.9	25.4		
40 and older	2.7	36.8	33.3	6.8	13.6		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
χ^2 = 1388.28 p = .000 missing cases: 143 *= no cases							
Age of mother upon entering the union (N=6084)							
Less than 25	57.5	9.9	14.5	25.4	29.6		
25-29	29.2	20.9	20.3	37.5	41.5		
30-34	9.9	23.5	19.7	24.6	21.9		
35-39	2.6	23.5	20.4	12.5	7.0		
40 and older	0.8	22.2	25.1	*	*		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
χ^2 = 1388.28 p = .000 missing cases: 143 *= no cases							

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family

[1] Percentages based on weighted data.[2] In intact families, children were found to live at home full-time, except for a very small fraction who attended boarding schools, college or university.

Stepfamilies appear to be short lived when compared to intact families. The average duration of the union is approximately 4 and 6 years respectively for simple and blended stepfamilies, compared to 13.4 years for intact families. Part of the difference is attributable to the greater instability of stepfamily relationships that has been documented in previous studies (for example, see Cherlin, 1978; White and Booth, 1985; Wineberg, 1992; Desrosiers et al., 1995). However, a large part of the explanation resides in the family formation process itself; in intact families, the duration of the union is calculated from the moment the union is formed and this sometimes includes many years before a child is born, whereas in stepfamilies, people tend to date the beginning of the union from the moment a parent with children starts living with a new partner. The average two-year duration that separates blended stepfamilies from those without a common child is doubtlessly due to the minimal period required to conceive a child, but also to the positive effect of the arrival of a common child on the stability of stepfamilies, as previous research has shown (for instance, see Desrosiers et al., 1995). In our analysis of stepfamily dynamics, we will introduce the arrival of a common child as an independent variable in order to see whether a common child stabilizes a stepfamily or not (see Chapter V, section 3.1).

Women tend to enter unions at a relatively younger age than men, and this can be seen across all family types in the larger percentages of mothers who started their current union under the age of 25, and in the larger proportion of fathers who did so above the age of 40 (Table 4.4). Mothers and fathers who are currently living in an intact family were much younger at the beginning of their union than their counterparts living in any given type of stepfamily: 57.5% of women and 36.8% of men were under 25 when they formed the union in which they bore their first child. This is not surprising since especially women entering into a stepfamily who already had a union before, might be older when entering into a stepfamily. Parents who had a common child in a stepfamily household were on average younger when they started living together than those living in simple stepmother/stepfather families. This is not surprising since previous

research has shown that the age of women at the formation of the stepfamily is a strong predictor of their probability of having a child and, therefore, of forming a blended stepfamily (see Juby et al., 2001). No women who formed a stepfamily past the age of 40 had a child with their new partner, which might be not surprising since women older than 40 are less likely to have children.

We examined the religious affiliation and behaviours of respondents with children to see if they vary according to the type of family. As shown in Table 4.5, the percentage of respondents who declared being Catholic does not fluctuate much across family types, ranging between 43 to 48%, nor does that of Protestants (ranging from 18 to 22%). However, the frequency of participation in religious ceremonies other than for special occasions, such as weddings, funerals or christenings, differs between the two groups. For instance, Catholic respondents who live in an intact family are much more likely to attend religious services on a frequent basis (i.e. weekly or monthly) than those living in step-or single-parent families. One does not find the same contrast among Protestant respondents, even though those living in intact families still tend to attend services more regularly. Compared to other families, a larger percentage of respondents in intact families reported a religion other than Catholicism or Protestantism (18.3%), and were found to participate in religious activities on a frequent basis. A smaller proportion declared having no religion (16.5%). Altogether, intact families seem to be more religious than any other family type; this is probably simply related to the importance attached to marriage and family by the Catholic and other traditional churches. As we observed earlier for other characteristics, blended stepfamilies tend to exhibit behaviours that lie in between those observed in intact families and simple stepfamilies.

Table 4.5: Distribution (in %)[1] of families with children under 21 by family type, according to religious affiliation and participation (N =7457)

Religious affiliation and participation	Type of Family				
	Intact	Step	Blended	Single mother	Single father
Catholic	**44.8**	**43.4**	**48.2**	**45.1**	**46.1**
Often	15.1	6.5	7.8	9.5	7.5
Sometimes	17.6	20.0	20.3	17.4	14.7
Never	12.1	16.9	20.1	18.2	23.9
Protestant	**20.3**	**22.2**	**21.5**	**20.1**	**18.1**
Often	6.5	3.7	3.8	5.8	4.7
Sometimes	7.5	8.1	10.8	6.3	5.3
Never	6.3	10.4	6.9	8.0	8.1
Other	**18.3**	**10.6**	**11.4**	**15.5**	**13.2**
Often	10.7	4.6	4.0	7.0	4.9
Sometimes	4.4	3.0	4.8	3.8	2.5
Never	3.2	3.0	2.6	4.7	5.8
No religion	**16.5**	**23.8**	**19.0**	**19.2**	**22.6**
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

$\chi^2 = 217.5$ p =.000 missing cases: 252

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

To get an idea of some of the socio-economic differences between family types, we analyzed their financial situation and labour market participation. So as to compare the economic situation of families that differ in their size and age composition, we calculated a family 'equivalence income' that takes these parameters into consideration. Table 4.6 presents the income distribution observed in each family type. A first glance at the figure reveals that families headed by 'fathers' are relatively better off than those headed either by 'stepfathers' or by single mothers. Hence, among two-parent families, a higher proportion of families comprising fathers living with their biological children are found in the high income category: 35% of intact families, as well as 40% and 36% respectively of simple and blended families with a stepmother are situated in that income class; by comparison, these percentages drop to 30% and 21%

respectively among simple and blended stepfather families (see Table 4.6). Of all the types of stepfamilies, blended stepfather families appear to be the worst off: over 50% of the families that include one mother's children born from two different unions, are concentrated in the two bottom income categories. As expected, single-mother families experience the most difficult economic situation, with roughly two-thirds of them found in the low and medium income categories, and one third concentrated in the lowest category; by contrast, only a quarter of single father families are found in the two bottom income classes. If we take a look at the average income, we can see that stepfather families have a lower income than intact families and blended families formed around a stepmother or stepfather. The biggest income gap is between single-mother and single-father families. We can see that on an average single-mother families have an average income of $24,607 Cdn which is almost half as much money as a single-father family. This supports the assumption that single mothers often face economic hardship (Holden and Smock, 1991).

Table 4.6: Distribution (in %)[1] of families with children under 21, according to their financial situation (N = 6285)

	Type of Family						
	Intact	Stepfather	Stepmother or stepfather-mother	Blended stepfather	Blended stepmother or stepfather-mother	Single mother	Single father
INCOME							
Low	5.8	8.7	6.7	15.7	*	34.7	9.5
Medium	18.7	20.7	20.9	37.7	26.1	33.1	14.8
Medium high	40.3	40.7	31.9	25.5	38.0	25.3	45.9
High	35.3	29.8	40.5	21.0	36.0	6.9	29.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
AVERAGE INCOME in Canadian Dollars	57369.3	51452.6	55462.34	46573.4	59967.8	24607.4	43940.1

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
$\chi^2 = 974,87$ p =.000 missing cases: 145 n.a.: 1277 not working
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

Obviously, the observed economic situation of families is linked to a series of factors, among which the number of income earners and the age structure of the family play an important role. Hence, the relatively better economic position of stepmother families can undoubtedly be attributed in part to their older age composition, as outlined above.

By controlling for the number of family members present in the household, equivalent income measures have allowed us to conduct inter-family comparisons. However, as these measures are calculated strictly on a household basis, they only *partly* reflect the financial situation of these families. In particular, they do not account for economic transfers that may occur between households that belong to a common stepfamily constellation. The fact that this type of financial measure does not take into account expenses incurred by family members (e.g. children) who reside outside the household probably helps explain the findings of a previous study in Quebec, which found that stepfamilies were more likely to feel economically deprived than the objective assessment of their household income suggested (Bernier et al., 1994).

In Canada, the male breadwinner model seems to be more outdated than in other Western countries, such as Germany or Italy. We decided to contrast the working behaviours of parents across family types. A first comparison of men's patterns of employment revealed no significant differences between family types in Canada: roughly 95% of the men living with children under 21 reported working in the twelve months preceding the survey, and those working part-time were too few to allow for a separate analysis by family type (data not shown). In terms of work participation, a very large proportion of men work on a full-time basis regardless of family type.

Table 4.7: Distribution (in %)[1] of mothers in families with children under 21, according to weekly hours worked during the year preceding the survey (N = 4370)

	Type of Family			
	Intact	Stepfamily	Blended family	Single mother
WORKING HOURS				
30 hours and more	56.1	72.3	56.4	65.0
18 to 29 hours	12.8	8.9	8.6	6.6
Less than 17 hours	7.2	4.7	9.8	3.4
Not working	24.0	14.0	25.2	25.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
AVERAGE Hours worked (excluded women who are not working)	34.0	39.2	35.5	32.7

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
$\chi^2 = 82,67$ $p = .000$ missing cases: 149
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

Among women, employment differences were found across family types; Table 4.7 presents the number of hours per week women usually worked during the year preceding the survey. Unfortunately, we did not have sufficient number of cases for each stepfamily and blended family category, so we had to group them in the way presented above. As in most Canadian studies, part-time work (either salaried or self-employed) here refers to any number of hours ranging from 1 to less than 30; this category has further been subdivided into two categories (0-17 hours; 18-29 hours) to better differentiate women's working patterns. Table 4.7 clearly shows that the majority of women with children aged under 21 work on a full-time basis, regardless of the type of family in which they live: more than half (between 56% and 72%) reported working 30 hours or more per week, and a quarter or less declared not having worked at all. Mothers in intact families and blended families, both including a large proportion of preschool children, tend to be less present in the labour force and to work a smaller number of hours than women from other types of families. Women living in simple stepfamilies are the most active in the labour market, they work an average of 39

hours per week, and single mothers present an intermediate level of activity, working an average of approximately 32 hours a week.

To explain the greater instability of stepfamilies, compared to intact families, researchers have invoked the lack of institutionalized roles for stepparents and stepchildren and the tensions or problems that are likely to arise in families that combine different sets of parents and children (for a detailed discussion, see Chapter II, section 4.2). To examine this question, we ran some analyses on values and attitudes towards family life in an attempt to assess whether stepfamilies were more likely to have conflicts and disputes than intact families. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4.8. This information is only available for the time when the survey was carried out; consequently, when we examine stepfamily dynamics, this information on values and attitudes toward family life will not be present since the study focuses on the first stepfamily episode which may or may not coincide with the time of survey. However, the results here might give us some idea of what to expect with regard to stepfamily instability.

Table 4.8: Distribution (in %)[1] of families with children under 21 by family type, according to values and attitudes towards family life

	Type of Family						
	Intact	Stepfather	Stepmother or stepfather-mother	Blended, stepfather	Blended stepmother or stepfather-mother	Single mother	Single father
Happiness about the relationship (N=5968)							
Happy	72.7	77.3	74.5	64,5	72,7		
Unhappy	27.3	22.7	25.5	35,5	27,3		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100,0	100,0		
$\chi^2 = 10,44$ p =. 034 missing cases: 268							
Satisfaction about work family balance (N=6302)							
Satisfied	76.5	78.4	71.6	74.4	64.9	68.9	75.9
Not Satisfied	23.5	21.6	28.4	25.6	35.1	31.1	24.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2 = 26,81$ p =. 000 missing cases: 130 n.a.: 1277 not working							
Arguments about chores and responsibilities (N=5913)							
Often	13.3	13.1	6.7	13.7	13,8		
Sometimes	39.1	29.3	26.0	37.1	35,4		
Hardly ever	32.0	28.3	34.0	33.7	29,2		
Never	15.7	29.3	33.3	15.6	21,5		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100,0		
$\chi^2 = 78,48$ p = .000 missing cases: 323							
Arguments about children (N=5895)							
Often	7.5	11.4	13.5	10.7	7,7		
Sometimes	34.2	28.3	41.9	35.1	27,7		
Hardly ever	35.4	32.0	25.7	35.1	43,1		
Never	23.0	28.3	18.9	19.0	21,5		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100,0		
$\chi^2 = 32,46$ p =. 001 missing cases: 341							
Arguments about money (N=5917)							
Often	9.7	12.1	8.5	18.6	17,2		
Sometimes	29.7	23.5	20.9	33.3	18,8		
Hardly ever	33.7	30.2	28.8	22.5	26,6		
Never	26.9	34.3	41.8	25.5	37,5		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100,0		
$\chi^2 = 60,75$ p = .000 missing cases: 319							

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family
[1] Percentages based on weighted data.

As can be seen in Table 4.8, no clear and distinct patterns in the attitudes towards family life emerge at first glance, although some significant differences are found across family types. When asked if they were happy in their current relationship, most respondents living in families with children responded that they were: only slightly more than a quarter of them reported being unhappy, except those living in blended stepfather families who were over a third (35%) to report being unhappy. With regard to their satisfaction about work-family balance, again roughly 75% of respondents in most two-parent family types declared being satisfied with their situation, as did 75% of single fathers. The lower levels of satisfaction expressed on this aspect of family life were observed among single mothers and among respondents living in blended stepmother or stepfather-mother families, of which 31% and 35% respectively reported not being satisfied with their balance between work and family.

Respondents living in two-parent families were also asked about the frequency of the arguments they had, if any, about children, money and sharing domestic chores and responsibilities. In general, intact family parents appear less inclined than those living in stepfamilies to have frequent arguments (i.e. often or sometimes) concerning children or money, but they were found to be more likely to argue about the division of domestic chores and responsibilities. Maybe, in intact families the division of chores and responsibilities is less clear to the family members than in stepfamilies. Since in stepfamilies this division of labour might be negotiated from the beginning whereas this might not be so for intact families. On that last aspect, intact families are proportionally as numerous (around 50%) as those living in blended stepfather families to report that they argue sometimes or often. Interestingly, where children or money are concerned, it is respectively in the simple and blended stepmother or stepfather-mother family categories that we find the higher proportion of couples who hardly or never argue. Given that the majority of these families mix more than one set of siblings, we would have expected higher levels of arguments.

The tentative picture that emerged from this brief analysis of attitudes is not very conclusive and does not point to higher levels of unhappiness or disputes in any given type of stepfamily. It does, however, raise an interesting question: if they do not seem to experience greater difficulties or tensions, why are stepfamily couples nevertheless more unstable than those living in intact families?

The existence of conflicts or tensions probably varies depending on many factors, such as the age composition and origin of the siblings, the complexity of the extended family environment, or the stage of development that the family has reached. Hence, the level of happiness or satisfaction observed is likely to fluctuate as family members take time to adapt to each other and to experience common family transitions. A more satisfactory analysis of tensions and conflicts in stepfamilies would require measures across time that would allow us to assess to what extent couples and families are able to make adjustments as they move through the different stages of family life, a task that is not feasible here with the cross-sectional survey data that we used.

Conclusion

These results provided us some insight into stepfamilies in Canada at the time of the survey in 2001. We now have a better understanding of the composition of stepfamilies and of the complexities inherent to their measurement and definition. The diagram by Anne Bernstein, also used by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1994), remains a very good example to illustrate these difficulties. In the following paragraphs, some findings will be highlighted and we will see why stepfamily dynamics are so important to understanding stepfamilies.

