Catherine Bonvalet
Céline Clément
Jim Ogg

Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers

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Catherine Bonvalet • Céline Clément • Jim Ogg

Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers

Catherine Bonvalet
INED
Paris
France

Jim Ogg
CNAV
Paris
France

Céline Clément
Université Paris Ouest Nanterre
Nanterre
France

Foreword

The post-war baby boom phenomenon is still a source of enigma today, even for demographers. Do baby boomers really represent a homogeneous and specific generation? To what extent have they contributed to the drastic family transformations of the last five decades? Do they bear some responsibility for the current social problems regularly raised by politicians and the media, such as youth delinquency and violence, negative impacts of divorce, weakening of social links, decline of authority and respect, loss of references, etc.?

Baby boomers arouse questions and ambivalence. On the one hand, the fertility recovery which occurred suddenly after the Second World War in most industrialized countries was received as a wonderful promise for hope in the future and even in some countries, like France, as a miracle after a long period of low fertility and strong pro-birth movements and policies; but on the other hand, this baby boom was progressively understood as a source of small revolutions and new claims in the sphere of private life, contributing to dismantling the previous social order and centrally the male breadwinner gender contract. Ambivalence between innovation and promises of gender equality, on the one side, and individualism and fear of egoism, on the other. Nowadays, baby boomers are looked through the lens of a new collective "problem": the papy boom.

Catherine Bonvalet, Céline Clément and Jim Ogg's book is the perfect tool to understand this process of change in private life. When following the succession of generations, that is to say, historical and sociological generations (people born at the same period, who have witnessed the same events at the same age), but also generations as we consider them in kinship (people situated between ascendants and descendants), one can understand concretely what these changes mean as an experience for the actors. The authors propose from the outset a distinction in this large generation between a first wave, born between 1946 and 1954 and a second one, born between 1955 and 1973. The famous year 1968 represents a turning point for this distinction as it is certainly different to experience this historical event at 13 or 14 years old or between 18 and 22. But the main argument refers to the gap in terms of socialization and living conditions: the first wave experienced the postwar frugality, scarcity, rationing and resourcefulness, whilst the second grew up in a context of economic growth and prosperity and enjoyed greater social mobility and a much better quality of life during the "Thirty golden years".

Among its numerous qualities, this book gives us a complete state of the art of academic discussion concerning the baby boom, its understanding from a demographic but also sociological point of view. It presents the main relevant results of large national and international databases, underlines the crucial role of the gender variable to understand social changes, so much it is true that women were frequently the main actors of the process of transformation during these decades. It also provides a very useful comparative counterpoint when looking at the differences between France and the United Kingdom. However, the book does not offer a systematic comparison between these two countries, but more a qualitative and in-depth study of the cultural differences, since many very close economic and sociological indicators could let us expect more similarities.

But the main contribution of this book is certainly the angle, the perspective put forward by the authors, which is also a framework following the life cycle of the first baby boomer wave: childhood, adolescence, family foundation, professional trajectory with the challenge of work-family balance and finally the current phase of caring tasks for elderly parents. Following this group's trajectory, the reader has access to a quasi-complete life cycle.

The first section, dedicated to the baby boomers' childhood, is a wonderful demonstration of the baby boom's complexity and enigma. The main arguments to explain this phenomenon generally refer either to macroeconomic performance (reduction of unemployment from 1941 onwards relayed by the Marshall Plan after 1947, which gave work opportunities to the parents of baby boomers) or to the role of French family policy to support fertility since 1938. But the authors argue that it is more useful to look back towards the two previous generations of mothers and grand-mothers to understand the conditions and possibilities of this demographic boom.

This is one of the major lessons of this essay: to understand to what extent a generation is the result of the previous ones. Contrary to a mainstream understanding, it is less a question of social reproduction, and more of change. Thus, grand-mothers of the baby boomers (generation 1880–1910) who formed their families during the inter-war period after the trauma of the "Grande Guerre", adopted a Malthusian position, refusing the burden of many births, a position that the authors qualify as "a child's refusal". The numbers are very clear indeed: the fertility rate fell from 6 children per women in 1870 to 2.3 in 1915. The gap is huge with the profile of their daughters, mothers of the baby boom, who also accepted the male-breadwinner gender contract, meaning a strict division of labour, with men as providers of goods and women as housewives and care-workers available for their children. Everything suggests that the challenge for each generation of women was not to suffer the fate of their mothers. And the process continues afterwards for the daughters of baby boom mothers whose challenge was to obtain birth control, access to contraception, abortion and women's rights.

To explain the new attitude of the baby boomers' mothers, the authors insist for example on the role of youth movements which have clearly contributed to this "voluntary domestic home confinement". But they underline mainly a double-bind: on one side, wonderful promises of development in a context of economic growth,

overcoming housing challenges, improvement of the welfare state, access to a consumer society and, on the other, strong social control and normative pressure in private life and gender roles. The baby boom family reminds us of the US family of *Revolutionary Roads*, Richard Yates' novel that describes finely the mixture of conformity and desire for emancipation, the promises of marriage and family happiness coupled with domestic confinement, which produce double-bind and chaos.

With this global angle, the authors take us back into the post 1968 revolution atmosphere, with its main issues and rhetoric: anti-institutionalism, anti-psychiatry, anti-conformity, anti-family, social struggles and political radicalization. They also sum up the (new and resounding) revolution imposed by baby boomers to the family, with all its indicators: fertility and marriage rate decline, increase of cohabitation, divorce and births out of wedlock, etc. But the main point in this process of change is undoubtedly the gender issue. As indeed, the real driver of these changes is the access of a generation of women to wages and "salariat", which means at the same time greater autonomy, the potential emancipation from marriage dependency and an individual protection through labour law. The model of the active mother supplanted that of the housewife, as the dual-earner family replaced the male-breadwinner.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that first, this driver is probably not only the result of new feminist claims but also the impact of the "Great transformation"—to use Polanyi's terms—which has to do with the development of the service sector of economy and feminization of the workforce; and second, that the reality is far from its promise as this individualization strengthened gendered and social inequalities. New social risks and social problems have emerged through this process which shifts the entire process of Welfare building: problems of work/family balance, lone parent's and child's poverty, economic dependence and precariousness of youth, growing demands and needs of care for the elderly. After offering a new set of values for the global society, like autonomy, choice, self-determination, freedom, here is part of the main baby boomers' legacy for the next generation. Terrific challenges, indeed.

Rennes   Claude Martin,
April 2014   sociologist, research professor at the CNRS

Authors' Notes and Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1
Introduction

In demographic terms, the family never seemed to have had it so good as it did in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the two ensuing decades. Demographers had not expected to see such high birth rates again, while marriage rates soared and family breakdown was a rarity.[1] A seemingly unshakeable institution, protected and nurtured by a nascent welfare state, the family appeared to enter a golden age. Young couples felt happy and confident about the future, and unlike their parents and grandparents, did not think twice about having two, three or even four children. France gradually ceased to be a "country of old people and childless households" (Veyret-Vernet 1950, p. 193), and a couple living independently with several children became the archetype of the modern family, representing the final phase in its evolution, as described first by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1975) and later by Talcott Parsons (Parsons 1955). Within that couple, the roles were clearly defined, with the husband the sole breadwinner, responsible for supporting the household, and the wife doing the housework and childrearing. This initially bourgeois model of the housewife had gradually percolated through to the working classes, where women abandoned their factory or clerical jobs as soon as their husbands' income allowed them to do so (Bard 2001).

