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Abstract: This paper looks into the timing and sequences of early life transitions of Canadian women using data from the 1995 General Social Survey of Family and Friends. Six events occurring in early adulthood are examined: school completion, first job, home-leaving, first cohabitation, first marriage, and first birth. Our analysis of birth cohorts spanning 60 years shows that the biggest changes in timing occurred in school completion and start of work; that the trajectories involving work before marriage have gained popularity among later cohorts; and that education appreciably delays early life transitions.

I. Introduction

According to Hareven (1991), studies of family life of ordinary people, -- their "growing up, courting, getting married, bearing and rearing children, living in families, becoming old, and dying" -- have their roots in historical demography and social history of the early 1960s. Many life course studies that have examined the timing of key events to deduce changes in family life show that life courses in the Western world have been changing over centuries. (For example, in the US, Modell and Hareven, 1978; Glick, 1977; Spanier and Glick, 1980; Uhlenberg, 1974; and in Canada, Rodgers and Witney, 1981; Gee, 1986; Ravanera, Rajulton and Burch, 1994). This is particularly true for life course research on young adults (Hogan,1981; Modell, Furstenberg and Hershberg 1976; Katz and Davey, 1978). Hogan's study (1981) documents changes in the early lives of American men, particularly those involving school completion, first job, and first marriage.

Our study intends to examine the lives of Canadian women in a similar way but including first birth and two other transitions, which have become more common in recent years: independent living (after leaving the parental homes but before forming a family), and cohabitation. The data gathered through the 1995 General Social Survey are used for this purpose. Although these data allow a comparison of life courses of men and women, this paper deals only with women. The social and psychological differences among women are as large and as consequential, and their life courses as complex as those among men (Gerson, 1985; Upchurch, Lilliard and Panis, 1995), and warrant a separate study. We examine the timing and sequences of early life transitions of Canadian women born between 1916 and 1975 as well as variations in the timing and sequences of these events by social status of parents, region of residence, culture, immigration status, and education.

II. Data and Methodology

A. The 1995 General Social Survey of Family and Friends

The core contents of the General Social Survey conducted in 1995 (GSS95) by Statistics Canada are similar to the 1990 GSS that focussed on the family (Statistics Canada, 1997). Two major differences between the 1990 and 1995 surveys are relevant to this study: (a) the 1995 GSS obtained data on school completion and start of regular work[1], and (b) more refined measures of timing were used in 1995, asking for both the year and month when each event occurred.

The sample survey covers the whole of Canada excluding residents of Yukon and Northwest Territories and full-time residents of institutions. The respondents consist of 10750 individuals aged 15 and older, of whom 5914 are women. We limit our study to 5290 women since we have excluded those aged 15 to 19 and 80 years or older at the time of the survey, for obvious reasons: the former are too young to have experienced many of the events of interest here while the latter are too few and too disparate in age. The sampling procedure followed by Statistics Canada ensures that the sample is representative of the population. Since the survey had a complex design rather than simple random sampling, weights are used throughout all our analyses.

Like any retrospective survey, the GSS95 has limitations. The first limitation is that those included in the sample are those who have survived and have remained in the country as of survey date. We assume that those who have died or emigrated experienced the events in a

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[1] The questions on dates were asked as follows: (1) **Home-leaving:** In what month and year did you last live with one or both of your parents (or parent substitutes?) (2) **School completion**: What is the highest level of education you have attained? In what month and year did you complete your studies? (3) **First Regular Work**: Have you ever worked at a job or business on a regular basis? By this I mean a full-time or part-time job which lasted six months or longer. In what year did you first start working on a regular basis? Exclude part-time employment while you were attending school full-time. (4) **First Cohabitation**: Have you ever been a partner in a common-law relationship? (Common-law partnership means having a sexual relationship while sharing the same usual address.) In what month and year did you and your partner begin to live together? (5) **First Marriage:** In what month and year was your first marriage? (6) **Age at First Birth**: In what month and year was your first child born?

manner similar to those who were around at the time of the survey. We have not measured the bias introduced by this assumption but the bias is probably not substantial. The trends obtained here are similar to those found in previous studies (for example, on first marriage and first birth) using census and/or registration data (Dumas and Peron, 1992; Ram, 1990; Ravanera, 1995). The second limitation is the problem of recalling information on past events, particularly among the elderly. In the events of interest here, the problem does not seem to be severe except for the date on age at completion of schooling with about 12% of the respondents unable to provide the data. For the other events, the percentages of respondents unable to recall dates are around 2 to 6%. The recall problem is more severe for information that is not directly about the respondents themselves, for example, about the respondent's parents.

