

## **Exchange marriages between sibsets: A sibling connection beyond marriage, Québec 1660-1799**

The aim of this paper is to explore transitions into marriage in the context of family during the 17th and 18th century in Québec. More precisely, we are interested in the occurrence of exchange marriages between sibsets. These marriages occur when two siblings from one family married two siblings from another family. When two brothers marry two sisters, a parallel exchange marriage takes place, and when a brother and sister marry a brother and sister, a crossed exchange marriage occurs. Most research addressing this subject are qualitative and/or restricted to a community. Which factors influence the hazard of being involved in an exchange marriage? Are they individual characteristics, family dynamics and composition, or contextual factors?

Historical demographers have long studied marriage patterns. As age at first marriage is considered an important determinant of fertility in a natural fertility context, many have tried to explain why and how the intensity of marriage as well as the age at marriage varies. For example, Hajnal distinguished a “West European marriage pattern” from marriage patterns observed in eastern and southern Europe on the basis of a high rate of permanent celibacy, a comparatively late age at marriage, and a tradition of establishing independent households upon marriage. (**Hajnal, 1965; 1982**). Daniel Scott Smith addressed the relevance of Hajnal’s West European marriage pattern for the American context, arguing that the predominance of neolocal household formation in the United States demonstrates the similarity of family patterns on either side of the Atlantic, despite the generally lower ages at marriage and lower rates of celibacy in North America (**Smith, 1993**)

Quebec’s marriage patterns are particularly notable in terms of very early ages at marriage in the early years of the colony, followed by rising age at marriage over time particularly for girls. Indeed, when considering only pioneer women, the average age at first marriage before 1663 was 19.3 years, in a range between 14 and 23 years. However, after this period, up to 1680, women married for the first time at the average age of 21.5 years. For men, the average age at first marriage was respectively 28.6 and 28.9 years before and after 1663. This gender difference has been explained on the one hand by the scarcity of women in the marriage market, and on the other hand by men’s need to serve in civil or military before marriage (**Charbonneau et al. 1987**).

The presence or absence of parental authority in marriage decisions has also been explored in the context of Québec ancien. Pursuing the idea that marriages of sisters in birth order may indicate the importance of parental authority in marriage (**Smith, 1973**), a study was conducted to determine whether such situation could be observed in Québec. One result of this study is that the girls were half as likely to marry if they had a younger sister who was already married. Furthermore, regarding the role of parents, the risk of

marriage was higher for those whose parents were still alive, suggesting that parents exercised the major part of their authority, encouragement or facilitation of their children's marriage before dying. (Dillon, 2010)

While the demography and social context of marriage in colonial Québec have been well explored, little work has been done on instances of exchange marriages across sibling sets. In the case of Québec we find two studies focusing on two different communities and time periods. The first, realised by Chantal Collard, covers the Charlevoix region for 1900-1960, and the second by Louis Lavallé explores LaPrairie parish for the 1647-1760 period. We can also mention Alain Collomp who studied the same phenomenon for Haute-Provence in France between 1792 and 1838. The frequency of exchange marriages across sibsets observed in these studies varied from one context to another: 15.6% in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century LaPrairie (Lavallé, 1992), 8.9% in twentieth-century Charlevoix (Collard, 1997) and 5.6% in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France (Collomp, 1977). These scholars suggested some differences between parallel and crossed marriage exchanges. In France, crossed marriages were more common, whereas in 20th-century Québec Collard observed more parallel marriages. For Laprairie, numbers were too close to determine which type of exchange marriage was more typical.

Previous work by Collard suggests that exchange marriages are a more suitable marital strategy than consanguineous marriages prohibited by the Catholic canon law. Collard found that exchange marriages were usually celebrated in a short time interval and involved brothers and sisters with a small age gap. These marriages are an opportunity for assistance between the two married couples. In interviews Collard conducted, men and women expressed the usefulness of such alliance manifested by the share of the family home and exchanges of food and children. "Cela ménage mieux ensemble" is an expression used to illustrate this.

Inheritance systems could also partly explain these differences between the two regions. While inheritance in Québec was more or less egalitarian (for sons), first born sons were systematically favoured in southern France. In the latter context, crossed exchange marriages favoured the circulation of wives as patriarchs could exchange their daughter for a daughter-in-law without paying a dowry. In addition, Lavallé emphasizes in how these double alliances resulted on a strong social endogamy and help strengthen the ties between two families over several generations. Finally, he notes, with the help of notarized documentation, that exchange marriages were at the root of many family agreements concluded in order to consolidate the land holdings that had been fragmented following the equal sharing of inheritance dictated by the "Coutume de Paris".