Sixty years on, the picture was very different. The total fertility rate had fallen to below two children per woman, and the divorce rate had risen to 50 %. The role of "housewife" had been ousted by the active mother striving to reconcile work and family life. Parenthood today is now desired and planned according to the stability of the prospective parents' relationship and their respective careers. Marriage is no longer the gateway to becoming sexually active, living together and starting a family, such that more than half of all births take place outside wedlock. The strength of these changes is reflected in shifts in our vocabulary, where age-old, negatively connoted terms indicating departures from the family norm have become obsolete. *Living in sin* has been replaced by *nonmarital cohabitation*, and *illegitimate birth* by *birth outside marriage*, while children *born of adultery* are now just the same as any other children, enjoying exactly the same rights. Above all, the linear progression from childbearing and childrearing to child-launching is no more, as the ease

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[1] With the exception of 1946–1947 (Pressat 1962).

with which marital links can be severed has given rise to far more chaotic trajectories, characterised by alternating periods of living alone and living together, and extended step families. Thus, the one-size-fits-all family model has gone plural, and a new set of adjectives (*nuclear*, *single-parent*, *recomposed*, *same-sex*) has emerged to describe its many and various forms.

1.1   The Family Renewed

More than half a century separates these two highly contrasting images, with supposedly novel family forms on one side and the traditional stable family on the other (Sirinelli 2003). The surge of optimism that gave rise to such high marriage and fertility rates back in the 1950s was certainly not a foregone conclusion, as France had just emerged from 6 years of war, and people still had vivid memories of the Great Depression. For researchers of the day, the family of the 1950s above all represented a triumph over the revolutionary ideas of the mid-nineteenth century, as well as over the threat posed by capitalism. Henceforth, the working-class family thrown into chaos by the mother going out to work in the factory was a thing of the past, and so, too, was the bourgeois family with a single son and heir (Maitron 1954).

As it happened, the revival in the birth rate eventually petered out (Desplanques 1988b), and the avant-garde ideas from the turn of the century soon re-emerged. "The feminist movement expanded, confident in the knowledge that it was combating primitive relics from the past, while cohabitation came to be viewed as a social right to be fought for, just like the weekly rest period or the right of association" (Sauvy 1954, p. 11). Pre-conceived notions of motherhood being equated with the provision of cannon fodder or with old women living in shoes began to disappear. Indeed, as early as 1954, Alfred Sauvy wrote that the family increasingly resembled "an outworn institution, a relic", defended chiefly by "conservatives and reactionaries":

> If you close your eyes for a quarter of a century, then open them again, you will discover a very different situation from the one that is being predicted. What it has lost in cohesion, the family will have gained in strength and vigour (Sauvy 1954, p. 13).

Clearly, then, the family is subject to cycles of ebb and flow, as Claude Lévi-Strauss postulated:

> It may well be that such is the inventivity of the human mind that it conceived and laid out virtually all the modalities of the family institution at a very early juncture. What we take to be evolution is therefore simply a series of choices from a finite number of options, as we move in different directions within a network that has already been mapped out (Lévi-Strauss 1986, p. 13).

These cycles correspond to different generations, some carrying on from where their parents and grandparents left off, others making a more or less clean break with them, but each nonetheless helping to transform the institution of the family. The twentieth century saw several such breaks, the first being with a society

in which the family was primarily a chain of generations, a lineage that had to be perpetuated, with a sovereign moral person that imposed obligations on its members and oversaw the transmission of knowledge. It was against this same traditional idea of the family that the Enlightenment philosophers had rebelled, as is evidenced by the definition of the family contained in the French *Encyclopédie* of 1765 (Lannes 1954, p. 4):

> The family is nothing but the group formed by a man or a woman and the children born of their union, and marriage but the voluntary marital union of man and woman contracted by free persons for the purpose of having children.

As Isaac Joseph (1977) reminds us, the family is a skilfully constructed artefact, patiently engineered by hygienists, social philanthropists and doctors, as well as by priests and schoolteachers (Donzelot 2005). There was therefore also a break in the way that children were brought up. From then on, they were to remain at the heart of the household, instead of being farmed out to wetnurses, left to their own devices or, worse still, abandoned. Finally, the emancipation of women, leading to a new conception of the couple and family bonds, brought about a break with the single-family model that had stood resolute against the avant-garde ideas about cohabitation espoused in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It would be wrong to think that the development of the family was restricted to a change in form, with a move away from complex households to nuclear families and thence to the current multiplicity of family configurations. For these different forms mirrored more profound changes, described by many family sociologists. As François de Singly (2009) puts it, "contemporary modern families are derived from a process of individualisation whose seeds were sown in the political sphere by the French Revolution". For this author, the emergence of the modern family took place in two waves. The first wave of modernity, when the person-centred, nuclear family first started to gain ground, coincided with industrialisation and urbanisation, while the second, beginning in the 1960s, corresponded to an accelerating process of individualisation and changes in the nature of family ties, especially marital bonds[2]. With regard to women, if the first wave was driven forward by the strength of marriage as an institution, due in part to the secondary role they played as wives and mothers, the second was characterised by their inclusion in the process of individualisation. Henceforth, they, too, had a right to live as themselves, and better education, changes in the labour market and the advent of the contraceptive pill transformed gender relations. The radical nature of this upheaval was eloquently expressed by Ulrich Beck (2008), who wrote that "by earning 'their own money', women could at long last relinquish their status as a 'kitchen unit endowed with speech'" (p. 172). Thus, "while not totally renouncing their previous conventional identifications, women could lay claim to a degree of autonomy and recognition outside the social framework of the family" (Samuel 2009, p. 122), and could take on multiple identities. However, just as it did for men, the right to be treated as

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[2] Ulrich Beck (2008) refers to this period as *second modernity*, whereas Anthony Giddens (1996) prefers the term *late modernity*.

individuals came with the duty for women to fulfil themselves, sometimes at the cost of their couple's stability.

According to some sociologists, this movement towards greater individualisation, set in train in the late eighteenth century, was reflected in a distancing from the notion of kinship. Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the first to develop a sociology of family relations, concluded that the democratic system in America, being free of the trammels of kinship and birthright, favoured a brand of individualism where each citizen could aspire to be the master of his own destiny, relying wholly on his own abilities. This resulted in a weakening of intergenerational relations and, above all, in a dissolution of kinship ties, where "the family presents itself to the mind as vague, uncertain and indeterminate" (de Tocqueville 1835, cited in Cicchelli-Pugeault and Cicchelli 1998, p. 42). Taking his cue from de Tocqueville, Emile Durkheim (1975) also noted the independence of the marital family from its extended kinship structure, that is, from previous generations, commenting that "there is nothing to recall the state of perpetual dependence that formed the basis of the paternal family". The idea that relations within the contemporary family no longer had an intergenerational dimension was taken up by Talcott Parsons in the 1950s, and it has influenced most of his successors, for despite the groundbreaking study by Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1957) and subsequent research demonstrating the strength of family ties (Bonvalet and Ogg 2006; Ouelette and Dandurand 2000), the strength of kinship relations in a postmodern society remains subject to debate (Déchaux 2010).