B. Cohort Analysis

In this study, we take on a life course perspective (Neugarten and Datan, 1973; Hareven, 1980; Elder, 1978; George, 1993), and analyze our data by birth cohorts in order to capture the effects of historical changes. For the life table analysis that examines intercohort changes in timing, we group the respondents into 5-year birth cohorts from 1916-20 to 1971-75. The sample size for each cohort is large enough for life table analysis to give reasonable parameter estimates. For a more detailed analysis of sequences of transitions and of the variations in timing by socio-economic characteristics, we make use of 10-year birth cohorts for a total of 6 cohorts starting with the 1916-25 to the 1966-75 birth cohort (Table 1).

C. Life Tables and Timing

To examine the trends over cohorts of the timing of events, we use life table analysis, a distinct advantage of which is that it takes care of right censoring of data. That is, those who have not experienced the event as of the survey date are taken into account in computations yielding unbiased probability estimates. Single-decrement life tables are done separately for school completion, start of regular work, first union, first marriage, and for first birth. Since common-

law unions were not experienced by substantial numbers of older women, life tables for first union are constructed to make results for younger and older cohorts comparable. First union is taken as the age at the start of either first cohabitation or first marriage whichever occurred earlier. The difference in the probabilities of first union and first marriage would imply the probability of experiencing cohabitation.

The life table parameters that track trends over cohorts are the ages at which 25%, 50% (the median), and 75% of women experience the event. Following the example of Hogan (1981), we examine spread using the interquartile range (or the difference between the third and first quartiles) as a measure of variation in the time it takes a cohort to experience an event.

And, to measure approximately the length of time for a complete transition to adulthood, we make use of a number of indicators similar to those used by Modell *et al*. (1976) and by Hogan (1981). Modell *et al*., for example, take the difference between the age at which 20% have completed schooling and the age at which 80% of the cohort have established their own home as an indicator of the duration of transition from youth to adulthood. Hogan measured it as the difference between the age at which 25% have finished schooling and the age at which 75% of a cohort have married. This measures the time when the first event in the overall process of transition to adulthood is well under way and the time when the last event is virtually completed for the cohort.

The transition to adulthood of Canadian women can be described as occuring in two stages (1) **taking off**, and (2) **settling down**. The "taking off" is measured as the difference between the age at which 25% of the cohort have completed schooling and the age at which 75% have left the parental home. The "settling down" can be measured in three different ways depending on how we can relate "settling" to adulthood. In these measures, we take the starting point of settling down as the first quartile of leaving the parental home and the terminal point as the third quartile of: (a) first union, (b) first marriage, or (c) birth of first child.

D. Event Histories and Sequences of Transitions

To trace the sequences of events or the life course trajectories of individuals, we use the non-Markovian portion of LIFEHIST, a computer package for event history analysis (Rajulton, 1991). Essentially, this part of the program creates multiple-decrement life tables with the assumption that previous experiences of events affect subsequent transitions. Among the results provided by the package are the asymptotic probabilities of going through different sequences. Multiplying these conditional probabilities of transitions gives the probability of reaching a certain stage (say, first marriage) through different pathways involving the other events of interest: school completion, entry into first job, home-leaving, first cohabitation, and first birth. LIFEHIST also provides a measure of duration or average number of years spent between "events" (also referred to as "states" in event history part of our analysis) by members of a cohort who follow the same trajectory.

D. Heterogeneity

Proponents of life course analysis have well recognized the importance of examining intracohort variations in life courses. Variations in social class, community backgrounds, and culture and ethnicity, for example, lead to differences in the life courses of members of the same cohort (Elder, 1978; Hareven, 1980; Modell and Hareven, 1978; Hogan, 1981; Imhoff, 1986). Ferreting out these variations is a challenge even with a large sample. In this study, intracohort variations in the timing of transitions are analyzed in two ways.