The blended stepfather/stepmother family that mixes three different sets of siblings is still quite rare; the stepfather family household, which comprises a mother living with her children and a partner who is not the father of these children, is the most frequently observed type of stepfamily, and it is much more

prevalent than the stepmother family unit. The number of individuals and households involved in stepfamily constellations is passably greater than that estimated on the basis of household boundaries. The inclusion in the analysis of children who do not live under the same roof of one of their two separated parents (but whom they are likely to visit, even if only irregularly) resulted in a notable increase (9%) of the number of households that are linked, one way or another, by stepfamily chains; similarly, the inclusion of single parents involved with 'living apart' partners, who might act as stepparents on an occasional basis, substantially increased the number of stepfamilies.The great majority of Canadian women living with children under the age of 21 are working on a full-time basis. Stepfamilies living in Canada did not appear to be much different among themselves, nor did they appear to significantly differ from intact families with regard to attitudes and levels of satisfaction and happiness towards family life. In both cases, the analysis did not point to systematic patterns of dissatisfaction or disputes in any given type of stepfamily, as past clinical psychological studies and research on stepfamily instability had led us to expect.

The results raised interesting issues: the higher level of instability observed among stepfamilies, as compared to intact families, does not seem to be closely associated with the subjective evaluation they make themselves of their conjugal and family relations. It encouraged us to pursue our analysis further: it points to the necessity of adopting a longitudinal perspective if we are to understand the transitions that stepfamilies experience as they move along the different stages of their life course. In other words, we need to look at stepfamily dynamics. This we assumed will help us understand which circumstances explain their higher instability and the role of a common child. Since our dissertation focuses on behaviour within stepfamilies and on why some stepfamily types are more at risk of breaking up or more likely to have a common child than others, we will no longer draw systematic comparisons with intact families and lone-parent families. The dynamic of stepfamilies is different: in particular, there are fewer transitions in intact families. This and the reasons pointed out above explain our

decision to focus only on stepfamilies. Until now, we compared stepfamilies with intact and lone-parent families in order to highlight differences and common points. This was crucial in order to provide an understanding of family theory and the re-emergence of stepfamilies. It also helped explain the background to the difficulties we face in identifying and measuring stepfamilies.

In the following chapter we will present the results of our longitudinal analyses. We start by presenting some descriptive results on stepfamilies measured retrospectively. Than we present the cumulative probabilities of our Kaplan-Meier estimations for stepfamily instability, followed by a presentation of the results of the Cox model. We then turn to the presentation of the results for the arrival of the common child also starting with the Kaplan-Meier estimations followed by the presentation of the results of the Cox model. A conclusion on the results will be provided at the end of the chapter, before we turn to the general discussion and conclusion of the dissertation.

V. FINDINGS ON THE DYNAMICS OF STEPFAMILIES

1. Some descriptive results

This section presents the results of the analyses on the dynamics of stepfamilies. We decided to study men and women separately for the following reasons.

First, so far, information provided by male respondents has not been taken into account in the research on stepfamilies which was based on the General Social Survey 1984 and 1990; this was because of problems in the collection of the data. Second, fathers who continued to be part of the life of their biological children after a separation are likely to be more involved in childrearing than fathers who did not. The latter may even omit their children when responding to the survey (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1999). This may have a selectivity effect on the data and, therefore, on the results. Third, separate analyses for men and women might give us a more accurate picture of stepfamily dynamics. Because of the lack of literature on men in (step)families, interpretations are likely to be more speculative. But the differences in some cases are so striking that it is all the more important to at least suggest what this means about the role of men in this context. So we will present the results on women first and then those on men, highlighting only the differences which stand out.

To get an overall idea of the distribution of several measured characteristics in our stepfamily sample, we will start by showing some descriptive results in Table 5.1. All variables presented describe stepfamilies at the beginning of their episode.

Table 5.1: Distribution (in %)[1] of first stepfamily episode with children aged under 21 by sex of respondent

	Type of family					
	Stepmother	Stepfather, mother no union before	Stepfather, mother union before	Stepfather and stepmother	Total	Composition of sample by sex (%)
Sex of respondents (N=2079)						
Women	12.7	28.3	56.1	2.9	100.00	60.2
Men	42.7	10.9	38.7	7.8	100.00	39.8
χ^2=305.0 p =.000						

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

[1]: Percentages based on weighted data

A main point to note about Table 5.1 is that there are overall more women (60.2%) than men (39.8%) in the sample. Often, men who do not live with their children do not actually report them and we know that children are more likely to stay with their mothers after separation. In the male sample we have a high prevalence of stepmother families (42.7%). This can be explained by the fact that the men who were living with their children were more likely to remember previous episodes and events and, therefore, more likely to be part of the sample. In addition, both male and female respondents who acted as a stepparent earlier in their life are perhaps more likely to report this family episode only if it lasted long enough for them to consider it as significant. This would explain why the percentage of stepmother families is higher among male respondents, 42.7%, and conversely, that of stepfather families is higher among female respondents, 84.4%[33].

In Table 5.2, the focus is on women and these are the results we shall discuss below.

[33] (56.1% + 28.3%= 84.4%)

Table 5.2: Distribution (in %)[1] of first stepfamily episode with children aged under 21 by family type, according to several demographic characteristics WOMEN

	Type of family				
	Stepmother	Stepfather, mother no union before	Stepfather, mother union before	Stepfather and stepmother	Total
Type of union (N=1352)					
Marriage	68.6	75.5	56.5	56.3	62.8
Common-law	31.4	24.5	43.5	43.7	37.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2 = 39.9$ p =.000 missing cases = 1					
Age at entering in the union, mother (N=1353)					
Less than 25 years	34.0	62.3	14.3	16.3	28.9
25-29 years	21.4	17.6	22.3	32.8	21.4
30-39 years	25.6	11.2	25.7	12.6	21.6
40 years and older	19.0	8.9	37.7	38.3	28.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 299.6$ p =.000					
Mean age (mother)	29.6	25.3	33.0	31.9	30.6
Age at entering in the union, father (N=1353)					
Less than 30 years	23.5	70.0	32.0	13.0	39.6
30-39 years	43.5	18.9	37.4	50.6	34.1
40 years and older	33.0	11.1	30.6	36.4	26.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 183.6$ p =.000					
Mean age (father)	35.3	28.4	35.3	37.2	33.5
Number of children in household (N=1353)					
1	57.9	76.5	44.8	*	52.8
2	27.4	16.5	39.5	36.8	32.1
3 and more	14.7	7.0	15.7	63.2	15.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 202.3$ p =.000 * = no cases					
Average number of children	1.6	1.4	1.8	3.0	1.7
Age group of youngest child in household (N=1353)					
younger than 5	38.5	68.2	35.6	48.2	44.5
5-11 years	41.5	26.8	43.2	40.4	38.8
12 and older	20.0	5.0	21.2	11.4	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 113.3$ p =.000					
Average age of children	7.2	4.1	7.7	6.2	6.8
Sex of children in household (N=1352)					
Boys only	42.6	44.9	34.3	14.1	37.3
Girls only	37.2	41.6	33.8	16.4	35.5
Boys and girls	20.2	13.5	31.9	69.5	27.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 89.9$ p =.000 missing cases = 1					
Education (N=1347)					
Less than high school	15.5	40.5	23.8	25.7	26.9
High school	18.8	19.4	20.1	23.5	19.9
Some college	44.0	33.9	45.6	35.3	42.1
College degree or above	21.7	6.2	10.5	15.5	11.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2 = 69.5$ p =.000 missing cases = 6					
Work status (N=1269)					
Never worked	12.8	34.6	12.8	13.4	18.2
Working	70.0	51.6	72.9	63.3	66.9
Not working	17.2	13.8	14.3	23.3	14.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 80.6$ p =.000 missing cases = 84					
Region (N=1353)					
Rest of Canada	12.5	30.7	53.2	3.7	100.0
Quebec	11.8	18.3	67.3	2.6	100.0
$\chi 2 = 22.1$ p =.001					

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

[1]: Percentages based on weighted data.

If we look at types of union first, we can see that the majority of stepfamily couples are married. There is an interesting discrepancy in the category of stepfather families: couples in which women did not have a previous union tend to marry (75.5%), while those in which the women did have a previous union (43.5%) tend to choose in a greater proportion, common-law unions instead of marriage. This might be due to the fact that, in many cases, the woman is still actually married and, therefore, unable to legally enter into anything but a common-law union.

Another interesting point concerns the age of the mother at the beginning of the stepfamily episode. Women in stepfather families who have had no previous union tend to be younger (25.3 years old) than those who have been in a previous union (33 years old) and than those in stepmother and stepfather families (31.9 years old). The pattern of age distribution for fathers entering into a stepfamily is similar to that of women. However, there were not enough cases with men under 29, since men tend to form unions a little later than women; we chose a higher age as the starting point at which they enter a stepfamily.

As far as the number of children is concerned, families with one child are the most common, followed by families with two children. In stepfather families in which the mother has not had a previous union, 76.5% of the women enter the stepfamily with one child. These families also have the lowest average number of children (1.4). Not surprisingly, stepmother and stepfather families have a high prevalence in the category of three or more children (63.2%), since both partners bring at least one child into the union.

The age of the children also shows some interesting differences. Families with children aged 12 or more, are less prevalent. This suggests that stepfamilies are formed around couples with young children, a tendency that is all the more interesting when studying the fertility behaviour of such stepfamilies and their risk of having a common child. Once again, it is the stepfather families in which

the women had no previous union that stand out the most. The majority of them have children younger than 5 (68.2%) and the average age of the children is 4.1. This is particularly young when compared to stepmother families where the average age of the children is 7.2. No clear pattern can be observed concerning the sex of the children.

The educational achievement of women entering a stepfamily is highest among stepmother families with 44% of them having obtained some college education, and among stepfather families in which women have had a previous union (45.6% with some college education). For stepfather families in which the woman had no prior union, one can see that most of the women have less than a high school degree (40.5%). If we assume that low educational achievement is in part responsible for a lower income or for a lower status in the labour market, this might support the idea that some women seek to escape from a precarious economic situation by entering into a stepfamily. However, we should also note that 33.9% of these women did obtain some kind of college education.

As far as the work status is concerned, whatever the type of stepfamily, women are usually working. It is worth mentioning that one third of mothers with no previous union had never worked. Also, women in stepmother/stepfather families are slightly less likely to be working, although they have usually had some prior work experience.

With regard to region, we can see that stepfather families with women who have had a prior union are the most prevalent (67.3% in Quebec and 53.2% in the rest of Canada). Interestingly, 30.7% of stepfather families in the rest of Canada are formed around mothers having had no union before. In Quebec it is 18.3% of mothers who enter a stepfamily with no prior union.

We will now look at Table 5.3 which outlines some of the results concerning men.

Table 5.3: Distribution (in %)[1] of first stepfamily episode with children aged under 21 by family type, according to several demographic characteristics MEN

	Type of family				
	Stepmother	Stepfather, mother no union before	Stepfather, mother union before	Stepfather and stepmother	Total
Type of union (N=726)					
Marriage	65.9	61.4	60.4	62.6	63.1
Common-law	34.1	38.6	39.6	37.4	36.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2 = 2.04$ p =.69					
Age at entering in the union, mother (N=726)					
Less than 25 years	33.9	45.3	17.6	6.6	26.2
25-29 years	21.9	33.1	31.5	25.1	26.9
30-39 years	13.2	9.8	23.6	30.5	18.5
40 years and older	31.0	11.8	27.3	37.8	28.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 66.0$ p =.000					
Mean age (mother)	30.8	26.6	30.9	33.1	30.7
Age at entering in the union, father (N=726)					
Less than 30 years	31.6	62.4	50.1	17.1	40.2
30-39 years	36.3	28.1	36.9	45.2	36.6
40 years and older	32.1	9.5	13.0	37.7	23.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 67.0$ p =.000					
Mean age (father)	35,1	28.7	30.9	37.1	33.1
Number of children in household (N=726)					
1	56.1	72.4	51.7	*	50.8
2	36.7	18.6	42.6	24.5	36.2
3 and more	7.2	9.0	5.7	75.5	13.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 273.1$ p =.000 * = no cases					
Average number of children	1.5	1.4	1.6	3.2	1.7
Age group of youngest child in household (N=726)					
younger than 5	38.2	58.0	41.2	43.4	41.6
5-11 years	34.2	29.1	47.5	43.7	39.8
12 and older	27.6	12.9	11.3	12.9	18.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 38.1$ p =.000					
Average age of children	8.0	4.7	6.7	6.2	7.0
Sex of children in household (N=726)					
Boys only	40.6	45.3	37.5	17.9	37.8
Girls only	34.7	38.0	34.2	13.6	32.8
Boys and girls	24.7	16.7	28.3	68.5	29.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 57.9$ p =.000					
Education (N=725)					
Less than high school	21.9	40.9	21.3	24.2	23.7
High school	18.9	15.9	17.6	15.1	17.8
Some college	41.2	36.9	46.0	28.9	41.5
College degree or above	18.0	6.3	15.1	31.8	17.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2 = 27.9$ p =.02 missing cases = 1					
Region (N=726)					
Rest of Canada	46.8	10.5	36.0	6.7	100.0
Quebec	46.5	9.0	35.3	9.2	100.0
$\chi 2 = 1.9$ p =.71					

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

[1]: Percentages based on weighted data.

As is the case for women, men in stepfamilies tend to be married rather than living in a common-law union.

The age of men upon entering the stepfamily follows the same pattern as in the sample for women, with the youngest being in stepfather families in which the woman has had no previous union (28.7 years old). But overall, when entering a stepfamily, men tend to be older than women. This is in keeping with the results suggesting that men tend to form unions later than women.

Again, as far as the number of children is concerned, the two tables show the same overall pattern for women and men. There is, however, one major difference concerning stepmother families: when it is the men doing the reporting, we find that 7.2% of these families have three or more children, while when it is the women who are being questioned, 14.7% of them report three or more children. In stepfather families in which the women had a prior union, 5.7% of the male respondents report having three children or more, this suggests that in these two types of stepfamilies, men tend to report fewer children.

The age of the children follows a similar pattern in both tables. However, the average age of children is somewhat older in stepmother families as reported by men (8 years old, compared to 7.2 in the sample on women). In particular, 27.6% of stepmother families in the men's sample have children who are 12 or older, while it is only 20% of them in the women's sample. It is possible that this might be explained by the fact that some children may move to live with their biological father when they are older.

As far as education is concerned, all in all, men have a slightly higher educational status than women. However, one percentage does stand out: in stepfather families in which the mother has not had a previous union, men tend to have a very low level of education (40.9%). Note that these men are also among

the youngest. This result is very similar to the one for women in such stepfamilies where it is 40.5% of them who have less than a high school degree.

We did not present any information about men's work status. Indeed, as most men are working, the cells for the categories of 'not working' or 'never worked' did not have a high enough number for us to use (see footnote 31).

