

Summaries of articles

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES

Introduction : Women and families : under the sign of paradox

Renée B. Dandurand

This text introduces the theme of the issue : « Women and families: under the sign of paradox ». Based on numerous feminist contributions to research over the last thirty years, this innovative reflection takes us beyond commonly-accepted (and erroneous !) opinions concerning « The Family », and the contemporary western model in particular. Such questioning, which has been accompanied by a profound transformation in family structure, has had repercussions on women's lives, prompting sometimes contradictory attitudes and feelings. This brief retrospective is followed by a presentation of the articles contained in this issue.

Naskapi women's contribution to everyday activities in the Fort McKenzie era (1945-48)

Danielle Desmarais, Carole Lévesque and Dominique Raby

Based on the results of an ethnographical inquiry carried out in the Naskapi community of Kawawachikamach (Schefferville, Quebec), this article highlights the lives of Naskapi women during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to documenting a little-known era in the history of this people of nomadic hunters, it highlights women's specific contributions to family and community life. By considering both women's life cycle and the annual cycle of activities, the authors call attention to the diversity and flexibility of women's work by women in all places (at the trading counter, in winter camps, in the bush) and in all circumstances (seasonal moves, community gatherings, births, marriages). On a theoretical level, the information presented here raises the question of the penetration of market capitalism in the Quebec North and its influence on men-women relationships with respect to the sexual division of labour.

Parents' rights and duties or the appropriation of children

Danièle Combes and Anne-Marie Devreux

The reproduction of human life is considered here as a social production organised and managed by gender relations. Results from research on the practices by which men and women define themselves as parents in the framework of French law have been used. The authors formulate the assumption of an appropriation of children, analyse it and show its theoretical relationship with the appropriation of women by men through gender relations. Using as their main thread the division in parental rights and duties they show how the appropriation of children by men is constructed through filiation and parenthood.

Women and family strategies in a situation of pauperization

Michèle Vatz Laaroussi

Two studies, completed in France, prove that women at home construct survival strategies based on their daily skills when they are in a situation of impoverishment. These women educate their husbands out of their traditional masculine patterns. They extend their networks, improve their spacial and temporal references, put into practice values such as selflessness and multi-activity. These values and understandings become resources for the social and economical survival of these families.

Biological motherhood, social motherhood : some female educators' strategies

Monique Cournoyer

Access to effective contraception has provided women with the means to regulate their own reproductive behaviour according to the norms of motherhood, and with regard to its

social regulation. The notion of « strategy » helps us understand how women situate themselves with regard to their maternal function and the constraints that go along with it. Female educators working in rehabilitation centres for adolescents face changing circumstances together with persistent demanding conditions. Confronted personally with the issue of motherhood, these practitioners adopt one of the following two strategies : they either emphasize the value of family or their professional career. This analysis reveals the tension existing between these two spheres in the lives of these women who are actively involved in a profession that reproduces numerous maternal functions.

Conceptions and practices of employed mothers : some paradoxes

Christine Corbeil, Francine Descarries, Carmen Gill et Céline Séguin

Using data from a survey conducted in the Montreal area, this article examines the opinions, feelings and attitudes of 493 working mothers in light of the daily context in which they live. Having identified some of the paradoxes that confront these women in their attempt to articulate their private and professional life, the authors endeavor to show that it is mainly in relation to their family life that working mothers will bear the burden and contradictions deriving from their double status as workers and mothers.

Loss of domestic knowledge, new professionalism in domestic work, what are the links with the production system ?

Monique Haicault

This approach to domestic work is based on observations that draw attention to its integration into a holistic conception of society. Such a viewpoint, now structured around the management function, takes into account domestic management of public and private spaces, social times, which are more and more restricting, and the persons themselves. Domestic excellence has become a necessity and a new identity for women. Although this does not lead them to unite against individual stress, it teaches them the capacity to conceive their day-to-day experiences in a detailed global framework. This professionalism could lead them in the long run to participate in the construction and management of public space.

Comments on a research devoted to social support received by men as heads of single-parent families in Quebec

Monique Mousseau-Glaser

Comparative research between fathers and mothers who are heads of single-parent families is a challenge because it requires, on the one hand, that subjects be selected under strict control and, on the other hand, that results be interpreted taking into account gender differences on various socio-economic and psychological dimensions.