First, an exploratory procedure looks at gross effects by preparing life tables for each category of a given variable. Because of small sample size the effects of other variables are not controlled for. Life table analysis is done for categories of mother's education, first language spoken, immigration status, and region of residence. These variables are meant to capture respectively the effects of social class, ethnicity and culture, and community backgrounds. Although these

variables are not ideal[2], they do capture some of the important differences in Canadian society. We also did life table analysis by respondent's education because the effects of social class, culture, and background, are most likely mediated through one's own education (Hogan, 1981).

The second procedure uses the proportional hazards model, again using the LIFEHIST program, which takes explicitly into account the fractional weights of the sample data[3]. This multivariate analysis simultaneously controls for the effects of the five variables included in our study, namely, respondent's education, mother's education, first language spoken, region of residence, and immigration status. For this part of the analysis, we focus only on timing of first marriage in keeping with the analysis on sequences of transitions that traced pathways leading to marriage.

III. Results of Life Table Analysis: Changes over Cohorts

Timing and Spread

Table 2 and Figure 1 reveal conspicuous changes over cohorts in the timing of school completion and start of regular work. The median age at which women completed their education increased by almost 5 years from the earliest to the latest cohorts. Women born in 1916-20 finished their schooling by 17 years of age. This increased to 19 among women born around 1940, to 21 among those born around 1950, and finally to 22 among those born around 1970. The interquartile

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[2] For social class, for example, it would have been better to use father's education and occupation at the time when the respondents were experiencing the transition to adulthood. However, the information on father's occupation was not collected in the survey; and, many respondents particularly those of the older cohorts did not know the educational attainment of their fathers. Compared to the number able to provide information on father's education, about 10% more respondents gave information on their mother's education.

Similarly, no question on ethnicity was asked. Neither was there a question on the size of the community where the respondents grew up. Age at immigration was asked but the sample size of immigrants is not large enough to be categorized by age.

[3] The LIFEHIST package includes a program for running the proportional hazards analysis of data from a weighted sample survey. Commonly used packages such as SPSS and SAS do not allow fractional weights for this model, and the program in LIFEHIST was written specifically to deal with fractional weights.

ranges of ages at school completion show a bulge among the mid cohorts (those born between 1936 to 1955), with 11 to 16 years. This is mainly due to the high age (ranging from 28 to 34 years old) at which the third quartile completed their schooling. A substantial number of these pre-baby boomers and early boomers did further studies in the late 60s to early 80s when conditions for higher learning and work were favourable. Among the women born from 1955 to 1975, the interquartile ranges have steadily decreased which may be an indication of stronger age norms in schooling among women. However, it is still too early to say whether or not these women will do further studies in the future, not because of favourable work conditions but as a response to the changing needs of post-industrial knowledge-based economy. Completion of studies of this type would be different from school-leaving as part of transition to adulthood.

An opposite trend happened in the timing at which women started working regularly. The earliest cohort started working only at age 26 whereas the women born in the 30s and early 40s worked at age 19, a decline of almost 7 years. The start of regular work increased slightly in subsequent cohorts - to age 20 among women born from the mid 40s to the 70s and to 22 among the youngest cohort.

These opposing trends in the timings of work start and school completion point to the increasing importance of work participation in women's lives. This comes out even more clearly in the interquartile ranges of ages at work entry. Among the earliest cohort, more than a quarter did not at all work (which is why no range is computed). In the succeeding cohorts the ranges drastically decline from 32 years for the 1921-25 cohort to 5 years among the latest cohort indicating an increase in work participation and in concentration of the age at start of work. Earlier social norms discouraged women, especially married women, and even more especially mothers, from labour force participation. The break with the tradition was introduced by those born in 1926-30 but the ones who got the big boost in terms of labour force participation were those born in the 1930s and the early 40s. These were the women who were in their early adulthood during the post-war economic boom in Canada which lasted until around the 60s.

The changes in the median ages of home-leaving and union formation are not as conspicuous as

those of school completion and work entry. For these two events, we observe a high age in earlier cohorts, a dip of about a year in the mid-cohorts, and among the later ones, an increase back to the level of the earlier cohorts.

The changes in first marriage were similar to the ones in first union until the cohorts born around 1951 for whom cohabitation became a trial marriage or an alternative to marriage. Among the two youngest cohorts, the gap between ages at first union and first marriage are about 2 to 3 years. This indicates that younger women also take partners at about the same age as older women, but tend to postpone entrance into formal unions.