With regard to region, the results are quite interesting and very different from the female sample. In the rest of Canada as well as in Quebec, stepmother families are the most prevalent type of stepfamily (46.8% in the rest of Canada and 46.5% in Quebec). Stepfather families in which the mother had no previous union are less frequent (10.5% in the rest of Canada and 9% in Quebec). With regard to the high prevalence of stepmother families in both parts of Canada for the male sample, we suggest that these men are fathers who were very involved in their children's upbringing and thus more likely to recall the stepfamily episode that they experienced when forming a union with a new partner. Table 5.4 combines results for both men and women in a number of categories. Indeed, as there were not enough cases in individual cells, results had to be grouped, and it therefore seemed more interesting to present the data all together.

Table 5.4: Distribution (in %)[1] of first stepfamily episode with children aged under 21 by family type, according to several demographic characterstics

	Type of family				
	Stepmother	Stepfather, mother no union before	Stepfather, mother union before	Stepfather and stepmother	Total
Period (N=2079)					
before 1970	26.4	41.1	29.0	3.6	100.0
1970-1979	26.6	23.0	48.3	2.2	100.0
1980-1989	26.8	19.4	49.1	4.7	100.0
after 1990	21.5	17.4	55.0	6.1	100.0
$\chi 2 = 88.0$ p =.000					
Mother tongue (N=2071)					
English	22.6	22.5	50.2	4.7	100.0
French	25.0	17.9	51.8	5.3	100.0
English and French	*	*	*	*	*
Other	31.4	24.5	39.5	4.6	100.0
$\chi 2 = 31.3$ p =.01 missing cases = 8 * = no cases					
Religion (N=2047)					
Protestant	24.1	20.2	50.5	5.2	100.0
Catholic	23.0	24.6	47.9	4.5	100.0
Other	35.6	25.3	39.1	*	100.0
No religion	25.5	16.0	53.1	5.5	100.0
$\chi 2 = 21.2$ p =.10 missing cases = 32 * = no cases					

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

[1]: Percentages based on weighted data.

With respect to period, one can see that before 1970, 41.1% of stepfamilies are stepfather families with mothers having had no previous union and 29% are stepfather families with women who have had a union before. But after 1990, the picture is quite the reverse: 17.4% are stepfather families with a mother who has not had a prior union, compared to 55% that are stepfather families with women who have. As we mentioned elsewhere, one explanation might be that before 1970, being a single parent was not particularly accepted and, therefore, women who had a birth outside a union were more likely to form a union, i.e. enter into a stepfamily. Today, on the other hand, separation is quite a common phenomenon and most people enter a stepfamily after having already had at least one prior union.

Looking at mother tongue, we can see that 50.2% of stepfather families in which the woman has had a previous union are formed around respondents for whom English is their mother tongue. This is also the case for respondents

reporting French as their mother tongue: 51.8% are stepfather families with women who have had a union before. It is only for respondents who report having a mother tongue other than English or French that we find less of a prevalence, with only 39.5% living in a stepfather family in which women have had a prior union. However, 31.4% of these respondents report living in a stepmother family. Religious affiliation is another category for which results for men and women were grouped together. We see that it is among Protestants that the highest percentage (50.5%) concerns those living in stepfather families with women who have had a union before. This is also the highest percentage for Catholics (47.9%), although somewhat lower than it is for Protestants.

The most striking results are perhaps those that emerge for stepfather families with women who have not had a prior union. They seem to be very young, to have young children upon entering their stepfamily episode and to prefer marriage as a type of union. Stepmother families also seem to show some interesting characteristics: they are made up of relatively young childless women who enter into a stepfamily with men older than themselves. In this descriptive section, we have seen that the patterns are pretty much similar for both men and women. We will now look at the results of our estimated models which might shed more light on the dynamic of different stepfamily types, starting with the results on stepfamily instability, as well as bring out gender differences.

2. Stepfamily instability: some Kaplan-Meier estimations

Stepfamily episodes might be ongoing at the time of the survey or they might have ended under a variety of circumstances, as we discussed in Chapter III (section 3.4 and section 4). Some terminated following a separation or the death of a spouse or partner, while others ended when the last child who defined the stepfamily left the parental home. In our analysis, we are looking more particularly at separation, so the episodes with endings other than a separation will be considered as censored. Table 5.5 presents the distribution of stepfamily

episodes according to type of ending. Nearly 30% of all the stepfamily episodes ended by separation prior to the survey, and 26.8% were still ongoing at the time of the survey. Consequently, observation stopped at survey time. The rest of the stepfamily episodes (44%) ended either because a partner died or because the last child defining a stepfamily left the parental home.

Table 5.5: Distribution (in %)[1] of first stepfamily episode with children aged under 21 by family type, according to their type of ending (N=2079)

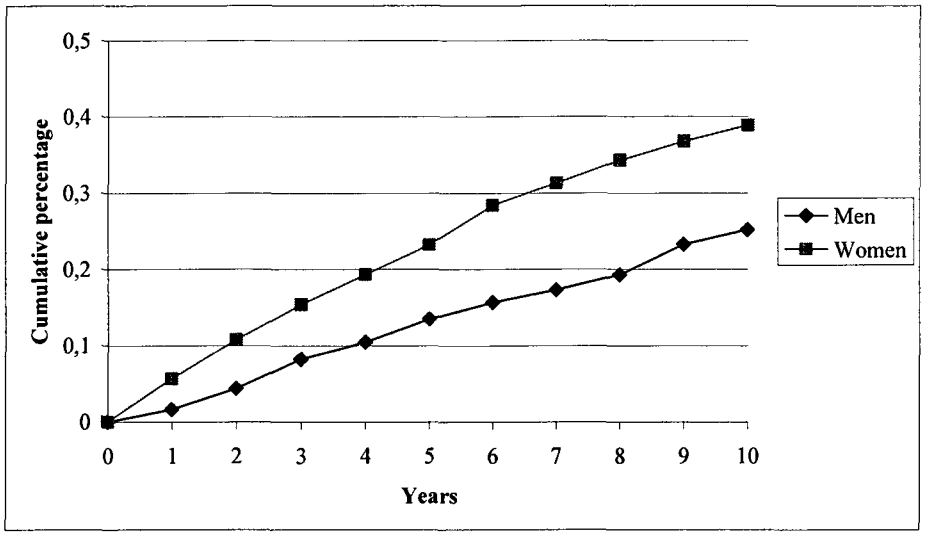
	Type of family				
	Stepmother	**Stepfather, *mother no* union before**	**Stepfather, *mother* union before**	**Stepfather and stepmother**	**Total**
Separation of union	26.4	41.9	27.3	13.6	29.3
Episode ended due to the death of partner or last stepchild left home	50.6	37.3	44.1	34.7	44.0
Ongoing episode	23.0	20.8	28.6	51.7	26.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi 2 = 38583.27$ p =.000					

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

[1]: Percentages based on weighted data

For stepfather families in which the mother has had no prior union, a separation seems to be the most common ending of a stepfamily episode (41.9%), whether it is a marriage or a common-law union. For stepfather/stepmother families, this frequency is relatively low, with only 13.6% ending in a separation. Looking at ongoing episodes, it is interesting to see that 51.7% of the stepfather/stepmother families are ongoing. We will now turn to presenting the cumulated probabilities of the risk of separation (Kaplan-Meier estimation).

Figure 5.1: Cumulative probabilities of separation by sex of respondents (Kaplan-Meier estimation)

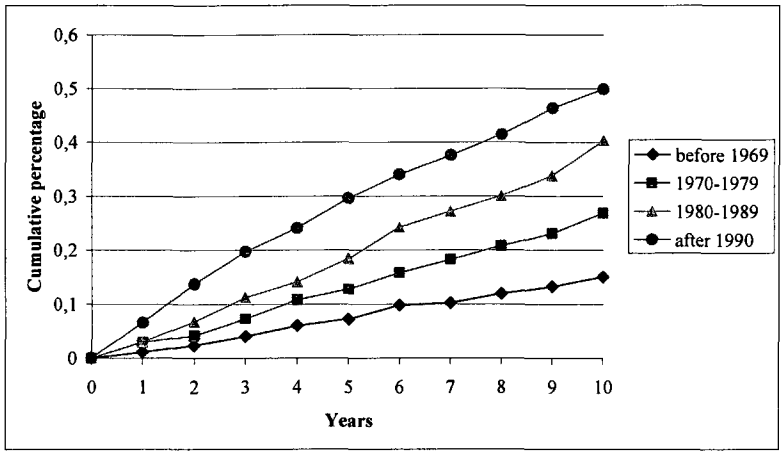


Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

The stepfamily episodes reported by women break up more rapidly than those declared by men. Approximately 19% of women who reported living in a stepfamily, as opposed to 10% of the men, separated from their partner after 4 years. After 10 years in the relationship, 38% of women reporting a stepfamily episode had separated, compared to 25% of the men (see Figure 5.1).

A variety of hypotheses can be put forward to explain this: it is possible that men underreport union dissolutions they have gone through; it is also conceivable that women enter unions with higher expectations than men and, therefore, are more likely to leave if they are unhappy. The results could also be attributed to a selection effect: on the one hand, male respondents are over represented in stepmother and stepmother/stepfather families. On the other hand, we have no information concerning men who have left their partner and children and do not keep contact with the latter (see e.g. Juby et al. 1999). Finally, whatever the origin of the conflict, it might more often be women who initiate the separation. We will discuss this issue below.

Figure 5.2: Cumulative probabilities of separation by the time period of first stepfamily episode (Kaplan-Meier estimation)

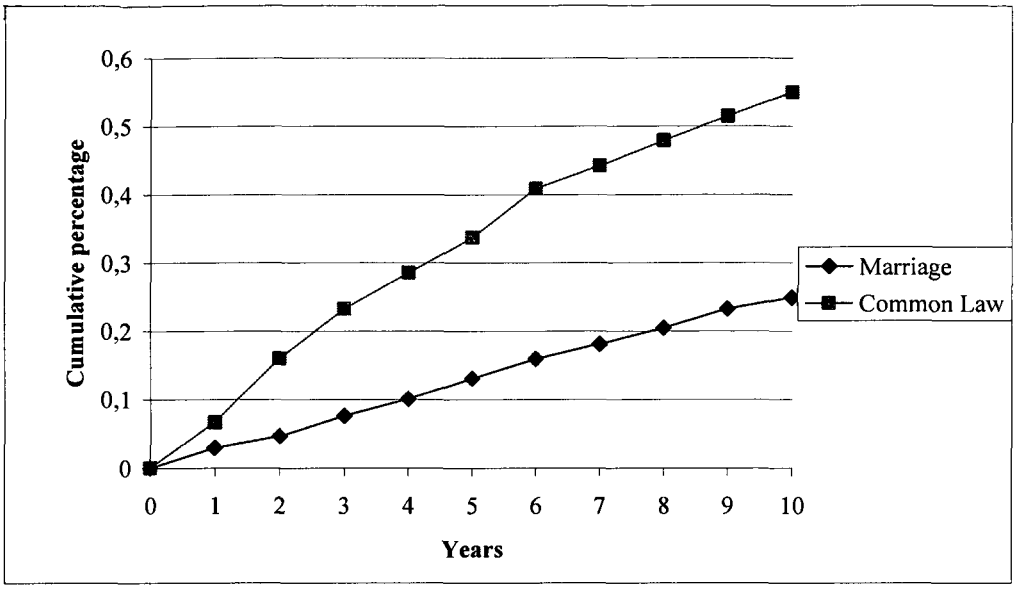


Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

The results for men and women concerning the risk of separation by period of time during which the stepfamily episode is experienced did not present significant differences, so they have been grouped within a single chart (see Figure 5.2). One can see here that stepfamilies formed after 1990 have a higher risk of breaking up than those formed before 1970. In other words, the younger the cohort, the higher the risk of separation. 50% of couples living in a stepfamily formed after 1990 are separated after 10 years, compared to only 15% of those who were living in a stepfamily before 1969. This rising risk of experiencing a separation follows the trend of high union instability after the Divorce Act in Canada in 1968. It might also be explained by the fact that the number of common-law unions increased over the same period and we know that these are at a high risk of breaking up. These results are in line with those of Desrosiers et al. (1995) who also found that women in older cohorts were less likely to experience a disruption than those in younger cohorts (note, however, that they only had women in their sample).

The next Kaplan-Meier estimation shows the risk of disruption with respect to the type of union (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Cumulative probabilities of separation by type of union (Kaplan-Meier estimation)

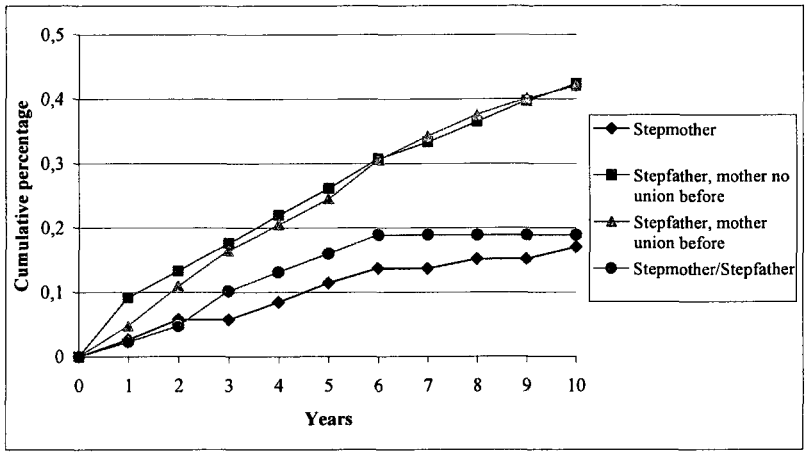


Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

Once again, with no significant differences between the results for women and men, we chose to present them as a single group. As we can see, stepfamilies formed around couples living in a common-law union are at a higher risk of experiencing a separation than those who are married. After 10 years, 54% are separated compared to approximately 24% among married couples. Also, the curve for couples living in a common-law union is growing much faster than the one for married couples. This is consistent with the overall trend among families of all types (not just stepfamilies) which shows that common-law unions tend to be less stable than marriages.

Striking gender differences emerge when we look at the risk of separation by family type. We will therefore present the results for women and men in two separate figures.

Figure 5.4: Cumulative probabilities of separation, according to the stepfamily type WOMEN (Kaplan-Meier estimation)



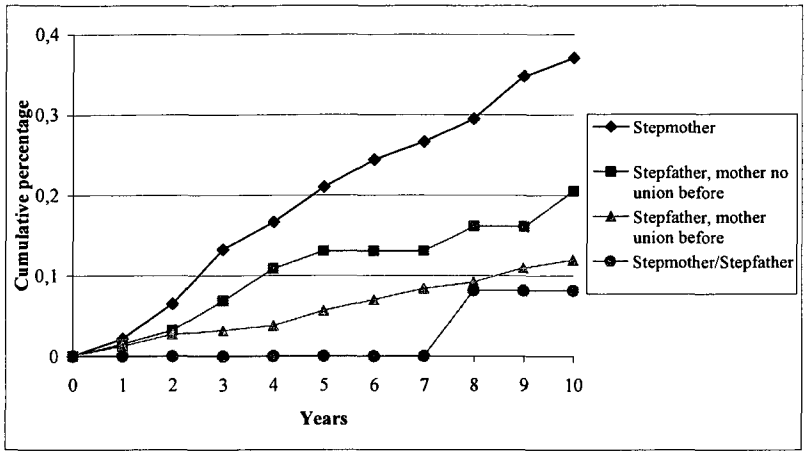
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

Regardless of whether the woman has had a previous union or not, stepfather families in the female sample are at higher risk of separation (see Figure 5.4). After 5 years, almost 25% of stepfather families are separated, compared to only 11% of stepmother families and 16% of stepmother/stepfather families.