The problem is that "the spiral of individualisation has not been kind to the family, where societal issues have even increased two-, if not threefold" (Beck 2008, p. 161). Norms are less strong, the family has become deinstitutionalised, and the values of personal autonomy have come to the fore, inducing a paradigm shift whereby, instead of the individual being at the service of the family, the family is now at the service of the individual, with a duty to ensure the self-fulfilment of each of its members (Segalen 2010). How, in this context, can family obligations and the values of autonomy be reconciled? How can the new commandment "thou shalt fulfil thyself"—this need to be totally in charge of one's destiny—and the "cult of achievement" that brings with it a "fatigue of being oneself" (Ehrenberg 1991, 1998) fit in with the demands of adult children and ageing parents? Have family norms really disappeared? Some authors, such as Claudine Attias-Donfut (1995a), have managed to square the family circle. According to Attias-Donfut, the process of individualisation, where the emphasis is placed on autonomy and elective relations, means that we are willing to recognise our obligations towards people with whom we are close, especially if they arise out of relationships built up over a lifetime, rather than norms imposed from on high. The intensity of this mutual aid will therefore vary according to the quality of the bond and the amount of time spent together during the younger person's childhood (Attias-Donfut 1995a). But can we really view all the changes that the family has undergone solely through the prism of invididualism? Is there not, perhaps, something else happening, in terms of transmission, as Durkheim postulated?

1.2   **Did the Baby Boomers Really Transform the Family?**

One way of getting to grips with the revolution that has taken place within the family, and all the attendant issues is not to close our eyes in 1946 and only open them again in 2006, as Sauvy would have us do, but instead to track one or several generations across this period, analysing the changes at work as and when they emerged or, at least in the case of cohabitation outside marriage, re-emerged. The question then is which generations to choose.

We decided to focus on the cohorts born between 1946 and 1954, which correspond to the first wave of a baby boom that was to last in France until 1973. Why these particular generations? First of all, because of their sheer size: there were 200,000 more births in 1946 than there had been in 1945, and between then and 1973, annual birth cohorts systematically topped the 800,000 mark, with two peaks—one in 1949 (869,000 births), the other in 1964 (878,000 births). This demographic tsunami created a bulge as it moved up the population pyramid from early childhood, and in 2006 it was reaching 'the Third Age', provoking debates on postponing retirement and financing long-term care. It was the earliest cohorts that were mainly responsible for the demographic shockwave. Extra housing units had to be built—and fast; municipalities needed more infants' schools, then elementary schools, then high schools; after which new universities were required to cater for the massive influx of students. It is no accident that the changes instituted by national pension reforms in France (Fillon Act 2003) started to be implemented in 2006, when the first of the postwar generations arrived at age 60.

As well as being notable for their size, the birth cohorts of the late 1940s and early 1950s are also special because of the historic events they witnessed or even had a hand in bringing about—starting with the civil unrest of May 1968 that has come to symbolise them. Moreover, they were the protagonists and instigators of normative change both within the family and in society at large. For this reason, they are viewed with a mixture of fascination[3] and mistrust, as attested to by the number of books referring to them in shorthand fashion as the "68 generation", the "gilded" or "blessed" (Chauvel 2002; Clerc 2010; Hamon and Rotman 1998; Sirinelli 2003) generation and even the "lyrical generation" (Ricard 1992), while at the same time decrying them and describing them as "spoiled brats"[4].

A further characteristic of the baby boomers is that they were raised in families presented as a model of happiness and stability, in a context of hope and faith in the future following the 1929 Wall Street Crash and World War II. Postwar children were the object of every attention from their mothers, prompting Yvonne Knibiehler (1997) to use the term "maternal revolution". This new relationship between parents

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[3] Especially in the English-speaking world, witness the far larger number of books and articles on the subject.

[4] According to Patrick Artus and Marie-Paule Virard (2006), baby boomer parents ruined their children, thus paving the way to a war between the spoiled *grandpa-boom* generation and their children.

and their children was based on "tenderness and attention" (Sirinelli 2003), as Louis Roussel confirmed in his analyses of behavioural changes among the baby boomers' parents:

> In all probability, these young people experienced a different model of socialisation from their elders. The families that raised them entertained new attitudes towards the institutions and the symbolic systems that legitimised them, which naturally affected the children. Such that the changes really date back to around 1940, rather than 1965. In any event, a generation effect was surely inevitable (Roussel 1987a, p. 444).

The period of prosperity (1945–1975) referred to in France as the *Trente Glorieuses*, or Thirty Glorious Years, contributed to this particularly protective environment. It also meant that these generations witnessed the emergence of the consumer society, duly becoming its chief beneficiaries. Even so, for Martine Segalen, the generations born in 1946 onwards were:

> Subverters of the family… children of peacetime and the consumer society of plenty. Insulated against harm by the welfare state, and by a wage-earning society that bestowed economic independence on each and every man and woman, they turned into adults in search of autonomy (Segalen 2010, p. 261).

The post-1975 period remained one of peace, albeit marked by recession. For it is important to stress that the French generations born after 1945 were the first not to experience war as their parents had done in 1939, their grandparents in 1914 and their great-great-grandparents in 1870. They can also be said to have been privileged, for unlike the preceding cohorts (1932–1942), whose childhood was scarred by WWII and their young adulthood by the Algerian War (Bantigny 2007), they experienced the urban, social and technological revolutions that characterised the second half of the twentieth century. There was the revolution in transport—they grew up with the motor car, the "figurehead of mass consumption" (Montulet 1996)—, as well as the introduction of new technologies, such that having witnessed the development of information technologies and the explosion of the Internet, they are now learning to grow old gracefully with new technologies of information and communication (NTIC), in what François Ascher (2001) has dubbed the "hypertext society". They were also present at the birth of the global community, and helped to shape a youth culture based around music and new values in the leisure society that came to the fore in the late 1960s. Although the baby boomers' parents were present at the changes that took place after 1945, they were passive bystanders, and it was the baby boomers who actually pioneered them[5]. In this respect, according to Louis Chauvel (2002), they do indeed appear to form a *gilded generation*, compared with both their predecessors, marked by the war, and their successors, deeply affected by the years of recession.

   For all these reasons, the baby boomers must surely meet the conditions needed to form a generation as defined by Karl Mannheim (1952), who made a distinction

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[5] As Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Stéphanie Vermeersch remind us, "the literature of the 1970s referred to a *new class*, or *alternative class*, or *everyday adventurers*. Pioneers of transformation and culture, free from doubts about either their future or that of their children, these social groups were at the heart of a dynamics of social transformation" (Baqué and Vermeersch 2007, p. 7).

between *potential* generations, formed on a purely biological basis, and *actual* generations, whose members are the agents of social change. For while the fact of being born after the war gave them a demographic identity, it did not automatically give them a social one. Belonging to the same birth cohort creates a generational situation akin to a social situation, and certain historical events, be they wars, revolutions or student protest movements, can turn this generational situation into what Mannheim called a "generational unit", especially if its members are protagonists in those events. This participation stirs a generational consciousness within them, in much the same way that class consciousness is kindled in militants. As such, the social unrest in France during May 1968 may have been a truly decisive moment for some of them, possibly even marking a crossroads in their personal trajectories, as they found themselves drawn towards what Mannheim called a "new destiny".