First births occurred on average at age 28 among the earliest cohort. The median age dropped by 2 to 3 years, not surprisingly, among the women born between 1921 and 1935, who were the parents of the baby boomers. From the 1936-41 cohorts, the median age at first birth started to climb again such that among those born in the 60s, it was back to that of the earliest cohort (about 28 years). The interquartile ranges hover around 8-9 years for cohorts born in the 20s and 50s and around 10-12 years for all other cohorts.

Overall Transition to Adulthood:

As explained above, a complete transition to adulthood may be viewed in two stages of (a) "taking off" and (b) "settling down". Table 3 shows the various measures of duration of a cohort's transition to adulthood. The "taking off" period has been measured as the difference between the age at which 25% of women have completed their schooling and the age at which 75% have left home. As seen in the Table, it took almost 12 years for the earliest cohort to take off whereas the latest cohort took only less than half the time (5 years). Excepting the women born in the early 50s, there is a continuous decline in the taking off period from cohort to cohort. The process of taking off among the earliest cohorts started at 15 and ended at 27 while the latest cohort began the process at age 19 and ended it at 24. This is not surprising given the important role of regular work among younger women. Within five years, therefore, younger women finish their schooling, enter the work force and leave the parental home. One can compare these to a

leisurely ride in a train (by earlier cohorts) and to a plane ride (by later cohorts).

What Modell *et al*. (1976) said about the modern youth's experience with greater uniformity and more routinization holds true for the taking off process of transition to adulthood among Canadian women. The modern "age-stratified systems of public rights and duties" (Kohli, 1986), felt particularly in the school system, help maintain this routinization. Besides, women are more involved in professions and other careers, entry into which is generally more age-standardized.

However, age uniformity no longer seems to apply for the process of settling down, which usually involves forming families (through cohabitation or marriage) and first birth. As seen in Table 3, the trend in the duration of settling down is curvilinear with longer durations in the earliest and latest cohorts, and with shorter durations in between. Greater age concentration happened among the cohorts born in the 20s and 30s. And, greater age variation depends on which event is considered to terminate the process of settling down. For example, if first union is considered as the terminal point in the process of settling down, then greater variation is found among women born in the 60s; if first marriage is the terminal event, then among women born in the 50s; and if first birth is used as the terminal event, then among those born in the 40s.

This seems to indicate that the breaking away from age norms started even among earlier cohorts for family events that have more permanent consequences (such as formal union and first birth). But, for first union, age homogeneity seems to extend to later cohorts. This could mean that women may be willing to follow an age prescription for an event that may be more readily reversible (for example, cohabitation as a form of first union), but follow their own "personal timing" for events not as easily dissolved (formal union and birth of child). This trend may not be unique to Canadian women. Kohli (1986) notes that in many Western countries, uniformity in the processes of family life cycle has stopped or gone into reverse since the beginning of 1970s.

IV. Results of Event History Analysis: Sequences of Transitions

The results of event history analysis generally concur with those from the life tables seen above. However, in analyzing event histories, we differentiate women by the sequences of events and use broader birth cohorts. Some differences in results can therefore be foreseen. The discussion below concentrates on salient features not brought out by the above life table analysis.

Pathways towards Marriage

The states used in tracing the sequences of transitions are: school completion, work start, home-leaving, cohabitation, first marriage, and first birth. We follow each woman up to her fourth transition and trace the different paths leading to first marriage. The results provided by LIFEHIST allow the tracing of paths to other terminal events as well (say, first birth) but, tracing up to first marriage provides a good picture of women's early life transitions with a manageable number of trajectories. The probabilities of first marriage (Table 4) are obtained by multiplying the various conditional probabilities of experiencing the events in a specific sequence. Table 4 does not include the states of first birth and of cohabitation, but they are by no means lost in the analysis. They are among the competing states used in the estimations of the conditional probabilities. Excepting the latest cohort, the number of women who made transitions to cohabitation or to first birth prior to marriage are not many.

The paths leading to marriage are many, and the ones most prevalent in all cohorts are shown in Table 4. For descriptive purposes, these paths can be labelled as family- or work-oriented, both of which can be further categorized into three types. These labels are based on whether or not transition to regular work has been made prior to marriage.