After 10 years, 40% of stepfather families are separated. Stepmother families tend to be at much lower risk with only 17% of them having separated after 10 years. These results concord with the expectations raised in our initial hypothesis that stepmother families are less likely to break up than stepfather families. We will discuss this further below. Stepmother and stepfather families experience a lower risk of separation with only 19% separated after 10 years.

The following curves show the results for men and we can see immediately that the pattern is reversed (see Figure 5.5)

Figure 5.5: Cumulative probabilities of separation, according to the stepfamily type MEN (Kaplan-Meier estimation)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

After 5 years, 21% of stepmother families but only 5% of stepfather families in which the mother had a prior union are separated. After 10 years, 37% of stepmother families are separated. In addition, there is a marked difference between the outcomes for the two types of stepfather families: where the woman has not had a union before, the risk of separation after 10 years is 20%, whereas it is as much as 12% when she has had a previous union.

The striking difference between stepmother families and stepfather families may be due to the fact that stepfathers are more likely to underreport their stepfamily episodes, compared to biological fathers living with stepmothers, especially when the episode is of a short duration. Similarly, women in stepmother families might underreport their stepfamily episodes. We may say that stepparents in general, whether man or woman, are probably more likely to report having played a "parental role" earlier in their life only if it was a significant experience for them (i.e. if it lasted for a significant period of time).

Stepmother/stepfather families seem to have the lowest risk of experiencing a separation despite being the most complex of all stepfamily types here. Their likelihood of breaking up is very small, with only 8% who are separated after 10 years. The unusual shape of the curve may be due to the small number of cases in this category.

2.1 Determining factors in stepfamily dynamics

We will now present the results of the analysis for which we used the Cox model. The dependent variable for our first analysis on stepfamily dynamics is stepfamily instability and we want to explain which circumstances lead to the risk of separation. The independent variables we are using are: having a common child or not, age of the mother and father, age of the children, number of children, type of union, period, region, mother tongue, religion, educational attainment and work status. Unfortunately, information on socio-economic characteristics, such as income, is only available at survey and not retrospectively, so we were unable to include this in our model. The educational attainment of respondents has been introduced in the model, but not as a time varying covariate because almost all respondents (except 9, i.e. 1.8% of the sample) had completed their schooling by the time they experienced their first stepfamily episode. The data preparation of these variables has been discussed in Chapter III section 6. Before going any further, we should nevertheless make a few comments which apply to all analyses.

The coefficients in the tables are presented in their exponential form (exp {ß}) and therefore express the risk of a specific group as a proportion of the baseline risk. A coefficient greater than one indicates that the characteristic introduced into the model increases the probability of experiencing a separation. A coefficient smaller than one indicates that the characteristic introduced into the model decreases the probability of a separation. For the categorical variables, such as stepfamily type, the age group of the youngest child or the number of children, the reference category is the one shown in italics.

The coefficient of the age of the mother and the father, introduced as a continuous variable, shows the change in the probability of experiencing a separation or having a common child for each unit increase in the metric variable. There are four time-varying covariates: having a common child, type of union

(which can change from common-law union to marriage), the time period during which the stepfamily episode is experienced and employment status. A time varying covariate, e.g. type of union, can be explained as follows: a respondent can enter the stepfamily episode in a common-law relationship but, during this episode, he or she gets married; this would mean that the value for the type of relationship would change from being in a common-law relationship to being married. The same pattern applies to work status, a respondent can be working at the beginning of the episode but leave his or her employment during the episode, hence the value of the variable would change from 'working' to 'not working'.

One comment should be made about the bootstrapping method we used: in order to improve our estimates, we used the General Social Survey's bootstrap sample weights. Statistics Canada provides these weights because of the stratified and clustered design of the survey. The results presented below reflect the standard errors derived from resampling each model 200 times. This process of resampling each model is also called the bootstrapping process.

All results presented here are the ones that fitted our model best. In other words, running sensitivity analysis, we ran age groups with different cut-off points and as a continuous variable. For example, we included the age of the mother as a categorical variable and saw that the risk of separation declines continuously from the oldest age group to the youngest one (reference category). We decided, therefore, to include it as a continuous variable. The covariates have been added step by step and their order has been changed so as to test the strength and underlying mechanisms of our results. For example, we included each variable separately in order to test their gross effect. After this, we included the other variables step by step and changed their order: for example, we included the type of family, then the type of union and then the age variables and then carried out the same operations in reverse. Or we started with the sociodemographic variables such as education or work status and then included the others one by one. All this has been part of the process of analyzing our data. The results

presented here are the most parsimonious Cox models and represent the order of our hypotheses.

2.2 Stepfamily instability: results of the Cox model

The models presented below follow the order of the hypotheses elaborated in our theoretical section. This means that we start first by analyzing the effect of the stepfamily type on the risk of separation (Model 1), followed by introducing the variable of having a common child (Model 2), the age of the mother, father and children, as well as the number of children in the household (Model 3) (note that these variables were included one by one although the presentation is in a single model), the type of union (Model 4), period and region (Model 5). Finally, we will present the full model, including mother tongue, religion, education and work status (Model 6). We tested interactions between type of union and period (results not shown), as well as between type of union and region. No significant effect emerged (Model 7). Last but not least, we tested the interaction between the age of the children and the work status of women and this did not show any significant result either (results not shown).

Table 5.6A: The risk of separation for the first stepfamily episode, according to family type WOMEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2 (full model)
Type of family		
Stepmother	0.35***	0.32***
Stepfather	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.33**	0.39*
N	1254	1254
Log likelihood	-2526.20	-2451.32

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): ***:p<.001: **:p<.01;*p<.05.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.

Table 5.6A shows the results of the risk of separation for the female sample in a simple stepfamily model, i.e. not distinguishing between the two types of stepfather families. We argued in our initial hypothesis that stepmother families are less likely to break up than stepfather families (see Appendices, Table A1, Model 1). This is confirmed by the results, stepmother families are 65% less likely to separate than stepfather families. When we control for all of our covariates (see Table 5.6A, Model 2) the effect decreases slightly; this means that part of the explanation for the risk of separation can be attributed to our covariates, in particular the time period during which the stepfamily episode is experienced. However, we should note that the behaviour of stepmothers is compared to that of women in the reference category, biological mothers in the case of stepfather families. We may argue that the women who recall in detail their experience as stepmothers are more likely to have invested in their relationship with the stepchildren (as opposed to stepfathers; see Chapter II, section 4.2). This might explain why these episodes are more stable.

Table 5.6B: The risk of separation for the first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics WOMEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Type of family							
Stepmother	0.37***	0.38***	0.35***	0.38***	0.38***	0.37***	0.37***
Stepfather, mother no union before	1.25*	1.28*	1.00	1.16	1.43*	1.43*	1.45*
Stepfather, mother union before	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.36**	0.37**	0.44*	0.45*	0.42*	0.42*	0.42*
Common child[1]							
Yes		0.88	0.73*	0.79*	0,82	0,80	0,81
No		*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Age of mother			0.97*	0.97*	0.96**	0.96**	0.96**
Age of father			1.00	1.00	1.00	1,00	1,00
Age group of youngest child in household							
younger than 5			*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
5-11 years			0.84	0,9	0,89	0,91	0,91
12 and older			0.92	1.03	1.07	1.14	1,14
Number of children							
1			*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
2			0.92	0,94	1.03	1,00	1,01
3 and more			0.68	0,76	0.92	0,91	0,92
Type of union[1]							
Marriage				*1*	*1*	*1*	
Common-law				1.87***	1.31*	1.32*	
Period[1]							
before 1970					*1*	*1*	*1*
1970-1979					2.74**	2.70**	2.70**
1980-1989					3.53***	3.43***	3.45***
after 1990					6.99***	6.80***	6.80***
Region							
Rest of Canada					*1*	*1*	
Quebec					1.25	1.24	
Mother tongue							
English						*1*	*1*
French						0.95	0,94
English and French						1.02	1,00
Other						1.05	1,05
Religion							
Protestant						*1*	*1*
Catholic						1.12	1,12
Other						1.43	1,45
No religion						1.11	1,11
Education							
Less than high School						*1*	*1*
High school						0.90	0,90
Some college						0.98	0,98
College degree or above						1.08	1,06
Work status [1]							
Never worked						*1*	*1*
Working						1.06	1.05
Not working						1.15	1,14
Type of union * Region							
*Canada*common-law*							*1*
Canada*married							0,79
Quebec*common-law							1,34
Quebec*married							0,88
N	1254	1254	1254	1254	1254	1254	1254
Log Likelihood	-2524.09	-2523.49	-2509,67	-2494,25	-2449,79	-2447.65	-2447.39

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): ***:p<.001: **:p<.01;*p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.
[1]: time varying covariate

Table 5.6B presents the results taking into account two different types of stepfather families: stepfather families in which the women had no prior union and those in which she did. The hypothesis we put forward was that stepfather families in which the women have not had a previous union are less at risk of experiencing a separation than stepfather families in which the women did have a prior union. However, our results suggest the reverse: stepfather families where the mother had no prior union have 25% more chances of separating than stepfather families in which the women had a previous union. This significant effect disappears when controlling for a common child, the age of the mother and father, the age groups of the children, the number of children and the type of union (Model 3 and Model 4). This is due, in part, to the age structure of mothers, as mothers who did not have a union before are younger than those who did and thus face a higher risk of separation. However, when we control for our other covariates, such as the time period when the stepfamily episode is experienced and region, the effect becomes significant. In particular, the risk of separation appears to be closely linked to the time period during which the stepfamily episode is experienced. Part of this explanation is probably linked to the fact that stepfamilies who are formed more recently comprise an increasing proportion of previously separated mothers who no longer face social reprobation.

This result contradicts the assumption that the most fragile type of stepfather family are those in which the women had a prior union, so we cannot confirm Hypothesis 1a.

The lowest risk of experiencing a separation is found among stepmother/stepfather families. They are 64% less likely to separate than stepfather families in which the mother had a union before. This effect remains significant throughout all our models and suggests that, in and of itself, this is a particularly stable type of family, as will be discussed below.

The second hypothesis was that the arrival of a common child decreases the likelihood of parental separation. Indeed, we argued that a common child might be a bonding factor linking all members of the stepfamily. However, although the results hint that this might be the case, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed because the coefficient is not significant if we look at Model 2. However, if we control for age of the mother and father, the age group of the children and the number of children (Model 3), as well as for the type of union (Model 4), the coefficient becomes significant and the arrival of a common child decreases the risk of separation by 27% in Model 3 and 21% in Model 4. This suggests that part of the effect of the risk of separation is linked to the age of the parents and the age of the children, as well as being related to the number of children and the type of union. Nevertheless, this significant effect disappears in our full model (Model 6).

We expected a common child to be a strong predictor for the decrease of the risk of separation, but the results in the female sample vary depending on the model; it will be interesting to see if the results for the male sample are different.

We assumed that adolescent children are a major source of conflict in stepfamilies and a destabilizing factor. With regard to the age of the children, no significant effect was observed, although the results do suggest that stepfamilies with older children are slightly less at risk of separation (Model 3). Our hypothesis was based on the assumptions of several authors (e.g. Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994), and we therefore expected stepfamilies with adolescent children to be at a higher risk of breaking up than those with younger children (under 5 years old). In stepfamilies where the youngest child is aged between 5 and 11 or is 12 or older, the risk of separation seems to be somewhat lower compared to the reference group of families where the youngest child is aged 5 years or younger, but the difference is not statistically significant.

The third model controlled, in addition, for the number of children. We can see that having three children or more in a stepfamily seems to be associated with a lower likelihood of separation compared to the reference category with one child, even though the results are not significant.

In this model, we controlled also for the age of the mother and the father and we can see that the higher the age of the mother at entry in the stepfamily episode, the less likely she is to separate. The effect is significant. One might argue that as women get older, they are more reluctant to leave their partner since their chances of finding a new mate reduce with increasing age; the male sample shows the opposite effect and we will return to this point below. For the fathers, it is with increasing age that there is a higher risk of separation, but the results are not significant.

The last hypothesis aimed to analyze which type of union among stepfamilies is at higher risk of separation. As we can see in Model 4, stepfamily couples living in a common-law union have 87% higher chances to separate than married ones. This supports the assumption that common-law unions are less stable than marriages. If we add the period through which stepfamily life was experienced into the model (Model 5), the effect decreases. Part of the explanation for the decrease of the effect of type of union on separation is due to the time period when stepfamily life is experienced. In the older cohorts, there were proportionally more marriages than common-law unions and marriages tend to be much more stable. The proportion of couples living in a common-law union among stepfamilies has increased in younger cohorts at the same time that the rate of separation of marital unions was increasing. It is worth noting that the effect of the period in which the stepfamily life is experienced is quite striking if we look at Model 5. The more recent the period, the more likely stepfamily couples are to experience a separation. People living in a stepfamily after 1990 are more than six times more likely to experience a separation than those living in a stepfamily before 1970. This is in line with the factors previously discussed: the increased

risk of separation for younger cohorts might be related to the high levels of separation observed since the late 1960s. However, there is no significant effect for the interaction between period and the type of union (results not shown). Region has been introduced in Model 5, but it has no significant effect, although people living in Quebec are 25% more likely to experience a break up than those living in the rest of Canada.

In the final model (Model 6), we included variables such as religion, language, education and employment status. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, socioeconomic characteristics such as income could not be included in the analyses because we only have information at survey and not retrospectively. With regard to religion, people coming from the category Catholics, 'Other' and no religion tend to have a higher tendency to separate than those who are Protestant, but the results are not significant.

No significant effect appeared for language either. Education and work are not significant. We should point out, however, that those with the highest level of education are more at risk of breaking up.

In Model 7, we were looking at a possible interaction between region and type of union. However, no interaction emerged as significant. Therefore, we cannot confirm our hypothesis that in Quebec, cohabiting stepfamily couples are more likely to separate than married couples.

We will now turn to a discussion of the results for the stepfamilies reported by male respondents. At first glance, the results for men are quite surprising for two reasons: the first hypothesis shows very different results from those observed for female respondents and, overall, even if results for many variables tend to be comparable for both men and women, they are more often significant in the case of men.

Table 5.7A: The risk of separation for the first stepfamily episode, according to family type MEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2 (full model)
Type of family		
Stepmother	3.23***	5.07***
Stepfather	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.28*	0.44
N	673	673
Log likelihood	-623.49	-588.11

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): ***:p<.001: **:p<.01;*p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.