For her part, Claudine Attias-Donfut (1991) has identified four possible definitions of the term *generation*. The first one is synonymous with *cohort*, which refers to a group of people who all experience the same demographic event (e.g., birth, marriage or divorce) the same year. For example, everyone born in 1946 belongs to the 1946 birth cohort—or generation. The second definition is the logical follow-on of the first one, in that it comprises individuals who are all the same age. Here, however, the emphasis is on the sharing of common historical experiences, which takes us back to Mannheim's generational unit. *Generation* can also signify the span of 25 or 30 years that generally separates a parent from his or her child, such as when we talk about things happening in *the space of a generation*, or *a generation later*. The fourth definition refers to intergenerational relations within the family, each generation seeing itself in relation to the others. This is the "genealogical generation" referred to by Olivier Galland (1997), to denote the bonds between parents and children, and, more particularly, to issues of transmission. This latter definition is regarded by Louis Chauvel (2002) as the most relevant of the four. It was in this sense that Margaret Mead (1970) used the term *generation*, when she made the distinction between a *postfigurative* culture, where children learn primarily from their parents and grandparents, in a context marked by tradition and past experience, a *cofigurative* culture, where both children and adults learn from their peers, in contexts of change brought about by migration or technological revolutions, and a *prefigurative* culture, where parents learn from their children, as knowledge can no longer be handed down from generation to generation, owing to the rapid pace of technological change, such that the world inhabited by the children is totally foreign to their parents. In this situation, each generation lives in its own separate world:

> At this breaking point between two radically different and closely related groups, both are inevitably very lonely, as we face each other knowing that they will never experience what we have experienced, and that we can never experience what they have experienced (Mead 1970, p. 125).

For both Margaret Mead and François Ricard (1992), "the baby boomers clearly constitute a generation that emanated from a *prefigurative* culture and introduced a new cofigurative culture" (Olazabal 2009, p. 30). Ignace Olazabal, however, distances himself from—or rather nuances—this view of intergenerational relations that emerged in the early 1970s, a period dominated by student uprisings in the

English-speaking world and which was still feeling the shockwaves of May 1968. According to him, the generations born after the war cannot be said to form a homogeneous group. Not all of them broke with their parents' *postfigurative culture*, nor did they necessarily adopt a *cofigurative* one. Rather, in line with Chauvel, he suggests that the baby boomers can be divided into three separate sets of generations: 1946–1955, the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the late 1960s and earlier 1970s. Intergenerational relations were also more complex than might first appear, depending not just on the family climate in which the baby boomers were raised, but also on the events they witnessed or played an active part in during their youth, as well as their individual and family trajectories. Olazabal stresses the need to differentiate between the children of the *demographic* baby boom (i.e., all those born between 1946 and 1973) and the *sociological* baby boomers. The first category refers to the generational situation and encompasses all the postwar birth cohorts, while the second category is actually a subgroup of the first, made up of individuals who lay claim to the identity of *baby boomers* (Olazabal 2009). As Stéphane Dufour, Dominic Fortin and Jacques Hammel emphasise:

> The baby boomers are postwar children who took up the slogan "who learns, earns". It is important to make a distinction between baby boomers and baby boom children. The baby boomers are those members of the baby boom who hold university degrees, the expression par excellence of this modernisation (Dufour et al. 1993).

Lastly, within the first set of generations, we also need to dissociate those who were born immediately after World War II, that is, between 1946 and 1950, and those were born between 1950 and 1954, as those who were aged 18–22 years in May 1968 experienced the events in a very different way from those were aged 14–17 years. The same goes for the French liberalisation of contraception in 1967, for while it often arrived too late for the first few generations, it allowed the younger ones to avoid the unwanted pregnancies and shotgun weddings their elders had suffered.

Like Olazabal, we can ask whether the generations born after 1946 really did "produce an entirely new social sense and meaningful cultural models that set them apart from the generations of their parents born in the 1920s and their elders born in the 1930s" (Olazabal 2009, p. 40), and whether they did indeed initiate a *cofigurative* culture with which some of their members identified, especially in their younger days. If they did, then what remains of that culture? What has been their experience of the seven ages of life so far? Have they genuinely subverted the conventional stages of family life? And if so, which ones? Certainly according to Olazabal, when it comes to retirement and grandparenthood, baby boomers fit fairly neatly into the postfigurative mould of their parents and grandparents. It may be that different individuals have adopted different types of behaviour over the years—*postfigurative* for some, *cofigurative* or *prefigurative* for others. Then again, such is the strength of transmission that family relations may have remained *postfigurative*, while marital relations have become either *cofigurative* or *postfigurative*. This is a particularly relevant question, as many baby boom children are encountering an entirely new demographic situation where longer life expectancies mean that for many their parents are still alive. They are therefore expected to cope with the old age of

their ascendant relatives, all the while being forced by the harsh economic climate to help their children gain a foot on both the job and housing ladders. But can the baby boom generations meet their family obligations without reneging on modern social values, such as freedom and personal fulfilment, based on individualism?

To answer all these questions, we chose to track the cohorts born between 1945 and 1954. We referred to them indifferently as *baby boomers* or as *baby boom children*, for only once we had completed our analysis would we be in a position to tackle the sociological notion of the baby boomer and determine whether or not these birth cohorts can be said to form an *actual generation*. Like Sarah Arber and Claudine Attias-Donfut (Arber and Attias-Donfut 2000), we decided to use the term *generation* to refer either to a historical and sociological entity, made up of a set of individuals born in the same period and who have lived through or witnessed the same events at the same age, or else to family members *sandwiched* between ascendant and descendant relatives. We reasoned that the norms and values handed down from parent to child in the course of primary socialisation, as described by Bernard Lahire (1998), are key to grasping changes in sociodemographic behaviour. They provide the stock onto which the behavioural patterns learned during secondary socialisation are grafted. We therefore paid particular attention to life stories, all the while attempting to set them in a broader historical, sociodemographic and geographical context.

1.3   A Comparative Approach

It would not have been informative to study the generations born after 1945 uniquely in the French context, given that similar demographic and sociological changes were sweeping across all industrialised countries at the same time. The very term *baby boom* was coined in the United States of America (USA) to describe the wave of births that began as early as 1943, prompted by economic recovery powered by a burgeoning arms industry. This recovery led to an increase in purchasing power that held up after the war had ended, encouraging couples to have an extra child (Olazabal 2009). Probably more so than their French counterparts, American baby-boom children grew up in a climate of affection and freedom, as advocated by Dr. Spock, to the point where they were nicknamed the *Dr. Spock generation* (Sirinelli 2003). According to some experts, this more relaxed style of parenting contributed to the emergence of student activism in the 1960s, by opening up a generation gap. Lewis Feuer[6] claims that this gap resulted from the previous generation's loss of legitimacy, but for Bruno Bettelheim, it arose from the contradictory and irrational exercise of parental authority, creating the need for an authoritarian father Figure (or, if we are to believe Edgar Morin, the desire to live in a less repressive world). Whatever its origin, the revolt against family and society found a formidable vector in the music that crossed the Atlantic via transistors and records, as well as

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[6] For a discussion of Feuer's, Bettelheim's and Morin's theses, see Granjon 1985.

in fashion (jeans, miniskirts, etc.). Throughout the 1960s, the effects of student movements originating in the USA rippled across the pond to the United Kingdom. Brought up in a consumer society that promoted hedonism, British and American youngsters rejected the *hedonism of having* in favour of the *hedonism of being*, driven by a need for freedom and a quest for truth. As a result, the sexual revolution and women's liberation began far earlier in Britain and the United States than they did in France[7]. This wave of protest profoundly affected the institution of the family in these two English-speaking countries, prompting an understandable fascination with the baby boom generations, as witnessed by the many academic studies, not to mention the plethora of popular science books and articles[8].