As expected, the family-oriented paths are more common among the earlier cohorts. For example, the chance of marrying prior to experiencing all other events (Family-Oriented Path I) is 14% in the earliest cohort. This chance declines steadily over cohorts such that it is a mere 1% by the latest cohort, which has a much higher chance (5%) of experiencing cohabitation (not shown in the table). A similar declining trend can be found for the two other family-oriented

paths (path II: leave home, then marry; and path III: complete schooling, leave home, and marry). This is a clear signal that trajectories that do not include work before marriage is disappearing among younger women.

The sequence involving work while still living with parents (work-oriented path I) is the trajectory of women whose schooling might have been interrupted by the need to work. As Table 2 suggests (by comparing the third quartiles of school completion and first marriage), these women went on to complete higher levels of education after leaving home and marrying, or even after having children. This path has its peak among women born after the Depression and during the war. The survey asked the respondents to provide the highest level of schooling they had attained and the date when it was completed. It is likely that greater number of younger women may go for futher studies after marriage.

The work-oriented path II is the path of the "independent" women: they leave home, complete their studies, go on to work, and then marry. This sequence has low but steadily increasing chance - from 3% for older women to 9% among the women born in the 50s and 60s. The 5% chance estimated for the latest cohort will surely increase. Since the work-oriented paths II and III require four transitions to complete, the effect of censoring is probably more severe than on the other paths.

The work-oriented path III, where women complete schooling, start regular work, leave home, and then marry, is the "preferred" path of all cohorts since it has the highest probability even among the earliest cohort. While this may be the single most common path, it does not seem to be the "normative" path for reasons that differ by cohorts. For the earliest cohort, working prior to marriage was not the norm ; the combined probability of the three family-oriented paths is 0.45 (.136+.166+.150) whereas the probability of this single "preferred" path is only 0.18. This probability increases to 0.26 among the mid-cohorts but is only 0.17 among the latest. Certainly, censoring is in effect here, but the other reason for this lower probability in the latest cohort is the competing trajectory of completing school, working, leaving home, and cohabiting. This trajectory has a chance of 7% for the latest cohort and 3% for the immediately preceding cohort

(not shown in the table). While the path involving cohabitation is not yet the norm, it is gaining popularity at the expense of the "preferred" trajectory.

The combined probability of different paths to marriage (given in the last few lines of Table 4) points to increasing complexity of trajectories over cohorts. For the earliest cohort, the probabilities of first marriage through these six paths add up to 0.73 but, for the most recent cohort, the total probability[4] amounts to only 0.34. Younger women follow myriad other paths through different combinations of transitions, many of these involving not only school and work but cohabitation and first births and some paths that do not at all include marriage. As the last two rows of Table 4 show, the work-oriented paths have steadily gained over the family-oriented paths.

Durations Between Transitions

Table 5 shows the durations between transitions estimated as the mean number of years it takes to move from one state to another among those who follow a specific sequence of transitions. For each sequence type, Table 5 gives the mean age at first transition, followed by duration (in years) in each successive state.

The trend toward a faster "take off" noted in the life table analysis is also revealed by the durations spent between transitions. Consider for example, women who followed the family-oriented path III: the earliest cohort spent 4.8 years between completing school and leaving home whereas the latest cohort took just 1.6 years. Presumably, women from the earliest cohort spent the time looking for a husband and serving 'apprenticeship' in housewifely activities. One might view this long period as both reflecting and serving to perpetuate women's subordination within households, first to parents and then to husband. For the most part, women moved from 'their

[4] This is the total for the six most prevalent sequences. Its complement represents the probability of other sequences, for example, sequences involving first birth or cohabitation prior to marriage.

father's household' to 'their husband's household'. All this has changed now. Women remain in the parental home just as long, but their primary role during virtually all this period is that of 'student' rather than that of 'apprentice housewife'.

Women's subordinate role is apparent even among those who worked before marriage (work-oriented path I). The 1916-25 cohort spent 5.2 years working while still in the parental home, most likely playing the role of 'dutiful' daughters. They then got married within a year after leaving home. The smaller proportion of women in the latest cohort who followed this path spent just about a year and a half being of 'service' to their parental household and took a longer time (two years) to marry after leaving home.