The following research is based on data drawn from the *Registre de la population du Québec ancien* (RPQA), a longitudinal family reconstitution database constructed from Catholic parish registers. From these registers, the dates and places of birth, marriage and

death were extracted from the early years of the Québec colony to 1799. Family reconstitution methods based on rules devised by Henry and Fleury were applied to the transcribed data, permitting the linkage of individual life paths and both vertical and horizontal familial ties (**Desjardins, 1998**). As a family reconstitution database, RPQA offers researchers almost unlimited possibilities to develop research questions involving life paths of kin. This characteristic makes the RPQA an ideal database to study siblings. The Québec historic population bears characteristics which make it an ideal object of family reconstitution; as such, the RPQA is distinctive from other family reconstitutions drawn from parish registers. This population is unique on account two factors: 1- the population of *Québec ancien* was small, and consequently the RPQA encompasses the entire Quebec territory; and 2- the Québec colony was a semi-closed population with almost no out-migration. As a result, family reconstitution of the Québec population does not lose geographically mobile people when they migrate from one parish to another, a typical problem of family reconstitutions which focus on only one community at a time. One of the principal advantages of this database is the possibility to consider it as a demographic laboratory. With complete demographic information on an entire, natural-fertility and semi-closed population across multiple generations, we can study demographic phenomena in an approximation of a “pure” state.

This work follows the lead of previous studies applying longitudinal analysis to historical demographic data. The introduction of event history analysis methods enables researchers to bring the analysis of historical data to another level, introducing the effect of time and enabling the study of how life course characteristics of the individual and their family members affect individual demographic behaviour (like mortality, fertility and nuptiality). For the purposes of this paper, we reconstructed the life course of everyone who lived in Quebec territories born between 1660 and 1759, adding to our file information on all of their siblings (birth, first marriage, death) as well as their parents (marriage and death). In this fashion, it is possible to follow a number of family dynamics over time, notably – change in sibship size and parents’ survival or death. This procedure should help identify factors associated with the choice of a spouse at first marriage. We also want to recreate and include variations in the marital market to see how important the context is for our phenomenon.

Taking a closer look at the phenomenon of exchange marriages, we realised that the definition of the population at risk was more difficult to conceptualise than originally thought given that there were two different ways of entering this type of union. Individuals entered exchange marriage either directly, at the moment of their own marriage, and indirectly, at the moment a sibling married. Siblings who entered exchange marriages directly did so by marrying into a family which had already welcome as son- or daughter-in-law one of their brothers or sisters, in the course of an earlier marriage. Siblings who entered exchange marriages indirectly did so automatically at the moment

that a second, perhaps younger, sibling married the brother or sister of their own spouse, thus joining the two families for a second time. In order to consider this difficulty, indirect and direct exchange marriages will be distinguished. Also, to capture the link between the family life cycle and individual life course, we will compare results obtained at the family level and individual level.

Table 1 : Proportion of individuals/families involved in an exchange marriages by time at risk scenario and different characteristics.

	Individual level		Family level
	Direct	Indirect	
<b>% involved in an marriage exchange</b>	12.34	13.07	21.21
<b>Birth cohort/ Parent's marriage cohort</b>			
Before 1660	-	-	29.44
1660-1679	13.81	12.61	22.30
1680-1699	14.73	15.66	28.74
1700-1719	14.70	16.18	28.15
1720-1739	13.58	14.71	21.53
1740-1759	9.63	10.05	15.60
<b>Birth location / Parent's marriage location</b>			
Eastern (Québec)	12.00	12.77	20.98
Central (Trois-Rivières)	13.86	14.79	23.64
Western (Montréal)	12.47	13.11	21.05
<b>Sibling sibset size/ Number of children</b>			
3 or less	6.32	5.80	4.23
4-6	9.62	10.54	16.74
7-9	13.25	14.59	33.40
10 and more	15.21	16.72	49.61

<sup>1</sup> Only siblings/children survived age 12

Table 1 presents some descriptive results to understand how exchange marriages varied by certain characteristics. We can see a clear pattern in time which can be described in the earlier period by a rise in the proportion of exchange marriages, followed in the 18th century by a decrease of the phenomenon. However, there does not seem to be a clear difference if we consider the location, except a slightly higher proportion of exchange marriages in the central area. For this paper, we believe a better way to conceptualise the location would be to consider the density and the degree of isolation of a region - factors that can greatly influence the marriage market. We will also explore similarities and differences between sibsets who contracted parallel versus crossed exchange marriages. Finally, as we could expect, the more siblings/children there is in a family, the higher the proportion of exchange marriages, with a result of almost 50% families with 10 or more children contracting exchange marriages.

Our preliminary Cox regressions has shown that there is some gender differences in the matrimonial regimes. We observed in our results some similar effects for sons and daughters, but also some important distinctions. For example, women at risk of exchange marriages seemed to be more affected by the marriage market. Also, our results confirmed the importance family composition in understanding this phenomenon.