In this context, we decided that the most relevant approach to tackling the family history of the baby boomers would be a comparative one. This approach would allow us to step back from the situation in France, put the events of May 1968 into perspective and thus avoid the temptation of reducing all the postwar generations to this one movement, especially since, as Jean-François Sirinelli (2003) reminds us, although May 1968 tends to be equated with the baby boomers in our collective memory, their elders also played an important role. Indeed, it was not so much the events of May 1968 that marked the postwar children—many of whom took no real part in them—as their spirit, which was to linger throughout the 1970s. In this sense, they represent a "necessary point of reference" according to Jean-Pierre le Goff (2007), separating a *before 1968*, dominated by conformism and relations of authority within the family, at school and in the workplace, from an *after 1968*, with its values of autonomy, freedom, and negotiated relations within the various institutions. Furthermore, May 1968 undoubtedly propelled French society towards modernity, following in the wake of British and American society.

We soon realised that we needed to compare the situation in France with the one in Britain. The two countries have several points in common when it comes to demographics, including roughly similar population sizes and mortality rates. There are also a number of notable differences, including attitudes to marriage, with a higher total female first marriage rate in Britain, at least until the 2000s, as well as a higher divorce rate (Sardon 2006). Further differences concern women's employment and childcare. Sociological change also tends to occur in Britain several years, if not decades, before crossing the Channel. Examples include early feminist movements, women's suffrage (granted in 1928), the contraceptive pill, which first went on sale in 1961, and the legalisation of abortion in 1967, which resulted in young French women travelling to abortion clinics in England. Change began to rock traditional British society as early as 1955 (Bédarida 1990), and it soon came to be regarded as an eldorado by baby boomers everywhere—the crucible, like the

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[7] Examples include women's suffrage, feminist movements and contraception.

[8] In Britain, a research project was conducted between 2005 and 2008 by the Institute of Life-course Studies at Keele University specifically to explore the baby boomers. It was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of the *Cultures of Consumption* programme. See Biggs et al. 2007.

USA, of a youth culture symbolised by the Beatles, and the home of a seemingly more permissive society.

British and French baby boom generations grew up in very different socio-economic contexts. According to Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1991) typology, France has a conservative, corporatist regime[9], while Britain forms part of the liberal system, along with the USA and Canada. The two countries boast the contrasting family cultures of northern and southern Europe, leading to different relationships between age groups and generations. This was clearly demonstrated in Cécile Van de Velde's research on how young British and French people enter adulthood, which revealed different conceptions of the family and its role (Van de Velde 2008) dating back to the pre-industrial period. According to Emmanuel Todd (1990), the "absolute nuclear family" model, an "individualistic model par excellence", prompts children to leave home early, in order to escape from parental authority. Henri Mendras (1997) has described Britain as the country of "extreme individualism", a society which is more individualistic and liberal than French society, where the norm of independence has less of a hold. "Ideological structures" therefore continue to "shape Europeans' family lives".

But how far are these contrasting family cultures reflected in the life stories of the generations born between 1945 and 1954 in France and Britain? Did British baby boomers distance themselves more from their parents, in line with the process of defamilisation, and build individualistic families in which the members were individually responsible and family solidarity was reserved for the youngest and most destitute (Masson 2007)? And how did French baby boomers reconcile their aspirations for freedom and autonomy with the cultural model of family solidarity?

1.4   A Combination of Methods

It soon became obvious that the only way to address these two questions was to use a combination of methods and data sources, taking advantage of the fact that the baby boom generations are of interest not only to demographers, on account of their size, but also to sociologists, as the purported engineers of family transformations, and to historians, insofar as their arrival coincided with the postwar era, the emergence of the consumer society, and continued modernisation and individualisation.

Census and civil registration data allowed us to look back across the two previous centuries in France and Britain and pinpoint the sudden breaks that occurred against a backdrop of gradual change. Secondary sources, such as the joint INSEE-INED *Family situations* survey, conducted in France in 1985, provided us with a sociodemographic framework and, importantly, allowed us to compare and contrast the baby boomers' behaviour with that of the generations that came immediately before and after them. Lastly, INED's *Event histories and contact circle* survey of 2001, tracing the family and occupational histories of the generations born between

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[9] Even if France seems difficult to categorise. See Martin 1997.

1930 and 1950, as well as those of their parents and children, lent our analysis a longer-term dimension, setting it on a family generational timescale.

In the first semester of 2006 (see Appendix 1), we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 30 children of the London baby boom and 60 of their Parisian counterparts. These were directly inspired by the *Event histories and contact circle* survey, and can be viewed as its qualitative extension, inasmuch as they focused on one specific generation—the baby boomers. We asked our respondents to describe their occupational, residential and family histories, and to say how they differed from those of both their parents and their children. We also sought their opinions about the changing nature of families and about baby boomers and what made them so special, in terms of May 1968, the permissive society, and so on.

In order to understand what they were saying and put it in context, we drew on the work of historians, sociologists and demographers—in particular the many demographers who were active at the time of the baby boom and shortly after. In contrast to Britain, family sociology had been regarded as a very minor research field in France in the 1960s. To borrow Louis Roussel's (1999) neat turn of phrase, media interest in the subject back then was *restricted to the lonely hearts column*, with the result that most researchers felt it was beneath them. The 1970s, however, saw a renewal of interest and, indeed a sense of urgency (Kellerhals and Roussel 1987b), with the slightest clue being subjected to minute scrutiny. Demography played a key role in this revival of family sociology, thus confirming Durkheim's belief in its importance for understanding families, households and domestic life. The research undertaken by the demographers of the day, and the questions they asked about the events unfolding before their very eyes, reveal very different perceptions of changes that today seem obvious to us, with the benefit of hindsight. For instance, it comes as a surprise to discover that, in 1950, Alfred Sauvy, the leading French demographer of the day, did not believe there would be a sustained increase in the postwar birth rate and only "belatedly and half-heartedly acquiesced" (Rosental 2003), and that Louis Roussel (1978) initially dismissed the fall in marriage rates, opining that cohabitation among young people was above all premarital.

We also drew heavily on data yielded by three research programmes. The first of these, funded by the Urban Development, Construction and Architecture Plan section of the French ministry for housing (PUCA), focused on the residential and geographical histories of 30 baby boomers in London and 30 in the Paris region, and gave rise to a book entitled *Les* baby boomers*: une génération mobile*, published jointly by INED and Editions de l'Aube (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). Funding from EDF enabled us to supplement the 30 original Parisian interviews with a further 30, resulting in the drafting of a joint EDF-INED report (Clément et al. 2007). The third and final research programme was financed by the French Ministry for Research as part of its "Terrains, Techniques, Theories" concerted incentive action (ACI), and examined the family histories of 60 baby boomers—again, 30 in Paris and 30 in London (Bonvalet and Ogg 2008).

The chapters in this book therefore offer a range of different approaches, and are ordered according to the chapters in the baby boomers' own lives, starting with childhood, then adolescence, and proceeding to look at family formation, professional life, and current family relations.

The first section, entitled *Baby Boomers in the Family*, explores the baby boomers' supposedly gilded childhood through their own words, portraying the subject from a new angle and highlighting the housing conditions and general socio-economic context of those postwar years. It also emphasises how changes in the family model meant that children occupied a more central place. Through its exploration of the baby boomers' youth, the second section *Baby Boomers Against the Family* tells the story of the 1960s protest movements in Britain and North America, and how they gave rise to a more permissive society. It also recalls the major transformations that were initiated—or, in some cases, revived—in marriage and family life. Given that the 1970s saw such profound shifts in the place of women, the third section, entitled *Baby Boomers in Alternative Families*, examines the professional lives of the women respondents and the choices they had to make, and describing the apparently new family configurations. The fourth and final section, entitled *Baby Boomers with the Family*, looks at the baby boomers' family relations today, caught between helping their children to move into adult life and their ageing parents who in many case require care.