School completion among those who worked before marriage (work-oriented path III) did not make a difference. The earliest cohort still spent 5.7 years working while staying with parents and married just as fast (within about a year) after leaving them.

Interestingly, the small proportion of "independent" women (work-oriented path II) in the 1916-25 cohort spent a long period of 5.6 years between leaving home and marrying. The 1956-65 cohort of women who went through this path spent slightly more time (6.6 years) between home-leaving and marriage. Regular work, more education, and the associated retention of the student role up to the time of departure from parental home, along with the longer period between first union and first birth (see life table results above), seem to provide women in more recent cohorts more time and space to establish/negotiate greater independence and more nearly equal household roles for themselves in their marriages.

V. Heterogeneity Analysis: Variations in Timing

Gross Effects Obtained through Life Table Analysis:

Social class seems to have a consistent positive relationship with age at transition to adulthood. For each event considered in this study, the higher the mother's education the older the age at each event (Table 6). The delay is particularly large for school completion and first birth. Women whose mothers had the lowest level of education completed schooling on an average at age 19 and had their first child at age 26. Daughters of college-educated mothers in contrast finished schooling at age 23 and had their first birth at age 29.

Except for school completion, women with French as their first language experienced each event at higher ages than those with English as their first language although the differences are not large. Those whose first language was neither French nor English went through each event, except first marriage, at older ages. This third category constitutes a multitude of cultures and possibly somewhat recent immigrants, which makes it difficult to explain the observed difference. Immigrants consistently report experiencing events later than the non-immigrants. One of the characteristics of immigrants is that they generally have higher education. It is therefore possible that part of the observed differences is really due to respondents' own education.

Those who live in the Atlantic provinces have the earliest transition to adulthood. They also tend to complete schooling and leave their parental home early but enter the work force latest. The most likely explanation for this is that the Atlantic provinces have the least opportunities for women in terms of schooling and work. In contrast, Quebec women complete schooling the earliest but leave home, form the first union, and marry the latest. They also delay the entry into parenthood. This may be a reflection of a distinctive mixture of Gallic sophistication and modernity with lingering traces of a very conservative brand of Catholicism, also manifested in their high rates of cohabitation but low divorce and low remarriage rates for the divorced.

Respondent's education seems to delay every transition appreciably and consistently. One exception is the older age at school completion by women with some college education compared to women with college or university diploma. This may be because women who manage to get some college education only also have less resources to complete their studies "on

time" or experience more discontinuities in schooling compared to women who obtain diplomas. Another exception is the later work entry among those with the lowest level of education compared to high school graduates. Women with lower education may have greater need for work but they may also have less human capital that makes the search for work more difficult.

Education has also a marked effect on the overall transition to adulthood (Table 7). Those with higher education spend the shortest time to "take off" but take the longest to "settle down". It takes about 4 years for those with college or higher education to take off, whereas those with lowest level of education take about 8 years. The process of taking off starts early at age 15 for those with the lowest education and only at age 20 for those with the highest level (not shown in the Table). Most likely, the human capital acquired through schooling and the parental resources that allow daughters to stay longer in school help shorten the process of taking off. And, having taken off, those with higher levels of education are in much better position to take on alternatives (such as more satisfying jobs) to early marriage. They therefore take their time to settle down. Using first marriage as the terminal event of transition to adulthood, it takes about 11 years for college graduates to settle down and 7 years for those with lowest level of schooling. This reiterates the point we made above about education's empowerment of women. Education gives them bargaining chips in the negotiation of their roles and their independence.

Net Effects through the Proportional Hazards Model

A proportional hazards analysis of first marriage for all six 10-year birth cohorts was done using all the variables mentioned above and three more variables: (a) number of transitions before marriage, (b) whether or not the respondent entered the work force before marriage and (c) whether or not she cohabited before marriage[5]. The results of the analysis of sequences above

[5] Alternatively, we could have used more complex models by using the timing of previous events as covariates (akin to models suggested by Upchurch, Lilliard, and Panis, 1995).

showed that these three variables had the effect of delaying marriage.