Looking at Table 5.7A, we can see that the first hypothesis is quite literally turned on its head in the male sample: it is stepmother families that have a three times higher risk of separation, compared to stepfather families (Model 1). If we control for our covariates, this effect becomes even more striking. When all covariates are taken into account, stepmother families are five times more likely to experience a disruption compared to stepfather families (see Appendices, Table A1). Let us remember that stepfathers who recall a stepfamily episode are likely to report an episode of significant duration in which they were quite involved in family life and in the upbringing of their stepchildren, and thus be perhaps less likely to report separation. They are more likely to be the ones who recall their stepfamily episode at survey and this may result in a selection effect. If such is the case, we can expect to have no information on the stepfamily episodes in which men were involved as stepfathers for only a brief period of time.

With regard to the assumption that stepfather families in which the woman has had a prior union are at higher risk of disruption compared to the ones in which she has not had a previous union, the results for men follow those of the female sample. Stepfather families in which the women had no prior union have a significantly higher risk of separation, see Table 5.7B (Model 1). Interestingly, stepmother families have four to six times more chances to separate than stepfather families in which the women had a prior union (Model 4, 5 and 6). The coefficient remains significant even if we control for all our other covariates.

Table 5.7B: The risk of separation for the first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics MEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Type of family							
Stepmother	3.99***	3.83***	4.70***	5.29***	6.47***	6.41***	7.35***
Stepfather, mother no union before	2.31*	2.60*	2.46*	2.43*	2.48*	2.48*	2.87*
Stepfather, mother union before	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.35*	0.31*	0.46	0.52	0.45	0,55	0,61
Common child[1]							
Yes		0.54*	0.49**	0.64	0,66	0,67	0,65
No		*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Age of mother			1.06*	1.06*	1.05*	1.05*	1.06**
Age of father			0.94*	0.94*	0.94**	0.94**	0.93**
Age group of youngest child in household							
younger than 5			*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
5-11 years			0.60*	0.57*	0.51**	0.50**	0.49**
12 and older			0.82	0,80	0,76	0,68	0,64
Number of children							
1			*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
2			0.71	0,76	0,77	0,76	0.68*
3 and more			0.66	0,68	0.74	0,69	0,65
Type of union[1]							
Marriage				*1*	*1*	*1*	
Common-law				2.32***	1.69*	1.54*	
Period[1]							
before 1970					*1*	*1*	*1*
1970-1979					4.23*	4.29*	4.38*
1980-1989					6.11**	6.46**	6.63**
after 1990					6.74**	7.20**	7.76**
Region							
Rest of Canada					*1*	*1*	
Quebec					1.86**	1.55	
Mother tongue							
English						*1*	*1*
French						1.61	1,39
English and French						0,93	0,85
Other						0,62	0,61
Religion							
Protestant						*1*	*1*
Catholic						0,79	0,81
Other						2.56	2,82
No religion						0.99	1,00
Education							
Less than high School						*1*	*1*
High school						0,98	0,92
Some college						0,89	0,86
College degree or above						0,78	0,68
Work status [1]							
Never worked						*1*	*1*
Working						0,97	0.96
Not working						0,63	0,59
Type of union * Region							
*Canada*common-law*							*1*
Canada*married							0,99
Quebec*common-law							2.82*
Quebec*married							0,90
N	673	673	673	673	673	673	673
Log Likelihood	-621.59	-618.16	-607,99	-599,98	-589,80	-586,07	-582,93

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): ***: p<.001; **: p<.01; *: p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.
[1]: time varying covariate

In the male sample, the arrival of a common child significantly reduces (by 46%) the risk of separation, (Model 2) and this effect remains if we control for the age of the mother and father and the age group of the youngest child (Model 3). However, the effect becomes non-significant when we include the type of union (Model 4). Part of the explanation for the decrease of the effect of the common child on separation is due to the fact that the birth of a common child is more frequent among married couples, who are also less likely to separate. As mentioned above, children seem to be a complicating factor for the establishment of stepfamily life and they are often perceived as a major cause of conflict; this may be true for children who were born prior to the stepfamily episode, but a common child who arrives within an existing stepfamily seems to counteract this effect and decreases the risk of separation. This confirms our hypothesis, even if the significant effect disappears as one introduces further covariates, as mentioned above.

Controlling for the age of the youngest child and the number of children in our model (Model 3), we see that if the youngest child is in the 5-11 age range, the risk of separation is significantly reduced by about 40% compared to the reference category. This effect remains significant when introducing other covariates. One could suggest that children of this age are more likely to welcome a stepparent and find him or her supportive. With regard to the number of children, the coefficients go in the same direction as in the male as in the female sample.

In terms of age, once again the results for men go in the opposite direction from those observed for women: the risk of separation increases with the age of the mother and decreases with the age of the father (Model 3). As they get older, men are less likely to separate. Both results are significant and we will return to this finding in the discussion which follows.

The hypothesis concerning the type of union is also firmly confirmed (Model 5): men living in a common-law union are two times more at risk of separating than men who are married. When one looks at region as a factor, one can see that men in Quebec are almost two times more likely to separate than those living in the rest of Canada. As in the model for women, the effect of type of union decreased when we introduced into our model the period in which stepfamily life was experienced (Model 5).

As for women, the time period during which men experience a stepfamily episode is also significant: the younger the cohort, the higher the risk of separation. However, no interaction has been observed here between type of union and period of entry (results not shown).

Looking at our full model (Model 6), we cannot observe strikingly different outcomes for men compared to the women. But we should mention that religion shows results that are somewhat different between men and women: for men, it is Catholics who are less likely to separate than Protestants (for women, it is the reverse). However, for both men and women, it is those in the category 'Other' who are more likely to separate than Protestants.

As far as education and work are concerned, the results for men are actually the reverse from what they are for women: for men, being in work and having achieved high levels of education reduces the risk of separation and, conversely, the lower the level of education, the higher the risk of separation. Clearly, different mechanisms are at work and we shall elaborate on this in the following discussion.

Likewise in the analysis for women, we were testing for possible interaction between type of union and region (Model 7). The results in the male sample do point to an interaction effect. The effect of the union type is not the same across regions; hence, Quebec cohabiting couples are nearly three times

more likely to separate than those living elsewhere in Canada. Moreover, the gap separating married and cohabiting couples (0.90 vs. 2.82) is likely to be significant in Quebec, while it is not outside Quebec.

2.3 Discussion

In this section we will briefly highlight and discuss some of the outcomes presented above and then turn to the presentation of the results for the arrival of a common child.

The most interesting finding in this analysis has been the differences observed between the stepfamily episodes reported by men and women regarding their risk of separation: while in the female sample it was stepmother families that faced the lowest risk of separation, in the male sample, we found the opposite, with stepmother families having a significantly higher risk of separation. The risk of separation for stepfather families in which the mother had no prior union is similar in both samples: this type of stepfamily is more at risk of experiencing a separation than stepfather families in which the mother had a union before. Interestingly, in both samples stepmother/stepfather families have a significantly lower risk of separation. As mentioned in Chapter II, section 4.2, it may be because both families face the same problems and have similar past experiences that these stepmother/stepfather families are stronger and less likely to break up. Recalling our theoretical chapter on stepfamily dynamics (Chapter II), we know that children in remarriages can be a major source of conflict. However, it seems to be that if both partners bring children to the union, this effect weakens compared to that observed in the other three stepfamily types. For stepfather families in which the mother had no prior union or for stepmother families, the adjustment seems to be somewhat more complicated. The greater ambiguity of roles in stepfather/stepmother families, as discussed in Chapter II, section 4.1, does not seem to influence the risk of disruption.

We should further point out here that the results with regard to the age of the youngest child do not confirm those found in the research by Desrosiers and others (1995). According to them, stepfamilies with younger children are less likely to break up than those with older ones. We tried grouping the age of the children in a variety of ways (creating smaller groups or reducing the age gaps) but this did not change any of the results observed (results not shown). If we recall Jacobson (1995) and his assumption that couples need time to establish their "mini-culture" and that children might feel rejected during this time, it could be that younger children feel this rejection more strongly as they tend to require more time and attention. If both partners have to face their day to day life, strengthen their new relationship and look after young children, stress and conflict are more likely to arise. However, we cannot support this assumption with our data because we know nothing retrospectively about the time that parents spent with their (step)children or the time the couple had to itself. Qualitative analyses could shed light on these issues.

An interesting finding is the one relating to the age of the parents and the different outcomes in female and male behaviour in the female sample. One explanation might be that as men get older, they tend to enter relationships with younger partners, whereas women do not display this type of behaviour. This hypothesis is consistent with the work of Sweeney (2002) who also speculates that "older women will be relatively more likely than younger women to delay separation until prospects for reaffilliation are good. As men tend to see less reduction with age either in their socially defined attractiveness or pool of potential partners, no similar interactions with the age are expected" (Sweeney, 2002, p. 415).

Looking at the male sample, we find the reverse: as women get older, they are significantly more likely to experience separation and men significantly less so. However, we do not know why this is the case; variables such as education

and work status, which might have helped us speculate on these findings, are not significant.

All in all, we saw that part of the explanation for the risk of break up in stepfamilies can be drawn from the time period during which stepfamily life is experienced; the younger cohorts are much more at risk to separate than the older ones. This effect is stronger for men than for women. Socioeconomic variables, such as education and work status, did not have any significant effect, although they do hint at some additional explanations for the differences in female and male behaviour, as mentioned above.

Even though we could not confirm all our hypotheses, the results point to some interesting findings: the type of stepfamily seems to be a key determinant for the risk of break up. Also, the findings suggest that there are quite different mechanisms at work in the male and female sample. This highlights the necessity of doing separate analyses which will thus provide a better understanding of female and male behaviour.

We will now look at whether these different patterns between men and women also hold for the analysis of the arrival of a common child.

3. Arrival of a common child: some Kaplan-Meier estimations

As in the analysis of stepfamily instability, we first carried out some Kaplan-Meier estimations to analyze the transition from a step- to a blended family with the dependent variable being the arrival of a common child. The cumulated probabilities of the risk of having a common child will be presented according to several characteristics. But before doing so, we present in Table 5.8 possible types of ending for an episode in this analysis.

Table 5.8: Distribution (in %)[1] of first stepfamily episode with children aged under 21 by family type, according to their type of ending (N=2079)

	Type of family				
	Stepmother	Stepfather, mother no union before	Stepfather, mother union before	Stepfather and stepmother	Total
Arrival of common child	35.8	51.9	28.6	23.4	34.8
Episode ended or women older than 42 years	52.3	36.3	53.8	36.3	49.2
Ongoing epsiode	12.0	11.8	17.6	40.3	16.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

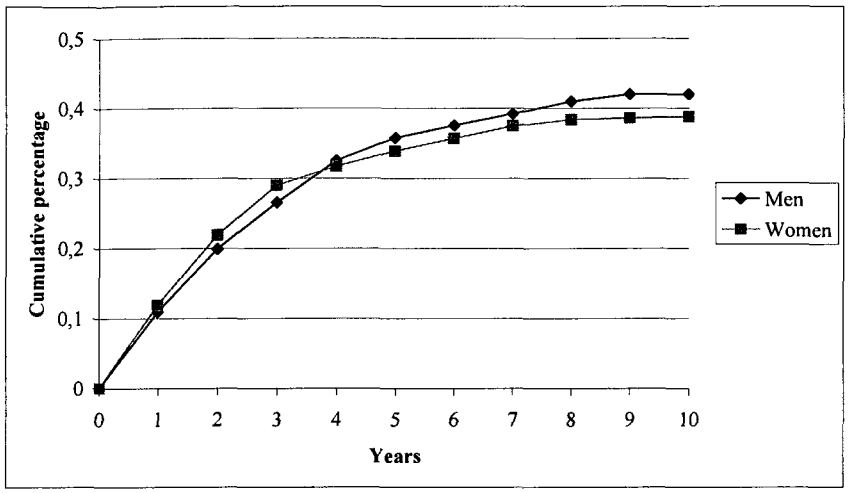
$\chi 2 = 59487.62$ $p = .000$

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

[1]: Percentages based on weighted data

Roughly a third (34.8%) of all stepfamilies had a child. We can see that 49.2% of our episodes stopped being at risk of having a common child before experiencing the event. Two types of reasons can be invoked: either the episode is no longer ongoing because it ended before the event of having a common child occurred (e.g. separation, death of a partner or the departure of the last stepchild), or the woman reached the age of 42 before having a child. In an earlier discussion, we argued that women over 42 were no longer considered to be at risk of having a common child and would, therefore, be censored. A fraction of stepfamilies, 16%, in which the woman was younger than 42 at the beginning of the episode (i.e. still at risk of having a common child), was still ongoing at the time of the survey. In Table 5.8, we see that 40.3% of our stepfather/stepmother families were still ongoing and at risk of having a common child at the time of the interview. Almost 52% of stepfather families in which the mother had no prior union had witnessed the arrival of a common child, compared to only 23.4% of stepfather/stepmother families.

Figure 5.6: Cumulative probabilities of having a common child by sex of respondents (Kaplan-Meier estimation)

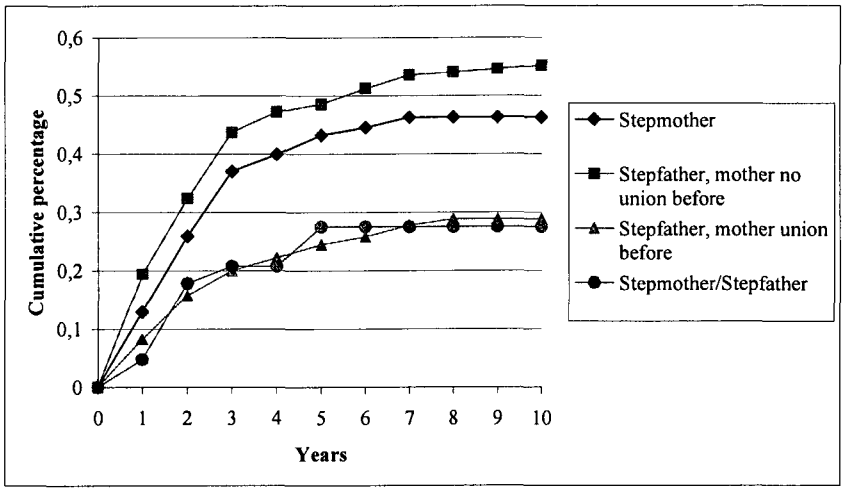


Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

Figure 5.6 illustrates the cumulative probabilities of having a common child among stepfamilies reported by men and women. Both the curves for men and women indicate that having a common child is likely to occur within the first five to seven years after the beginning of a stepfamily episode; for example, after five years, 34% of women and men have witnessed the arrival of a common child. After seven years, 39% of the men and 37% of the women in a stepfamily had a common child. The curve grows faster at the beginning of the stepfamily episode; this makes particular sense for women as their fertility declines with increasing age.

Figures 5.7 and 5.8 introduce separately for women and men the probability of having a common child by stepfamily type.