Only once we have completed this true *journey of a lifetime* do we attempt to establish—such is the complexity of the issue—whether the baby boomers do indeed form one specific generation that clearly stands out from those before and since, breaking free of their parents' norms but at the same time instituting new ones with their children and attempting to preserve some of the values of their youth, not least freedom and autonomy. One thing is for sure: their desire for personal fulfilment, which may at times have led them to strain against the bonds of marriage, coupled with their wish to forge close relationships with their parents and children has led some of them at least to *renew the family*.

Part I
Baby Boomers in the Family

Chapter 2
The Baby Boom Phenomenon

Population—especially fertility—moves in mysterious ways (Le Bras 2007), the postwar baby boom being a case in point. Although flagging birth numbers classically recover in the wake of a conflict, the revival is generally short-lived. This makes the baby boom surprising on two counts, for not only did the birth rate start to rise while France and Britain were still gripped by war, but it remained high for several decades.

In a postwar context characterised by low agricultural and industrial production, as well as by the widespread destruction of buildings and the transport infrastructure, the baby boom threw up several challenges, the first being to recognise it for what it was (it was to take Alfred Sauvy a good 5 years to do so). The question was whether it was a *one off* that would simply peter out after a few years, or a lasting change, for as Rosental (2003) explains, "people still remembered how birth numbers had briefly surged at the end of the First World War, as a result of women catching up with the childbearing they had postponed until after the conflict". This issue was of interest not just to academics, but also to politicians, as the baby boom was to have a long-term impact on societies, as we can see only too clearly today, with the current problems brought about by an ageing population and the debates on pension reform. Even after all these years, the sheer intensity and duration of the baby boom continue to surprise and astonish, and many questions remain unanswered.

2.1 The Unexplained Recovery in the Birth Rate

2.1.1 What Was the Baby Boom?

There are intriguing similarities in the changes in fertility that occurred both during and immediately after World War II in France and Britain. In 1942, for instance, a reversal of the prevailing downward trend was observed in both countries, with a return to levels last seen in the early 'thirties. This was followed by a rapid acceleration, resulting in figures that had rarely been recorded in the twentieth century.

Fig. 2.1 Total fertility rates in France and in England and Wales. (Source: INED database, www. ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

In 1946 alone, the total fertility rate in France rose from 2.3 to 2.98 children, representing a 0.7-point increase, while across the Channel, the rise was from 2.05 to 2.47 children, representing a 0.4 gain (Fig. 2.1).[1]

In actual fact, this rapid surge in fertility was not as steep as the one that had taken place after World War I (there was a 1.12-point increase in France between 1919 and 1920). It is therefore not so much the *intensity* of the increase in fertility that is remarkable as its *duration*—nearly 30 years.

The exceptional nature of the baby boom is thrown into particularly sharp relief when it is set against a longer demographic timeline, which shows a long and gradual decline in fertility on both sides of the Channel, starting in the nineteenth century. It is important to point out, however, that although the two countries now share very similar populations of around 60 million, their demographic histories pursued markedly different courses across the previous two centuries. Whereas England and Wales followed the classic schema of demographic transition[2], whereby a reduction in mortality from 1750 onwards was followed some considerable time later by a reduction in fertility, France started to see its fertility dwindle just a few years after mortality had started to fall, in the early nineteenth century (Vallin and Caselli 1999). This heralded the start of a century-long process of slow and steady decline at an annual rate of 6%, with just two *blips*: catch-up births following the Napo-

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[1] Depending on the available data, we compare France with either England and Wales, Great Britain or the United Kingdom. Although the INED databank contains demographic series for France stretching back to 1900, similar data are only available for England and Wales, as total fertility rates were only recorded for the United Kingdom from 1960 onwards. Great Britain is made up of England, Wales and Scotland. When Northern Ireland is added, it becomes the United Kingdom.

[2] Shift in a population from a traditional demographic regime marked by high fertility and mortality to a modern demographic regime in which fertility and mortality are low. Source: http://www. ined.fr/en/lexicon/.
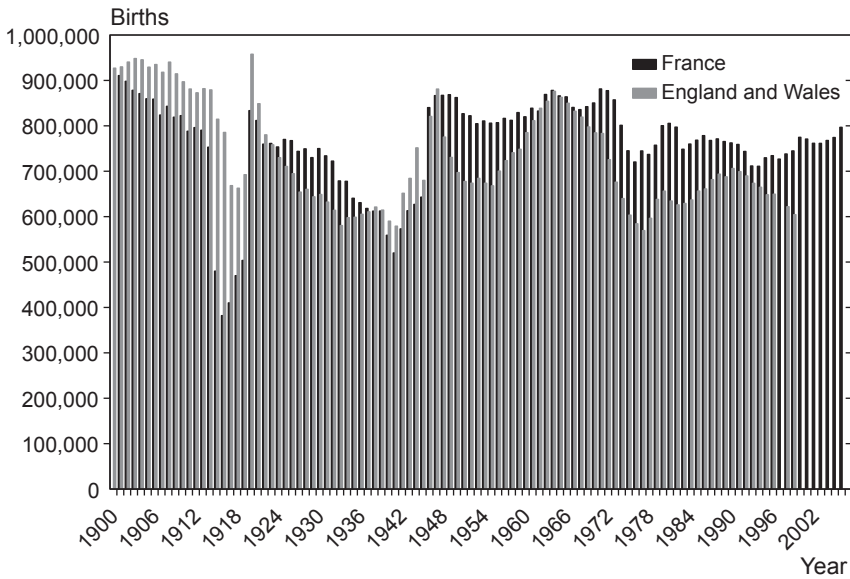
Fig. 2.2 Number of live births in France and in England and Wales. (Source: INED database www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

leonic Wars and the 20-year period of 1860–1880. From a demographic point of view, therefore, nineteenth-century France was characterised by voluntary infertility across all layers of population (Armengaud 1966). In England, by contrast, there was no real fall in fertility before 1880, but when it came, it was quite unprecedented in English history, according to David Coleman and John Salt (1992).

The pace of decline quickened with the advent of the Great War, but only in France, where the total fertility rate fell from 2.5 children in 1910 to 1.21 in 1916 (the figure for this year was 2.6 in England and Wales). As we have seen, the end of the conflict saw a sharp rise in fertility, with figures of 2.6 in France and 3.08 across the Channel for 1920, compared with 1.55 and 2.31 for 1919. However, this was very much the product of circumstance, as couples wed in 1919 and 1920 had their first children (Desplanques 1988b). After this brief flurry of activity, rates in both countries fell dramatically, plumbing the depths in the 1930s—a decade marked by Depression and attendant mass unemployment and poverty[3] (2.05 children in France and 1.75 in England and Wales in 1935).

If we focus purely on the number of live births—and it is this statistic that defines the 1946–1973 baby boom in France—although there had been a substantial increase in the wake of World War I, both in France and Britain (up by 300,000 between 1919 and 1920; see Fig. 2.2), it was to prove short-lived, and the number

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[3] In France, couples did not appear to share the concerns voiced since the early nineteenth century about falling birth rates (Desplanques 1988b). Although many authors, including Bertillon, Leroy Beaulieu and Targe, expressed their alarm, propounding populationist-inspired theories (see Béjin 1988), their appeals for women to engage in patriotic procreation fell on deaf ears.

of births declined rapidly from 1923 onwards. It remained at extremely low levels throughout the 1930s, especially in Britain, such that "never, in peacetime, had cradles been so empty" (Desplanques 1988b, p. 291).

