

# Sharing the Double Burden

## A New Model of Domestic Happiness

RODERIC BEAUJOT, ZENAIDA RAVANERA AND JIANYE LIU

At some point, most Canadian families feel crunched for time, trying to fit busy schedules into 24-hour days. Managing paid and unpaid work, caregiving and community responsibilities often leaves little time for much else. The “double burden” of simultaneously handling work and home life has traditionally been shouldered by women and mothers, but a growing number of men are engaging in regular household and caregiving activities. Consequently, a new “shared double burden” model of work is emerging, one in which men and women are juggling in a more harmonious fashion.

The tension between caring and earning is a useful entry point for the study of contemporary family life, in general, and of healthy, happy relationships, in particular. By looking at the results of Statistics Canada’s time use surveys, we can see the shifting patterns in how men and women divide paid and unpaid work.

The trend over the last 25 years has been one of gender convergence. In 1986, the average “total productive activity” time (time spent in paid work, education and unpaid work) among 25- to 54-year-olds was 8.3 hours for men and 8.1 hours for women. By 2005, the average for both men and women was 8.8 hours.<sup>1</sup> In that same year, women and men also averaged almost the same amount of time per day with family (3.5 hours and 3.4 hours, respectively).<sup>2</sup> In a comparison of twenty-something Gen Xers (born 1969–1978) and Ys (born 1981–1990), Marshall found that younger wives were spending slightly less total time in paid work (48% vs. 47%) and notably less doing housework (59% vs. 53%).<sup>3</sup>

What on the surface appears like parity, however, belies the different ways individual couples sort activities. Our own research in this area points to five distinct models of work division (see sidebar).

Among couples where neither partner is a full-time student nor retired, the traditional division of work is still the most prevalent, but it is a pattern in decline. In 1992, 44% of couples were “complementary-traditional” couples, but this had dropped to 33% by 2005. The proportion of women living in the “women’s double



### Definitions of models of the division of earning and caring activities

**Complementary-traditional:** Wife is doing more unpaid work and husband more paid work.

**Complementary-gender-reversed:** Husband is doing more unpaid work and wife more paid work.

**Women’s double burden:** Wife is doing the same amount of, or more, paid work and more unpaid work.

**Men’s double burden:** Husband is doing the same amount of, or more, paid work and more unpaid work.

**Shared roles:** Wife and husband are doing the same amount of unpaid work.

burden” model remained stable at 27% between 1992 and 2005. “Men’s double burden” couples increased from 6% in 1992 to 11% in 2005, as did the “complementary-gender-reversed,” from 2% to 3% in the same time period. Couples identifying in the “shared roles” category showed the largest increase, from 23% in 1992 to 27% in 2005.

For couples seeking greater equity in their roles as parents and providers, the “shared role” model provides the greatest balance in paid and unpaid work. Indeed, this division of paid and unpaid work is being adopted by a growing number of Canadian couples, and, with increasingly equitable parental supports and shifting attitudes about gender roles, it is becoming the new norm.

*Roderic Beaujot is a Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Western Ontario, London, ON; Zenaida Ravanera is a Research Associate at the Department of Sociology, University of Western Ontario, London, ON; and Jianye Liu is an Associate Professor of Sociology, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON.*

<sup>1</sup> Katherine Marshall (2006), “Converging Gender Roles,” *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Vol. 7, no. 7, July, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 75-001-X, p. 5-17, accessed December 18, 2012, <http://bit.ly/19LirPD>.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Turcotte (2007), “Time Spent with Family During a Typical Workday, 1986 to 2005,” *Canadian Social Trends*, 83: 2-11, <http://bit.ly/PB5vRE>.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine Marshall (2011), “Generational Change in Paid and Unpaid Work,” *Canadian Social Trends*, Winter 2011, no. 92, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 11-008-X, accessed December 18, 2012, <http://bit.ly/u13QT6>.