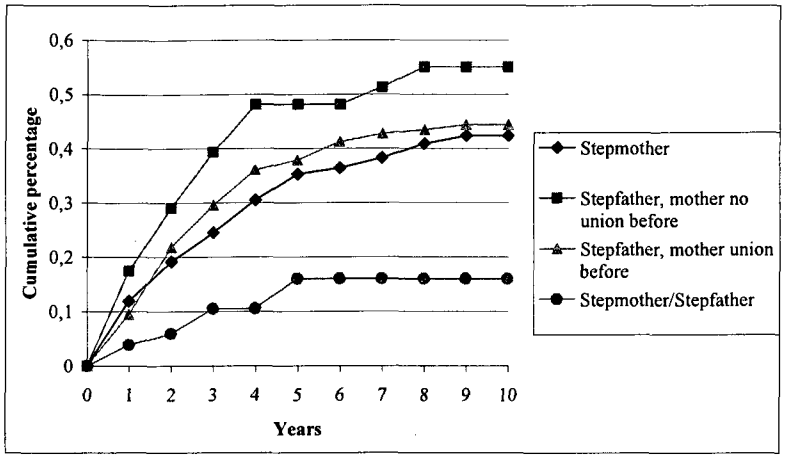
Figure 5.7: Cumulative probabilities of having a common child by type of stepfamily WOMEN (Kaplan-Meier estimation)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

In Figure 5.7, we see that stepfather families reported by women in which the mother has not had a prior union are the most likely ones to make the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family. After 6 years, 51% of them had a common child. In stepmother families in which the woman has not yet had any biological children of her own, it is 44%. So, contrary to our expectations, stepmother families are not the type most likely to have a common child. Finally, stepmother/stepfather families are the least likely to have a common child (after 6 years, only 26% did). The implications of these results will be discussed when we analyze the Cox models. We will now look at the results for men.

Figure 5.8: Cumulative probabilities of having a common child by type of stepfamily MEN (Kaplan-Meier estimation)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

As we can see from the male sample, stepfather families in which the mother had no prior union have a high risk of having a common child (see Figure 5.8). After three years, 39% of this family type witnessed the arrival of a common child and after four years, it is almost 50%. The curve for stepmother families is quite different in this male sample from what it was in the female sample: for men, after four years, 30% of stepmother families have a common child and after eight years, it is 41%. In the female sample, it was 40% after four years and 46% after eight years. With regard to stepfather families in which the mother did have a prior union, differences between men and women are also remarkable: in the male sample it is 36% of stepfather families/women with prior union who witnessed the arrival of a common child after four years, compared to 22% in the female sample. And after eight years, it is 43% in the male sample and only 29% in the female sample that experiences the event of having a common child. The implications of these differences will be discussed below. The unusual appearance of the curve for stepmother/stepfather families may simply be due to the small number of cases.

3.1 Arrival of a common child: results of the Cox model

For the analysis of the arrival of a common child, the covariates are the same as for the model on stepfamily instability, with the exception of the age of fathers

and religion. These variables were no longer included as they did not bring out any interesting results. The order of the modeling follows the order we elaborated for our hypotheses. Again, we start first by analyzing a stepfamily model without distinguishing between the two groups of stepfather families (results presented in Table 5.9A). In the next table (Table 5.9B), we differentiated between the two different types of stepfather families and our first model for both tables, Model 1, tests the effect of the type of family on the likelihood of having a common child. Model 2 introduces the age of the mother as a continuous variable. Model 3 includes the age groups of the youngest child, while Model 4 controls for the number of children and Model 5 for the type of union and region. Model 6 is the full model in which period, mother tongue, education, and work status are also introduced. Model 7 shows the interaction between type of union and region.

Table 5.9A: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to family type WOMEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2 (full model)
Type of family		
Stepmother	1.37*	1.32*
Stepfather	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.83	1.03
N	1146	1146
Log likelihood	-2924.84	-2761.11

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calucalted using the bootstrap estimation method.

Our first hypothesis, that stepmother families are more likely than stepfather families to make the transition to a blended family, can be confirmed at first glance, but, as we will see later when we distinguish between two stepfather family types, the results are somewhat different. Looking at Table 5.9A, we see that stepmother families have a 37% higher risk of having a common child compared to stepfather families. The coefficient slightly decreases when looking at the full model for this table (Model 2) but remains significant. We therefore have evidence that becoming a biological parent is important for women.

Table 5.9B: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics WOMEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Type of family							
Stepmother	1.82***	1.39*	1.53*	1.54**	1.39*	1.29	1.30
Stepfather, mother no union before	2.26***	1.29	1.33*	1.32*	1.04	0.95	0.93
Stepfather, mother union before	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	1.11	1.18	1.11	1.09	1.03	1.02	1.02
Age of mother		0.92***	0.93***	0.94***	0.94***	0.94***	0.94***
Age group of youngest child in household							
younger than 5			2.31*	2.34*	2.77**	2.64**	2.65**
5-11 years			1.83*	1.84*	2.02*	2.02*	2.03*
12 and older			*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Number of children							
1				*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
2				0.85	0,86	0,82	0,80
3 and more				1.01	0,93	0,83	0,82
Type of union[1]							
Marriage					*1*	*1*	
Common-law					0.48***	0.50***	
Region							
Rest of Canada					*1*	*1*	
Quebec					1,12	1,23	
Period[1]							
before 1970						*1*	*1*
1970-1979						0,76	0,77
1980-1989						1,00	1.00
after 1990						0,97	0,98
Mother tongue							
English						*1*	*1*
French						0,91	0,99
English and French						0,86	0,79
Other						1,19	1,19
Education							
Less than high School						*1*	*1*
High school						0,93	0,95
Some college						0,92	0.93
College degree or above						1,08	1,11
Work status[1]							
Never worked						*1*	*1*
Working						0,76	0,79
Not working						2.47***	2.55***
Type of union * Region							
*Canada*common-law*							*1*
Canada*married							1.77***
Quebec*common-law							0,87
Quebec*married							2.73**
N	1146	1146	1146	1146	1146	1146	1146
Log Likelihood	-2896.93	-2847.20	-2841.78	-2840.71	-2817.46	-2761.04	-2758.40

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calucalted using the bootstrap estimation method.
[1]: time varying covariate

The first model of Table 5.9B distinguishes between stepfather families in which the mother has had a prior union and those in which she has not; it shows that the latter have a high likelihood of having a common child. So it is no longer stepmother families that have the highest likelihood of having a common child. This points out the importance of distinguishing between the two groups of stepfather families, since they appear to be very different. Stepfather families in which the women had no prior union are twice as likely to witness the arrival of a common child compared to those in which the women did have a prior union. However, when controlling for the age of the mother, the coefficient attached to women with no prior union decreases and becomes insignificant. This suggests that part of the effect observed for the risk of having a common child among this group was due to the mother's young age. As we can see in the second model, the age of the mother more generally has a clear impact on the likelihood of having a common child. With increasing age, the likelihood decreases. We also tested the effect of age for the mother and the father (results not shown here) by including age as a categorical variable and found that the likelihood of having a common child continuously decreases as they move from the youngest to the oldest age groups. Hypothesis 2 suggested that this would be the case and can therefore be accepted.

With regard to the age of the youngest child and its influence on having a common child (Model 3), one can see that the younger the child is, the higher is the risk of having a common child: stepfamilies with children younger than 5 have more than twice the chance to witness the arrival of a common child. This coefficient becomes even stronger if we control for the number of children and the type of union (Model 4 and 5).

As the literature suggests and as discussed previously, it seems that families with preschoolers have a higher risk of having a common child than families where the children are already in puberty. This supports the idea that it might be less of a change in lifestyle for families to have an additional child if

they already have young children in the household, as put forward in our Hypothesis 3.

The relationship between the number of children living in the household and the likelihood of having a common child has been the subject of many studies with different outcomes, as discussed in Chapter II, section 5.3. Although the coefficients are not significant (Model 4), the results suggest that the likelihood of having a common child decreases with a rising number of children. Thus Hypothesis 4 cannot be confirmed.

Type of union has a strong influence on the likelihood of having a common child (Model 6). As one can see, stepfamily couples living in a common-law union are 52% less likely to have a common child than stepfamily couples that are married. This supports the assumption that, in general, couples living in a common-law union are less likely to have children and that blended family couples tend to marry rather than live in a common-law union. Of course, it may be that it is the married stepfamily which is more likely to have a common child. One may wonder whether they marry to cement their stepfamily and make it more institutionalized, or do they marry and institutionalize the family after the conception of the common child because of its impending birth.

Surprisingly, region does not have any significant effect on the likelihood of making the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family (Model 5). In Chapter II, section 5.4, we looked at regional differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada, concerning type of union and fertility rates, for example. However, with regard to the arrival of a common child, no differences have been found.

Our next hypothesis was that stepfamily couples living in a common-law union in English Canada are more likely to have a common child than those who live in Quebec. To verify this assumption we had to test an interaction between

region and type of union. As one can see, stepfamily couples living in a common-law union are 13% less likely to have a common child in Quebec compared to the rest of Canada. But this result is not significant so we cannot confirm our hypothesis. The assumption put forward by Brown (2000; see Chapter II, section 5.4) that common-law couples need something more to cement their relationship in regions where common-law relationship is less accepted cannot be confirmed for Canada. This could be simply because common-law unions are already widely accepted in Canada, as opposed to the US for which Brown developed her hypothesis. However, it is nevertheless interesting to note that in our model, stepfamily couples who are married are 77% more likely to have a common child as opposed to stepfamily couples living in a common-law union when looking at our category 'rest of Canada'. Stepfamily couples who are married and living in Quebec are more than twice as likely to witness the arrival of a common child compared to those living in a common-law union and in the rest of Canada.

In order to analyze regional differences from a different perspective, we introduced mother tongue into the model (Model 6) to test whether there are differences between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians. However, language is not a significant factor in the likelihood of having a common child and we will return to this below. We also controlled for the time period when the stepfamily life was experienced in order to test whether stepfamily dynamics with regard to having a common child also changed over time and whether overall fertility rates also affected stepfamilies. Even if we did not set out with a particular hypothesis on this, it seemed interesting to us to look at the time period during which stepfamily life was experienced since part of our discussion is on declining fertility trends in western societies. The results suggest that, compared to the reference category (living in a stepfamily before 1970), the subsequent cohort was less likely to have a common child. We may attribute this to a more general population-wide decrease in fertility rates. However the coefficient for period is not significant.

Last but not least, to test our last hypothesis (women who work are less likely to have a common child compared to those who do not work), we introduced education and work status as variables. The level of education is not significant, although more educated women seem to be somewhat more likely to have a common child than those with a lower level of education (Model 6). As we can see, the coefficient for working women is not significant so we cannot accept our hypothesis. We should nevertheless mention that women who are not working are more than twice as likely to have a common child compared to those who never worked. We will now turn to the results for the male sample.

Once again, compared to the female sample, the results across family types are strikingly different for the episodes reported by men and we will now turn to look at them.

Table 5.10A: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to family type MEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2 (full model)
Type of family		
Stepmother	0.84	0.76*
Stepfather	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.31**	0.65
N	613	613
Log likelihood	-1429.99	-1364.68

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calucalted using the bootstrap estimation method.

Looking at Table 5.10A, Model 1, we can see that stepmother families have a 16% lower chance of having a common child than stepfather families, but the difference was not significant. In the full model (Model 2), the gap separating the two groups is wider and the coefficient becomes significant. It was while controlling for the age of the mother that the coefficient became significant (see Appendices, Table A2). This suggests that the arrival of a common child is closely linked to the age of the mother. This finding contradicts our hypothesis. It

also goes against the idea that the desire to obtain a maternal status plays a major role in the decision of stepfamily couples to have a common child. Stepmother/stepfather families are also significantly less likely to have a common child than stepfather families. This result makes sense since these families have the largest number of children and are the most complex. Though the gap between stepmother and stepfather families is probably due to a selection effect: in the male sample, as opposed to the female sample, we have all stepmothers, not just the committed ones, as fathers living with their own children are likely to report the presence of a stepmother whatever her involvement. However, with regard to the fathers, we might have only the more committed ones in our male sample: those who are living with their children as a biological father or stepfather. The less committed men may potentially have omitted mentioning their role as stepfathers or even as biological fathers, to a lesser degree.

Table 5.10B: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics MEN (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 4	Model 6	Model 7
Type of family							
Stepmother	0.90	0.78	0.83	0.85	0.75	0.78	0.78
Stepfather, mother no union before	1.38	1.11	1.14	1.21	1.31	1.14	1.14
Stepfather, mother union before	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.33**	0.41*	0.39**	0.67	0.68	0.68	0.68
Age of mother		0.94***	0.95***	0.96**	0.95***	0.94***	0.94***
Age group of youngest child in household							
younger than 5			2.16*	2.47**	2.38*	2.38*	2.38*
5-11 years			2.01*	2.16*	2.19*	2.25*	2.25*
12 and older			*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
Number of children							
1				*1*	*1*	*1*	*1*
2				0.93	0,96	0,96	0,96
3 and more				0.42**	0.36**	0.39*	0.39*
Type of union[1]							
Marriage					*1*	*1*	
Common-law					0.38***	0.33***	
Region							
Rest of Canada					*1*	*1*	
Quebec					1,17	1,17	
Period[1]							
before 1970						*1*	*1*
1970-1979						0,67	0,67
1980-1989						0,85	0,85
after 1990						1,44	1,44
Mother tongue							
English						*1*	*1*
French						1,09	1,08
English and French						1,37	1,37
Other						1,08	1,08
Education							
Less than high School						*1*	*1*
High school						0,85	0,85
Some college						0.97	0.97
College degree or above						0,67	0,67
Work status[1]							
Never worked						*1*	*1*
Working						1,79	1,79
Not working						1.56	1.55
Type of union * Region							
*Canada*common-law*							*1*
Canada*married							3.09***
Quebec*common-law							1,21
Quebec*married							3.57***
N	613	613	613	613	613	613	613
Log Likelihood	-1428.85	-1411.16	-1407.96	-1402.81	-1377.98	-1364.51	-1364,50

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.
[1] time varying covariate

If we distinguish in our first model of Table 5.10B, between the two types of stepfather families, we find that where the mother has had no union before, the family is more likely to have a common child; however the coefficient is not significant. With regard to this result one could argue that 'joint' parenthood may be a factor; i.e. whereas the stepfather acquires the role of a parent with the arrival of a common child, the mother (who has not had a previous union) thus enjoys becoming a parent within a union. The same can be said for the female sample. However, stepmother/stepfather families are 67% less likely to witness the arrival of a common child. The effect is significant. When we control for the number of children (Model 4), the effect of the coefficient is reduced and is no longer significant. This suggests that the risk of having a common child is closely linked to the number of children.

With regard to our second hypothesis concerning the age of the mother, we can confirm that when it increases, the likelihood of having a common child decreases. Since there were no interesting observations to be drawn from the age of the father, this covariate is not part of the analysis.

Our third hypothesis can also be confirmed: the younger the existing children, the more likely it is that they will have a stepsibling.

Unlike in the female sample, the fourth hypothesis can here be confirmed. With an increasing number of children, the likelihood of having a common child decreases significantly i.e. stepfamilies having three or more children are 58% more likely to have a common child than the ones having only one child (Model 4).

Type of union tells the same story as in the female sample: people living in a common-law union are 62% less likely to have a common child in a stepfamily context. In addition, if we look at region and at the interaction between

region and type of union (Model 7), no interaction effect can be found. The results go in the same direction as for women.

With regard to the time period during which stepfamily life is experienced, we see that the younger cohorts are more likely to have a common child (Model 6). We will discuss this issue below.