The surges in birth rates that occurred in 1920 and 1946 had quite different causes. Thus, while it was the "abundance of firstborns that accounted for the 1920–1921 recovery" (Desplanques 1988b, p. 291) in French birth statistics, the "extra" fertility in 1946 stemmed above all from the arrival of second or third children, as couples were reunited. The following year, there was also an increase in firstborns, produced by couples who had sealed the knot after the Liberation. Then came the second children, with figures peaking in 1949. This first peak of birth rates was specific to France (Desplanques 1988a). As a result, while the total fertility rate for England and Wales in 1947 was 2.7—similar to the rate in Switzerland and the Netherlands—it was substantially lower than the figure for France (3.02), and when the trough of the wave came in 1951, it dropped to just 2.14 children per woman. The second peak, when it came in 1965, was common to nearly all Western nations, and this time round, British women proved just as fertile as their French sisters, as shown in Fig. 2.1. To sum up, an extremely strong early recovery in France resulted in a rate of three children per woman from 1947 onwards. This figure dropped to just 2.6 children in 1956, but then started to climb again, returning to its postwar heights in 1964. Although the peak in Britain was not obtained until the 1960s, the birth rate rose more steeply during the 1950s, catching up with the French one (2.94) in 1964. Rates in both countries then fell, dipping below the two children per woman mark in 1973 in England and Wales and in 1975 in France. We can therefore identify two distinct increases in the total fertility rate reflected in two separate waves of different intensities, one in 1946–1947, the other in 1964. While the first was a mere blip on the screen, the second represented a massive reversal, thus dividing the baby boom period into two parts: the immediate postwar years and the mid-1960s.

Despite its name, the baby boom was not just about lots of babies being born. It was also—and above all—about lots of babies not dying. When the annual number of births rose above the 800,000 mark in 1946, it was certainly not the first time this had happened in the demographic history of the two countries. It was in 1901 that the highest figure (910,000) was recorded in the twentieth century for both France and Britain, contrasting starkly with the number of births in 1936–1938 (Fig. 2.2). What was different about the postwar rise was that babies born after 1946 were far more likely to survive than those born in 1900 had been[4]. According to Guy Desplanques (1988a), nearly one infant in seven died before its first birthday at the beginning of the twentieth century, but by 1950, this figure had fallen to 1 in 20. To gain a clearer idea of what this statistic actually meant, there were more than 130,000 deaths in England for 881,000 live births in 1911. In 1947, this figure had dropped to 41,000 deaths for exactly the same number of births (Fig. 2.3). Early mortality also has a major impact on completed cohort fertility, in that some female children may fail

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[4] 1945 was a catastrophic year, with one French child in nine dying before the age of 12 months (Desplanques 1988a).

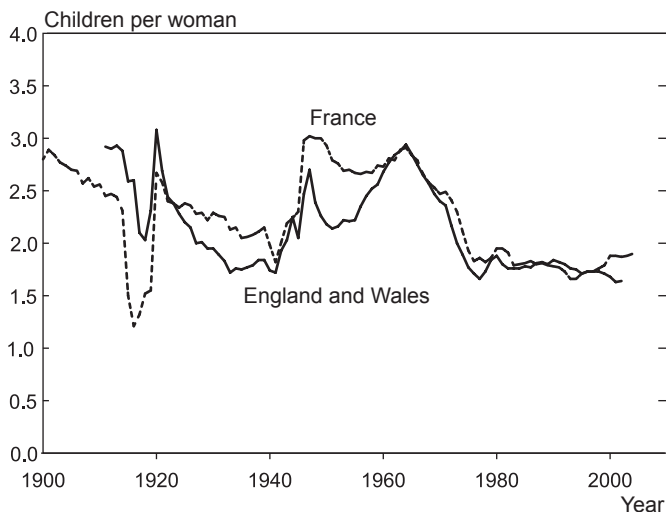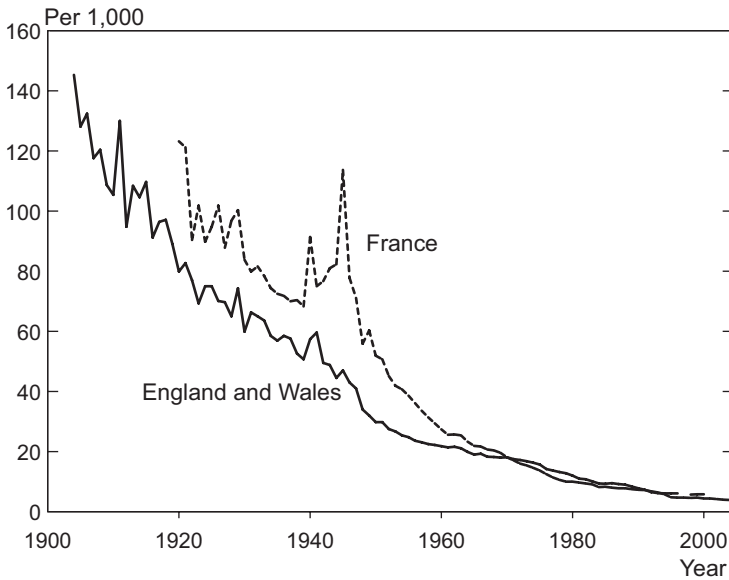**Fig. 2.3** Infant mortality rates in France and in England and Wales, 1900–2005. (Source: INED database www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

to reach the age of procreation, and some women may die before they have reached the end of their fertile life. For example, 38 % of girls born in France in 1900 died before they reached the age of 28, compared with just 4 % of those born in 1960, resulting in a clear impact on net lifetime fertility (Daguet 2002a)[5].

It was therefore the combination of these two factors, that is, an increase in fertility and a decrease in infant mortality, that resulted in the baby boom. Between 1945 and 1946, 200,000 extra children were born in France and 140,000 in Britain—children who had a far better life expectancy than those born at the beginning of the twentieth century.

2.1.2   Why Did the Baby Boom Happen?

When set against the historical perspective of a century-long decline in the birth rate, the baby boom seems particularly striking. One remarkable feature is its longevity, as opposed to its intensity. The other is that it began right in the middle of World War II.

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[5] This author highlights the impact of early mortality on lifetime fertility. The 1900 and 1954 generations had the same lifetime fertility (i.e., 2.12 children per woman), but their net lifetime fertility, which takes account of women who die before they reach their reproductive age, was just 1.52 children for the 1900 generation, compared with 2.02 for the 1954 generation.

2.1.2.1   The Recovery of the Birth Rate in 1942

The application of a method devised by Jean Bourgeois-Pichat for accurately measuring changes in fertility in France led to what Alfred Sauvy (1978) was to describe as a revolutionary conclusion: "Not only did fertility start to recover in 1939, but it grew strongly from 1941 onwards, increasing by 37 % in 1943 alone" (p. 155). His conclusion could just as easily apply to Britain, begging the question of why fertility started to climb in 1942, when war was still raging[6]. Fertility reached its nadir in 1940–1941, a period when life was particularly difficult, with severe shortages of food and consumer goods. In France, ration books for bread, sugar and pasta were introduced in September 1940, and extended to all consumer goods in 1941, the number of coupons they contained determined by the age of their holders. As Sauvy (1978) recalls, "the amount of ordinary rations that people could buy with their coupons represented approximately half their quantitative needs and far less for noble foods" (p. 164). To make up for these shortages, city-dwellers were sent so-called *family packages* by their country cousins, and the black market flourished. Even so, according to Jean-François Muracciole (2002), "during the war, the majority of French people devoted most of their time and energy to gleaning enough to feed themselves and their families" (p. 244).