For brevity, in this section, we will focus on the two mid-cohorts and relegate to the appendix the results for the other cohorts. Many women belonging to the two earliest cohorts could not provide information on their mother's education (See Table 1 above); and, the two latest cohorts have the highest proportion of censored cases (See Appendix Tables 1C and 1D). Despite these, however, a comparison of the Appendix Tables and Tables 8A and 8B shows that the net effects of the variables are similar across cohorts.

Tables 8A and 8B show that the model provides a good fit as indicated by the high likelihood ratio chi-squares for the model. For both cohorts, the effects of the number of transitions, work before marriage, and cohabitation before marriage are in the expected direction. Every additional transition reduces the relative risk of marrying; and the risk is lower among those who worked before marriage (though not significant in the case of 1936-45 birth cohort) and among those who cohabit before marriage.

The effect of education remains in force even after controlling for other variables. Those with higher education consistently have much lower relative risks. The net effects of mother's education are also in the expected direction though not significant for the 1936-45 birth cohort - possibly, the social class effect is mediated mainly through respondent's education for this cohort.

An interesting result obtained through this analysis is that of region of residence. While the gross effects in the previous section show that women marry earliest in the Atlantic provinces, the net effects here are the opposite. Controlling for other variables, the Atlantic provinces have the lowest risk and other provinces higher risks, most significantly Ontario and British Columbia, which have more vibrant economies. This seems to indicate that strong economies by themselves lead to early family formation. But, healthy economies also lead to greater opportunities for women, most likely for schooling and work, which in turn delay family formation.

The effects of Quebec as region of residence and French as first language are not highly

significant for both cohorts. Possibly, the effects of these variables are mediated through other variables notably education and cohabitation.

The moderately significant effects of "Other Language" and "Immigrant" variables even after controlling for other variables indicate a persistent cultural effect on age at marriage. Further explication of these effects is not possible with data collected through this survey.

In sum, it seems clear that marriage timing does vary by social class, opportunity structures, and culture. And, while we have not separately examined the net effects for the other early life events, it seems very likely that these factors have similar effects on them as well.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

In terms of historical time, the changes documented here in the timing and sequences of early life transitions of Canadian women occurred in the past 60 years - from about the Great Depression to the 90s. No doubt the historical events within this period affected the women's lives, and we can speculate on what must have been their effects on the timing and sequences of early life events. The earliest cohort of women in this study were about 15 to 20 years old at the time of the Depression. It is possible that their schooling was cut off and that many of them might have been compelled by need to work. It is quite likely, however, that the end of their schooling and start of work were just a continuation of a longer term trend that had started with earlier cohorts.

The big change for the next three 5-year birth cohorts (1921-25, 1926-30, 1931-35) was that they parented the boomers. It is conceivable that the second World War affected the timing of their end of schooling and start of work. The second world war and its after-effects certainly did influence their family life course in that they married and had babies at younger ages. These women may have returned to "traditional" values as a response to disruptions of the Depression and war.

The beginning of the end of the family-oriented life courses seems to have happened during the period of postwar prosperity in Canada. The women born towards the end of the 30s and in the 40s spent their early adulthood during the economic boom in the 50s and 60s. Their later age at school completion meant higher levels of educational attainment, greater work participation and delayed family formation.

With the economic good times continuing until around mid-70s, the trend on women's early life courses went on pretty much 'on course' among those born in the 50s. They completed schooling, started regular work, and left home within a very short interval (not necessarily in this order), then married and gave birth much later.

Towards the end of the 70s and on to the 90s, ideological changes have taken hold and acquired their own impetus regardless of the economic situation. With the greater choices that education and work have provided, women are now exercising freedom not only on which life events to experience but also when and in which sequence to experience them.

Early life courses experienced by Canadian women have indeed changed in the past 60 years, but the changes have not been experienced uniformly by all women. The benefits of education and work and their delaying effects on family formation are more the experience of those in higher social classes and in places which offer more opportunities for education and work. Although this paper has tried to explore the differences by certain socio-economic characteristics, more still needs to be done. We have not, for example, examined the differences in sequences of transitions. And, although we have looked into the variations in timing of first marriage, we need to examine more carefully the variations in the other events related to transition to adulthood. We could also get a deeper understanding of the relationships between the various events by constructing more complex models, for example, by using the timing of previous events as time-varying covariates in the analysis of timing of later events.

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Figure 1: Median Ages at Transitions

By 5-Year Birth Cohorts