Mother tongue does not show any significant effect. Nor do education and work status (Model 6). We should recall here that the hypothesis regarding theses variables was only developed for women and not for men, since it is usually women who have to reconcile work and family, at least when the children are very small.

In Chapter II, section 5.6., we looked at the issue of sterilization. Most of the studies discussed were based on research that included sterilized respondents. We were curious to see to what extent our results might change if sterilized respondents were excluded from the analyses or if sterilization was used as a censoring event. In order to take sterilization into account, we ran a number of models. The results for the sample which took sterilization as a censoring event into account are presented separately for male and female respondents in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics
STERILIZATION TREATED AS CENSORING EVENT (Cox model)

	Model 1 (Women)	Model 2 (Men)
Type of family		
Stepmother	1.47*	0.68*
Stepfather, mother no union before	1.01	0.90
Stepfather, mother union before	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.85	0.52
Age of mother	0.96*	0.95*
Age group of youngest child in household		
younger than 5	2.46*	3.74**
5-11 years	1.63	3.33*
12 and older	*1*	*1*
Number of children		
1	*1*	*1*
2	1.00	0.95
3 and more	1.00	0.32**
Type of union[1]		
Marriage	*1*	*1*
Common-law	0.42***	0.34***
Region		
Rest of Canada	*1*	*1*
Quebec	1.73*	1.37
Period[1]		
before 1970	*1*	*1*
1970-1979	0.54**	0.57*
1980-1989	0.40***	0.61*
after 1990	0.52**	0.93
Mother tongue		
English	*1*	*1*
French	0.62*	0.83
English and French	0.79	2.09*
Other	0.98	0.93
Education		
Less than high School	*1*	*1*
High school	0.85	0.93
Some college	1.07	1.10
College degree or above	1.14	0.67
Work status[1]		
Never worked	*1*	*1*
Working	0.70*	1.35
Not working	1.87**	1.47
N	1146	613
Log Likelihood	-1969.67	-1128.11

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.
Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.
[1]: time varying covariate

As one can see, the results do not change substantially from the preceding analyses with either sample, male or female with the exception that time period seems to have a significant effect on having a common child, even though the direction of the coefficient did not change: the younger cohort in the female sample (after 1990) is 48% less likely to have a common child than the reference category (before 1970). Additionally, in the female sample, Quebec women are 73% more likely to have common child compared to those living in the rest of Canada and this result is significant. In Quebec, Tuba sterilization has been popular since the 1970s; this may account for the fact that region has not been a significant coefficient in our previous analyses, but becomes significant as soon as we take sterilization as a censoring event since a woman is no longer at risk of having child as soon as she is sterile. With regard to period, we may speculate that when contraceptive methods were less reliable, more women may have undergone sterilization to ensure that they would have no further children. With improved contraception available, women are perhaps less likely to opt for sterilization. This would explain why the effect of period became significant in this analysis.

3.2 Discussion

In this section, we briefly discuss some of the results presented above. With regard to our first hypothesis, that stepmother families might be more likely to witness the arrival of a common child than stepfather families, we can only accept the hypothesis for the female and not the male sample. In the sample for women, we can only accept this hypothesis when taking stepfather families as a whole. When distinguishing between the two types of stepfather families, it is no longer stepmother families who have the highest chance of having a common child. This points to the importance of differentiating between the two types of stepfather families. In the male sample, we observed the contrary: stepmothers were found to be less likely to have a common child. This contradictory result may be attributed to a selection effect. In the female sample, women who previously reported acting as a stepmother are likely to be those who were involved in longer

stepfamily episodes and for whom mothering was an important role. For them, becoming a biological mother might be important and this would confirm the idea that maternal status plays a role. In the male sample, the stepfathers who report a stepfamily episode are likely to be the ones who were more involved in longer episodes and have fond memories of the experience. The same might be true for the fathers who live with their biological children in a stepmother family. For the latter, it might be less important to have additional children and this would explain the lower likelihood of stepmother families witnessing the arrival of a common child. With regard to our other hypothesis according to which increasing age of both mother and children leads to a decreasing likelihood for a stepfamily to have a common child, this seems to be supported by both samples. This suggests that age is a strong factor for childbearing decisions in stepfamilies.

Interestingly, the number of children does not appear to influence significantly the decision whether to have a common child or not, so the sibling hypothesis according to which couples have children to provide siblings for existing ones does not seem to be borne out by our study. This is important because much past research suggests that the number of children is a strong predictor for further childbearing decisions. It is all the more interesting, because raising children requires a lot of time and investment and one could have thought that an increasing number of children would be a deterrent for further births.

Looking at the time period during which stepfamily life was experienced, we saw that in the male sample the younger cohorts (after 1990) are more likely to have a common child than the reference category (before 1970). Even though the result is not significant, it is a finding that is worth noting. Juby et al. (2001) did not have findings for this last cohort since the data had not yet been collected. Looking at Canadian fertility rates in general, one can see that from the end of the 1980s and until the mid-1990s, there was a slight increase in fertility in Canada (Milan, 2000). This may explain the increasing likelihood of having a common child for the 1990 cohort compared to the older cohorts. One may further assume

that since the number of stepfamilies continued to rise during this period and stepfamilies were thus no longer perceived as unusual, so having a common child might have become more normal in this type of family. These results differ from the female sample. We could suggest that the meaning of fatherhood has changed and that paternal status has become something towards which men can aspire.

We also took into consideration sterilization and tested the data with it in three different ways: as a time varying variable, excluding it from the sample altogether or considering sterilization as a censoring factor, but none of the results led to important changes in our outcomes without the one mentioned previously namely region and time period in the female sample.

Conclusion

In the following section we will draw some conclusions on our analysis of stepfamily dynamics, before turning to the general discussion and conclusion of this dissertation.

The results presented suggest that stepfather families with a mother who has had no prior union are at a high risk of experiencing a separation, while stepfather/stepmother families are the least likely to separate. This suggests that partners share a similar family history in the latter and are thus able to adjust more easily to stepfamily life. The adjustment seems to be more difficult in stepfather families in which the mother has not had a prior union, even if it is only one partner who brings a child into the family and the setup appears less complex. It may be that in this type of family, the child takes up time and attention that might otherwise be devoted by the couple to adjusting to each other and establishing their 'mini-culture', as suggested by Jacobson and his processual model. Also, if we assume that the mother has been alone with the child and did not experience a separation shortly before entering into the stepfamily episode, it might be difficult for the child to share the mother with her new partner, leading to conflict within

the stepfamily. Yet one might have assumed that this type of family is less likely to separate than stepfather families in which the mother did have a prior union because here, there might still be a biological father needing to be integrated within the new family setup (visiting arrangements, money transfers, etc.).

In stepfather/stepmother families, on the other hand, partners are perhaps more equal in the time and attention they divert towards children because they both have children and commitments to them. If this is the case, then one would expect results for stepmother families to be similar to those of stepfather families, but this is not the case in the female sample. It is perhaps gender differences that come into play, with women trying harder to be good stepmothers and to fulfill everybody's expectations of their role, thus making for higher success rates in this type of family. We also have to consider that the female sample consists of those women who report themselves as stepmothers and who might, therefore, also be the ones who were very involved in their stepfamily life. Stepmothers who do not recall such an episode are unlikely to appear in the sample. In the male sample, the low success rate of stepmother families might be attributed to a similar selectivity effect: it is the fathers, biological or step, who are the respondents. Therefore, the success of stepfather relative to stepmother families may be due to the fact that it is those men who were more involved in their stepfamily who are likely to recall and report the episode.

The type of union around which the stepfamily is formed seems to play an important role in the stability of stepfamilies: stepfamilies living in a common-law union are much more at risk of experiencing a disruption than those in which the couple is married. For the male sample, this is even truer. This might be in line with the generally higher instability of common-law unions. Demographic factors, such as the age and the number of children, seem to have only a weak effect on instability, but the arrival of a common child decreases the risk of separation, even though this result is not robust when controlling for our other covariates. So maybe it is true that a common child creates a unique bond tying

the family together. Region also seems to play only a significant role in stepfamily stability in the male sample, with a higher risk of separation in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada, possibly related to the higher rate of common-law unions in this province. But surprisingly, regional differences disappear when controlling for mother tongue; this suggests that part of the effect of region on separation is due to mother tongue. Even though the coefficients for mother tongue are not significant we can see that respondents having French as their mother tongue are 61% more likely to separate than respondents having English as their mother tongue. With regard to results on the arrival of a common child, region did not show any significant effect either. We can thus conclude that regional differences do not play a major role here. Indeed, one can perhaps assume that not only do stepfamilies have their own dynamic but are also of such complexity that regional differences are no longer significant. One explanation for this finding might be that regional differences may apply in the decision to have a first child (availability of daycare, paternity and maternity leave packages, etc.), but is less likely to be a factor in stepfamily stability.

The results suggest that parents and children experience several transitions during their family life, going back and forth between single parenthood and stepfamily life. As this takes place, the circle of relatives grows and children will have to learn to adjust not only to one stepparent but possibly to two or more. This is not necessarily a negative experience for the children and the effect of such changes will depend not only on how they perceive the separation(s) and new partnership(s) of their parent(s), but also on how the parents communicate with their children about the changes in question. These effects would have to be measured by further studies that would look at second (or later) stepfamily episodes and the impact of stepfamily life on children.

With regard to the arrival of a common child, our results do support some of the assumptions underlying the theoretical framework discussed above. Demographic factors are strongly related to the risk of having a common child.

The so-called 'sibling hypothesis' is not supported by our results, because the number of children was not a significant variable. The sibling hypothesis may be more applicable to intact families for whom the number of children seems to be a key determinant for having an additional child (see for discussion Juby et al., 2001). Our hypothesis regarding women's work status, suggesting that ones who work were less likely to have a common child, has not been confirmed. Indeed, the result for working women was not significant.

However looking at work status comparing men and women, interesting elements emerge. Work appears to have much more of an effect on the likelihood of women having a common child than it does for men. Of course, additional children demand changes in lifestyle and career for both men and women, but for men (of whom far fewer are reported as not working or never having worked), the decision to have additional children might be driven more often by economic factors: each additional child is an additional cost. For women, additional children still have a higher impact on lifestyle and career planning than they do on men. As we saw, women who are not working are much more likely to have additional children than the ones who do work. However, we observed no interaction between the age of the child and work status (results not shown). Additionally, we should mention that it is difficult to know whether women who are reported as not working took extended maternity leave for the sake of the other older children, or whether they stopped working because they have an additional child.

All in all, our results suggest that type of stepfamily and type of union seem to be key determinants for both analyses, while variables such as region and time period seem to be stronger determinants for the risk of separation, and childbearing in stepfamilies is strongly related to the age of the mother and the youngest child. Interestingly, women's work status is an important determinant for having a common child but not for the risk of separation, although the role of women in the labour market is often put forward to explain their willingness to separate.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The dissertation presented here was about stepfamilies. In this conclusion, we discuss some of the results and suggest questions for further research. In the first part of the dissertation, we saw that Canada faces challenges similar to those of many Western societies, namely, a low fertility rate, high divorce and separation rates, an aging population and an increasing number of couples choosing to live in a common-law union rather than marry. There is also a rising number of stepfamilies in Canada.

We reminded readers of several influential theories explaining these demographic changes. One of these theories, the Second Demographic Transition, has been discussed in detail. The main idea behind this framework is that there have been fundamental changes in values and attitudes toward marriage, divorce and parenthood. People are described as being more individualistic and this has an impact on their decision to have children and on the perceived role of parenthood. Nowadays, parenthood seems to have more to do with individual self-fulfillment than with meeting social expectations by having children.

In addition, we saw that different explanations have been put forward to help understand the increase in divorce rates, in particular some classic approaches, such as Becker's. He attributes high divorce rates and the decline in the number of marriages to a weakening of the division of labour within couples (men as breadwinners, women as child carers). However, scholars who emphasize the role of gender (e.g. England and Farkas, 1986) explain the high divorce rates by the increased financial independence of women through their participation in the labour market and their consequently increased ability to leave unhappy relationships.

Before analyzing the dynamics of stepfamilies in particular, we took a step back to discuss the re-emergence of stepfamilies, the terms used to describe them,

and their definition. We also tried to understand why they are so often perceived as problematic family setups. Stepfamilies are not a new phenomenon; indeed, they have always existed, but the circumstances around their formation have changed: nowadays, they are mostly formed after a separation or divorce and not after the death of a partner. This makes stepfamilies more complex than in the past, because the other biological parent is usually still present and has to be taken into account in any analysis of stepfamilies. Children have to adjust to their parent's new partner and maintain contact with their other biological parent who is no longer part of their day-to-day life, a challenge which has to be accepted by everyone involved in the stepfamily. We saw that stepfamilies are often labelled as problematic or stigmatized; this might be due to the fact that the classic intact family continues to be the main reference point and that stepfamilies have not yet been institutionalized (Cherlin, 1978).

We then turned to look at the definition of stepfamilies and saw that this definition depends, to a large extent, on the perspective we adopt. An apparently simple diagram involving 3 families (see Diagram 1.1, Chapter I) helped us to understand why the definition of stepfamilies is so complicated. We also saw that different studies put forward a variety of definitions. We decided to follow the most common definition: a stepfamily is made up of a biological parent living under one roof with his/her children and a partner who is not the biological parent of the child(ren). A blended family is a stepfamily, as defined here, which also includes a child born to the couple. This common child has often been described in the literature as providing a uniting bond for the whole family.

We presented some family theories and examined which would be best suited to the study of stepfamilies in today's context. Indeed, families are much more dynamic than they were in the past and the roles of men and women have changed: women are very active participants in the labour market and men are no longer the only breadwinners. We saw first that from the perspective of a classical system theory, stepfamilies are still seen as being very different from intact

families. We must remember that intact families continue to be the key reference point for any comparison of alternative family models. This makes it all the more difficult for stepfamilies to find their place in society. Theories concerning symbolic interactionism, the second theory we presented, helped us to understand the importance of roles and role expectations in stepfamilies. This is particularly important here since individuals have to adapt to different roles simultaneously (e.g. becoming a stepparent and a partner). Third, we saw that development theory and the sociology of the life course provide the best frameworks to understand not only families but also stepfamilies in a longitudinal analysis because it takes into account a time span within which we can look at the circumstances likely to have an impact on the risk of separation or of having an additional child. In my view, it is also interesting to note that this perspective is less value laden as it does not consider stepfamilies as problematic a priori.

We then turned our discussion to focus solely on stepfamilies, looking more particularly at their dynamics (Chapter II). We were interested in two issues in particular: 1) the instability of stepfamilies and 2) the arrival of a common child. We started first with a theoretical discussion of stepfamilies and their lack of institutionalization. We saw that Cherlin's assumption regarding the lack of institutionalization (Cherlin, 1978) is the most common explanation for stepfamily instability. Jacobson's (1995) processual model actually offers an additional explanation for the understanding of stepfamily instability as it takes into account the past of each family member and the requirements for building a new family. We further discussed which type of stepfamilies might be more stable, which variables might influence their instability, as well as factors such as the age of the children, number of children, marital status and region. We thus developed several hypotheses with regard to stepfamily instability.

