

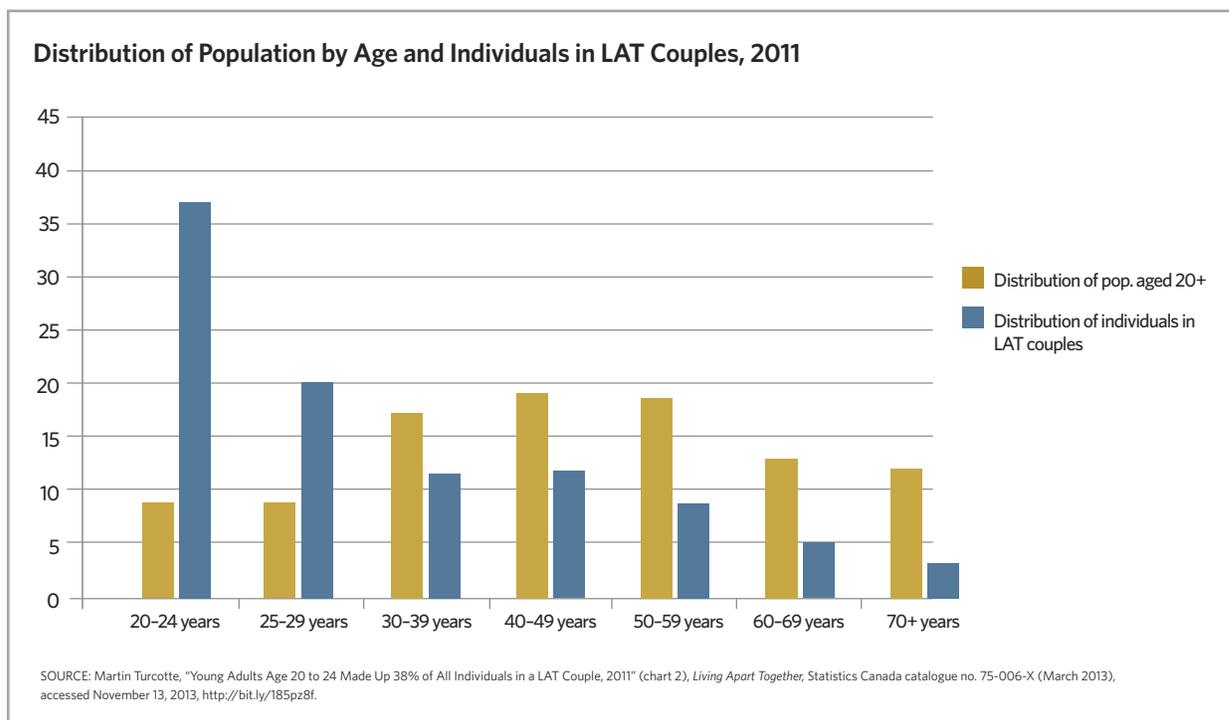
FASCINATING FAMILIES

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DECEMBER 2013 | ISSUE 60

Living Apart, Together: LAT Couples in Canada

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Lately, there has been a growing amount of attention given to couples involved in an intimate relationship with a partner who lives in another residence. These "LAT" (living apart together) couples represent one of many relationship types, all of which contribute to the diversity of social life in Canada. A closer look at LAT couples in Canada reveals a great deal of diversity *within* these couplings due to the many reasons why people might decide to share a relationship but not a dwelling.

According to the 2011 General Social Survey (GSS), more than 1.9 million Canadians lived in an LAT couple, representing 7.4% of the total population aged 20 and

older. These couple types were slightly less prevalent than a decade earlier, when 8.4% of this age group reported being in an LAT relationship, but they still account for a significant proportion of relationships.¹

While LAT couples occur among all age groups, they are most common among younger Canadians, declining with age: 31% of 20- to 24-year-olds, 5% of 30- to 39-year-olds and only 2% of Canadians aged 70 and older were part of an LAT couple in 2011.² This is perhaps not surprising given that younger Canadians are more likely to be living in the parental home than their older counterparts (59% of 20- to 24-year-olds lived in the parental home in 2011).³

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While age is strongly correlated with the likelihood of being in an LAT relationship, other factors are also at play. Canadians who had been either separated or divorced in the past were more likely to be in an LAT relationship than their single counterparts. Among surveyed LAT couples, more than one-third were either separated (13%) or divorced (21%), while 28% reported being single.⁴

For many couples, living apart together is a transitional phase that will eventually lead to cohabitation. Of those living in LAT relationships in 2011, nearly 7 in 10 stated that they intend to live together eventually, while 15% were uncertain and 14% said they did *not* intend to live together.⁵ The proportion of people in LAT couples who said they intend to live with their partner eventually *decreased* with age, from 82.5% of 20- to 24-year-olds in LAT relationships to only 27.5% for those aged 60 and older.⁶

A number of constraints can prevent couples who intend to live together from doing so: of the 42% of people in LAT couples who reported that “circumstances” kept them living apart, the top three were those related to educational studies (26%), financial situations (25%) and work (15%). It should be noted that circumstances vary according to age: for example, the proportion of LAT couples not living together due to work circumstances was much higher (32%) among 40- to 49-year-olds.⁷

“Living apart together” is not always a product of external circumstances. While most LAT couples reported that they live apart due to the above-mentioned circumstances, 32% said that both

partners had *decided* to live apart. While the most frequently cited reason among this group for choosing to live separately was because respondents were “not yet ready for living together” (indicating that their LAT status was transitional), 28% of people who chose to live in an LAT couple said they did so to “keep independence.”⁸ Many of these people simply want to experience the connection and intimacy of being in a couple while maintaining the autonomy of living apart.

Family Lens

LAT relationships are nothing new. Whether it's because of circumstances related to age, school, work or emotional preparedness, a certain proportion of couples in Canada (particularly young couples) have shared a relationship while living apart from their partner. Sometimes people living in LAT couples have chosen to continue living in separate residences to preserve a feeling of independence. People who have previously been married may wish to maintain financial autonomy and avoid comingling debt or wealth with a new partner, or they may simply not feel any pressure to cohabit. Regardless, LAT relationships highlight the diversity of relationship types in Canada, an example of one of the many forms of coupling in which people manage their personal and relationship preferences, priorities and circumstances.

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¹ Martin Turcotte, “Living Apart Together,” *Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 75-006-X (March 2013), accessed November 13, 2013, <http://bit.ly/10bGi78>.

² Ibid.

³ Statistics Canada, “Percentage of Young Adults Aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 Living in the Parental Home, Canada, 1981 to 2011” (Figure 1), *Fifty Years of Families in Canada: 1961 to 2011*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 98-312-X-2011003 (September 2012), accessed November 13, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1aTqcnr>.

⁴ Statistics Canada, “Distribution of Unmarried People Not in a Common-Law Relationship, by Marital Status and Being in an Intimate Relationship with Someone They Do Not Live With, Canada, 2011” (Table 4), *2011 General Social Survey: Overview of Families in Canada*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 89-650-X (October 2012), accessed November 13, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1434Krl>.

⁵ Statistics Canada, “Distribution of Persons in an Intimate Relationship, Whose Partners Live in a Different Household, by Intention to Live Together, Canada, 2011” (Table 8), *2011 General Social Survey: Overview of Families in Canada*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 89-650-X (October 2012), accessed November 13, 2013, <http://bit.ly/19zbJbM>.

⁶ Turcotte.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