On the basis of our literature review, we argued that stepmother families are less at risk of breaking up (**H1**) and that stepfather families in which women have not had a prior union are less at risk of experiencing a separation than the

ones in which the women have had a prior union (**H1a**). We also argued that a common child would decrease the likelihood of separation (**H2**), that stepfamilies with adolescent children are at a higher risk of separation than those with younger children (**H3**), that stepfamilies living in a common-law union are less stable than those who are married (**H4**), and finally, that married couples in Quebec are less likely to separate than cohabiting stepfamily couples but that the gap between them should be smaller than that observed elsewhere in Canada (**H4a**).

We then turned to the question of the arrival of a new child, discussing the circumstances in which a stepfamily might decide to have a common child. Prominent theoretical frameworks, such as union confirmation hypothesis, parenthood-commitment hypothesis, and sibling hypothesis were discussed and our own research hypotheses were elaborated. Our first hypothesis assumed that stepmother families are more likely to make the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family (**H1**); the second hypothesis suggested that the younger the women are upon entering a stepfamily, the more likely they are to make a transition to a blended family (**H2**). The third hypothesis suggested that stepfamilies in which the youngest pre-union child living within the stepfamily is a preschooler are more likely to make the transition from a stepfamily to a blended family, as opposed to stepfamilies where the youngest pre-union child living within the stepfamily is already in school (**H3**). In the fourth hypothesis, we suggested that with an increasing number of (step)children, the likelihood of a common child would decrease (**H4**). In our fifth hypothesis, we highlighted regional differences by asking whether stepfamily couples living in a common-law union in English Canada are more likely to have a common child than those who live in Quebec (**H5**). Our last hypothesis was related to women and their labour market participation and looked at whether working women are less likely to have additional children than women who are not in the labour force (**H 6**).

In Chapter III, we presented the data and methods we used for our analyses. Our empirical data is drawn exclusively from the General Social Survey

(GSS) 2001, cycle 15 on families. The first analysis focuses on stepfamilies at survey comparing them with intact and lone parent families. When we looked at stepfamilies at survey we were interested to see how many families were belonging to a stepfamily environment but who are usually to taken into account and therefore underestimate the number of stepfamilies. So we were able to obtain two sample sizes, one with 7,709 individuals where the children were living with the respondent and one with 8,426 individuals where we also found children belonging to the environment of the respondents, i.e. not living with the respondent neither full-time nor part time. Comparing these two different sample sizes, our results suggest that when the stepfamily environment is included, 16.9% of all families are stepfamilies, instead of 10.6%; consequently, we also observed that the number of single parents rose from 18.5% to 22.5% and that there were fewer intact families: 60.6% instead of 70.9%. We thus see that many more households are involved in a stepfamily environment than one might have assumed. This points out to the importance to take into account also household chains when we think about stepfamilies and not only the residential basis, because stepfamily reality might be reflected better this way. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of our data, i.e. we have no further information on those children who belong to the environment of the respondent; consequently, we could not include stepfamily networks in our analysis, even if we were able to highlight the issue. Future research will need to address this question.

The second step in our research consisted in identifying stepfamily episodes in the data provided by the 2001 survey. In terms of time and complexity, this was perhaps the most important task in the research for this dissertation since it involved preparing two data sets, one at survey time and one retrospectively. We were confronted with many problems, mostly due to missing data, but our aim has always been to retain as many responses as possible from the survey without jeopardizing the consistency or high quality of our data. The final sample size we had at our disposal was of 2,771 respondents reporting a stepfamily episode during their life. We demonstrated that many respondents

were left out simply because they did not meet the criteria for being identified as part of a stepfamily. We also explained the method we used, namely event history analysis. This method is often recommended for the analysis of data in a life course perspective. Finally, we presented our results on the stepfamilies at survey, followed by an analysis of stepfamily dynamics, looking at the risk of instability and the arrival of a common child.

Stepfamilies at survey and their characteristic

Comparing stepfamilies with intact families, we found that stepfamilies are more often based on common-law unions than marriages, except blended stepfamilies which are more like intact families in this matter, tending to marry rather than live in a common-law union. With respect to our other variables, we found that stepfamilies do not differ much from intact families. Interestingly, this includes the results for variables such as happiness or dissatisfaction with family life, two areas which clinical and psychological studies often suggest as more problematic for stepfamilies than intact families. However, we must remember that such studies are based on people who actively seek help because they have already identified difficulties in their family life and the sample, therefore, is of a very particular nature. Nevertheless, we did note in our results that stepfamilies have a shorter duration (4 years) compared to intact families (13 years), with blended families falling in between (6 years). Once again, this suggests that we should analyze stepfamily dynamics from a different perspective, a longitudinal one, in order to see first of all at what moment in time a separation or the arrival of a common child occurs and, secondly, which circumstances led to these events. It has also often been argued that a common child is a bonding factor; however, the circumstances under which some stepfamilies become a blended family have not been studied in any great detail so far.

We will now turn to the results on stepfamily dynamics and summarize some of the more interesting findings.

The dynamics of stepfamilies

For the dynamics of stepfamilies, we were more particularly interested in the risk of separation and of having a common child. All in all, the most compelling findings are perhaps the differences that emerge between men and women regarding stepfamily types.

With regard to the instability of stepfamilies, we were able to confirm only some of our hypotheses. Although, as expected, stepmother families appear to be the least likely to break up, this is only the case in the female sample and this can be attributed to a selection effect which will be discussed below. We have seen that stepfather families in which the mother has had no prior union are at a high risk of experiencing a separation. One interesting finding was that the age of the mother and the father gave us reverse results depending on which sample we were looking at. Also in line with our expectations is the fact that a common child does seem to reduce the risk of disruption. This supports the suggestion that this new child provides a common bond linking all family members together. However, the finding was not as robust when controlling for other covariates. We also saw that the type of union seems to play an important role: stepfamilies living in common-law unions turn out to be at a higher risk of breaking up than those who are married, but this may have nothing to do with the fact that they are stepfamilies. Indeed, as we well know and discussed previously, common-law unions are less stable than marriages in any case. Last but not least, we saw that stepfamily instability has been increasing over time. However, for both men and women, no interactions between the type of union and region have been found; in other words, there is no support for Hypothesis 4a which suggested that in Quebec, married couples are less likely to separate than cohabiting stepfamily couples. However, we did find that in the male sample, stepfamily couples living in a common-law union in Quebec are more than twice as likely to separate as their counterparts in the rest of Canada.

The arrival of a common child

Having analyzed our results concerning instability in stepfamilies, we then turned to look at those concerning the arrival of a common child. Here too, the more striking results are the differences between men and women with regard to the risk of having a common child depending on the type of stepfamily. With the female sample, we can accept the hypothesis that stepmother families are more likely to have a common child than stepfather families, but this was not the case in the male sample. We also saw that it is not so much the number of existing children but the age of the mother and the age of these children that are key factors in determining whether there will be additional children or not. This was surprising and runs counter to the assumptions and findings put forward in various publications on the subject. In the beginning of Chapter II, section 5, we were asking what might be the key circumstances that lead them to decide to have a common child or not because, unlike intact families, stepfamilies have a complex structure and history.

This is why we put forward the suggestion that the number of children is an important issue when deciding whether to have a common child or not. However, this is not the case and here, stepfamilies are actually more like intact families: it is the age of the mother and the age of the children which seem to be key determinants for further childbearing. So we may assume that fertility patterns in stepfamilies are similar to those in intact families.

Our hypothesis number five, that stepfamily couples living in a common-law union in English Canada would be more likely to have a common child than those living in Quebec, has not been confirmed in either sample. Consequently, the assumption elaborated by Brown that couples living in a common-law union need something more to cement their relationship in regions where a common-law relationship is less accepted cannot be confirmed for Canada. We attributed this finding to the fact that common-law unions are already more accepted in Canada, compared to the United States for which Brown elaborated her hypothesis. Last

but not least, we tested the last hypothesis in which we argued that working women are less likely to have a common child than women who are not working. Although we were not able to confirm this hypothesis, we should mention that we found that women who are out of the labour force are more than twice as likely to have a common child compared to those who had never worked.

In the introduction, we wrote that Coleman and Ganong (1990) suggest that more longitudinal analyses on stepfamilies are needed in order to better understand their dynamic. This dissertation tried to respond to this by showing that while a cross-sectional analysis of stepfamilies is interesting, it is best combined with a longitudinal perspective to fully take into account the complexity of such families. In particular, our results highlight that while variables such as the age of children, the number of children or region are not particularly important to understand stepfamily instability (it is variables such as the type of family and the type of union that have the most impact), the arrival of a common child does appear to be influenced by demographic factors, namely the age of the mother and the youngest child in the household.

This dissertation does have some limitations, due in part to the nature of our data. For instance, we could not examine retrospectively several characteristics of the respondents' partners at survey; nor were we able to elaborate on stepfamily networks, even if we could at least raise it as an issue. In order to understand this broader stepfamily environment, as well as aspects of stepfamily life such as living arrangements and satisfaction with the family setup, it is not only better data that is required but also more qualitative studies. But, however, much of a challenge the data construction has been for the purpose of our study and despite the complexity of stepfamilies, we feel that it is all the more crucial to study this type of family as it is becoming increasingly important in our society.

We also found that the data concerning men were more limited and that most studies on stepfamily instability or the arrival of a common child focus on women; consequently, our conclusions regarding male behaviour are somewhat speculative. In addition, as discussed in the text, there might be some selectivity at play in the male sample: the stepfathers and fathers in our sample are likely to be those who were more involved with the children's upbringing. The same can be said for the stepmothers in the female sample: they are more likely to recall the stepfamily episode if it was a significant experience for them.

What we hope to have achieved in this work, is to update the research on stepfamily instability in Canada, a topic which seems to be somewhat neglected in current literature. We also aimed to close the gap between recent studies on stepfamily fertility in European countries and the United States, by providing an overview of the situation in Canada in the new millennium. The most interesting aspect of the research was perhaps highlighting the differences in our analyses differentiating between men and women. In Canada so far, male family histories have not been studied in any depth and we hope to have offered some insights on male respondents. This should invite further research to focus more on men, since the role of fathers and fatherhood has not been given the same attention as mothers and motherhood. It is all the more important to study how and why the behaviour of men in families is different from women since gender equality is now more established in Western societies than it was in the past. In particular, men are more actively involved in bringing up children and traditional family roles are changing.

In this dissertation, we focused on the Canadian context, but a prior publication (Martin and Le Bourdais, 2008) offers a comparison of German and Canadian stepfamilies at survey. Comparisons between more countries would help identify whether the difficulties faced by stepfamilies are country-specific or inherent to stepfamilies themselves. In the chapter on the arrival of a common child, we saw that country specific policies might encourage people in different ways to have additional children. What we would need now are comparative

studies of stepfamily instability from a longitudinal perspective; this would complement the research carried out to date here and elsewhere.

Table A1: The risk of separation for the first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics
SIMPLE STEPFAMILY MODEL (Cox model)

	Model 1 (Women)	Model 2 (Men)
Type of family		
Stepmother	0.32***	5.07***
Stepfather	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.39*	0.44
Common child[1]		
Yes	0.81	0.69
No	*1*	*1*
Age of mother	0.95**	1.05*
Age of father	1.00	0.94**
Age group of youngest child in household		
younger than 5	*1*	*1*
5-11 years	0.90	0.48**
12 and older	1.17	0.70
Number of children		
1	*1*	*1*
2	0.95	0.74
3 and more	0.85	0.69
Type of union[1]		
Marriage	*1*	*1*
Common-law	1.28	1.52*
Period[1]		
before 1970	*1*	*1*
1970-1979	2.63**	4.38*
1980-1989	3.24**	6.75**
after 1990	6.37***	7.58**
Region		
Rest of Canada	*1*	*1*
Quebec	1.11	1.54
Mother tongue		
English	*1*	*1*
French	1.00	1.64
English and French	1.37	1.02
Other	1.04	0.64
Religion		
Protestant	*1*	*1*
Catholic	1.12	0.76
Other	1.48	2.44
No religion	1.06	0.93
Education		
Less than high School	*1*	*1*
High school	0.88	0.92
Some college	0.94	0.84
College degree or above	1.06	0.74
Work status[1]		
Never worked	*1*	*1*
Working	1.00	0.93
Not working	1.09	0.65
N	1254	613
Log Likelihood	-2451.32	-588.11

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): ***:p<.001:

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.

[1]: time varying covariate

Table A2: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics
SIMPLE STEPFAMILY MODEL (Cox model)

	Model 1 (Women)	Model 2 (Men)
Type of family		
Stepmother	1.32*	0.76*
Stepfather	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	1.03	0.65
Age of mother	0.94***	0.94***
Age group of youngest child in household		
younger than 5	2.64**	2.37*
5-11 years	2.02*	2.24*
12 and older	*1*	*1*
Number of children		
1	*1*	*1*
2	0.83	0.96
3 and more	0.84	0.40*
Type of union[1]		
Marriage	*1*	*1*
Common-law	0.50***	0.33***
Region		
Rest of Canada	*1*	*1*
Quebec	1.23	1.17
Period[1]		
before 1970	*1*	*1*
1970-1979	0.76	0.67
1980-1989	1.00	0.85
after 1990	0.98	1.45
Mother tongue		
English	*1*	*1*
French	0.90	1.10
English and French	0.85	1.44
Other	1.19	1.09
Education		
Less than high School	*1*	*1*
High school	0.93	0.84
Some college	0.92	0.96
College degree or above	1.08	0.67
Work status[1]		
Never worked	*1*	*1*
Working	0.77*	1.80
Not working	2.48***	1.57
N	1146	613
Log Likelihood	-2761.11	-1364.68

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.

[1]: time varying covariate

Table A3: The risk of having a common child in a first stepfamily episode, according to different characteristics (Cox model)
WITHOUT STERILIZED RESPONDENTS

	Model 1 (Women)	Model 2 (Men)
Type of family		
Stepmother	1.25	0.71
Stepfather, mother no union before	0.90	0.97
Stepfather, mother union before	*1*	*1*
Stepfather and stepmother	0.93	0.69
Age of mother	0.94***	0.94***
Age group of youngest child in household		
younger than 5	2.49*	3.08*
5-11 years	1.79	2.75*
12 and older	*1*	*1*
Number of children		
1	*1*	*1*
2	0.99	0.97
3 and more	1.18	0.34*
Type of union[1]		
Marriage	*1*	*1*
Common-law	0.43***	0.32***
Region		
Rest of Canada	*1*	*1*
Quebec	1.36	1.36
Period[1]		
before 1970	*1*	*1*
1970-1979	0.74	0.63
1980-1989	0.80	0.77
after 1990	0.94	1.24
Mother tongue		
English	*1*	*1*
French	0.83	0.91
English and French	2.12	1.60
Other	1.06	1.08
Education		
Less than high School	*1*	*1*
High school	0.88	0.87
Some college	1.04	1.09
College degree or above	0.87	0.59
Work status[1]		
Never worked	*1*	*1*
Working	0.72	1.70
Not working	2.26***	1.56
N	821	509
Log Likelihood	-1876.60	-1089.33

The level of significance of the coefficient (exp ß): *** : p<.001 ; ** : p<.01 ; * : p<.05.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, General Social Survey (Cycle 15) on Family.

Data calculated using the bootstrap estimation method.

[1]: time varying covariate

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