Restrictions were also very tight in Britain, owing to the merciless U-boat attacks on Atlantic convoys that lasted at least until 1943 (Muracciole 2002). Food was rationed, as was clothing. However, despite such austere economic conditions, and high levels of financial uncertainty (especially for women whose husbands were PoWs or, in the case of French men, forced to work in Germany), fertility started to recover on both sides of the Channel in 1942. Two factors are generally put forward: the economy and pro-family policy. Sauvy (1978), for one, cites the fact that unemployment had all but disappeared in France by 1941. In England, too, there was full employment from 1940 onwards, bringing about what François Bédarida (1990) has called "a fundamental shift in the life of the working classes", which still bore the scars of the 1930s Depression. It is also important to remember that the Second World War mobilized far fewer men than the First had done, and that men started to return from the Front in 1940 (Muracciole 2002). In France, enlisted men went home after the Armistice between France and Germany in 1940, and the German-occupied country then remained largely free of conflict until the Liberation. The same situation prevailed in Britain, as David Coleman and John Salt point out:

> British armies were expelled from Europe for four years. This may be one reason why fertility recovered somewhat after its initial wartime decline. (Coleman and Salt 1992, p. 17)

For many researchers, however, the recovery in French fertility in 1942 was actually prompted by a pro-family policy that had first come to the fore in the late 1930s. Jean-Claude Chesnais (1988), in particular, underscores the impact of pro-natalist measures dating back to 1938–1939 that included the generalization of family allowances and the introduction of a non-working mother's allowance, as well as

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[6] A similar recovery in birth numbers took place in every country in Western Europe.

the establishment of a High Committee for Population chaired by Adolphe Landry. In 1938, there had been "fewer cradles than graves" (Sauvy 1988, p. 149), with 612,000 births for 647,000 deaths, meaning that future generations were shrinking. This situation prompted increasing state intervention in people's private lives, in a bid to reverse the trend, resulting in the Family Code of July 1939, followed by the creation of the Ministry for the Family in 1940, led by father-of-seven Georges Pernot. The year 1941 saw a 30 % rise in family allowance for families with three or more children, and the allowance for stay-at-home mothers was generalized, such that it was tantamount to a single living wage, and became the "keystone of Vichy policy" (Muracciole 2002, p. 143).

   It is, however, one thing to acknowledge a plausible link between the recovery of fertility and the pro-family policy implemented in France in the late 1930s and quite another to assert that this was the one and only factor, especially since birth rates also increased in other European countries. Indeed, Jean-François Muracciole (2002) and Guy Desplanques (1988a) have demonstrated that there is no single explanation, be it psychological (e.g. the survival instinct in times of war) or political (e.g. the impact of government policies). The widespread assumption is that France witnessed a resurrection of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's family model, centred on the natural bond between mother and child, where the woman is first and foremost wife and mother, and must therefore renounce all ideas of paid employment (Rousseau 1762). This model corresponds to the nuclear family described and analysed by Talcott Parsons (1955), where gender roles and functions are clearly delineated, the man being the main breadwinner and the women the *homemaker*. The father thus has an instrumental role and the mother an expressive one, and the status of the family is defined by the man's occupational status. However, the reality in 1942 was somewhat different, as the number of births outside wedlock increased, and despite legislation restricting the employment of married women[7], women with absent husbands suffered such financial and economic hardship that they simply had no choice but to go out to work. In England, women were actually encouraged to find jobs, as part of the war effort. In 1941, single women under 30 were called up to work in industry or in the services, and in 1943 this measure was extended to all single women up to the age of 50. Married women under 40 had to register for work in factories (where they came to represent 40 % of the workforce). A preoccupation with families comes through very clearly in the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services* of 1942, more famously known as the Beveridge Report, which recommended a national system of social security and family allowances (Leese 2006).

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[7] On 11 October 1940, the Vichy Government banned the employment of married women by government departments and local councils, and forced women over 50 to retire.

2.1.2.2   Why Did the Baby Boom Last So Long?

The baby boom observed in so many industrialised countries, with France and Britain dominating the rest in Western Europe, cannot be ascribed solely to postponed 'catch-up' births, otherwise it would not have continued once this goal had been achieved. Although it is difficult to identify the mechanisms and main protagonists that underpinned the baby boom, there are several closely correlated factors. Generally speaking, the reasons advanced to explain the high numbers after 1946 are the same as those linked to the initial recovery in the birth rate, namely couples being reunited, low unemployment and pro-family policies. Regarding the latter, a number of far-reaching measures affecting families and the demographic situation were introduced from 1945 onwards. In France, shortly after war had ended, General de Gaulle called on women to produce "12 million bouncing babies for France in 10 years" (Norvez 1990), while in Britain, the 1949 *Report of the Royal Commission on Population* stated that the ideal family consisted of three or four children (Leese 2006, p. 29). In France, after the "calamity of 1945" (Norvez 1990, p. 54)—a year that proved particularly deadly for infants, owing to poor milk supplies and a lack of heating—, the priority was to improve the infant population both quantitatively and qualitatively. A particular target was to reduce infant mortality, which was one of the missions of the new mother and child welfare system (Protection Maternelle et Infantile, PMI) established in 1945. Demographers were to have a powerful voice, not least Alfred Sauvy, who was a strong proponent of pro-family and sociodemographic policies (Norvez 1990)[8]. In Britain, the postwar years also saw the introduction of genuinely pro-family policies (Family Allowances Act in 1945, *Report of the Royal Commission on Population* in 1949, and the extension of family allowances), all of which put women centre stage. They were to become important players in society, the object of every attention, be it from doctors[9], psychologists or the media. In France, even if their entitlement was based on their husbands' rights, family allowance was paid directly to the baby boomers' mothers in the form of postal orders from 1945 onwards. This meant that they had their own budgets and became fully-fledged economic agents within the market, as highlighted by the Women's Civic and Social Union (UFCS), a social Catholic organization, and the National Union of Family Associations (UNAF). This change did not go unnoticed, and women soon became the target of numerous magazines and consumer products. In the early years at least (as we will see in Chap. 4), women proved to be the main beneficiaries of the consumer society, in that they were freed from the most arduous and repetitive household chores by new household appliances, such as the SEB pressure cooker and above all the washing machine ("those long and tiring laundry days are now a thing of the past"[10]). Unsurprisingly, many researchers in France credit the pro-family policy that emerged in the 1930s and gathered strength in the

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[8] See in particular Chap. 3, entitled "*La situation à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*".

[9] "The baby boom definitively brought the child out of the circle of private life" (Knibiehler 1977).

[10] Words uttered in July 1950 by a radio commentator vaunting the merits of Hoover washing machines, cited by Leese (2006, p. 45).

postwar years with driving the baby boom. Although some would beg to differ, pointing out that similar rises in birth rates occurred in countries with fewer pro-natalist measures, it is certainly true that the increase in figures was less pronounced in Britain, where the label *baby boom* is usually reserved for the fertility peak of the 1960s, the initial recovery being viewed primarily as a catch-up process.

As in 1920, children represented a source of immense hope, a reason to live and a means of healing the wounds of war. Unlike the interwar period, however, far from fading, this belief in the future persisted and even grew as the years went by. One reason for this is that, in contrast to the aftermath of the Great War, both victors and vanquished were helped to restart their economies after 1945. As Jean Mathiex and Gérard Vincent explain:

> Liberal economists in Europe and the United States, Marxist economists in the USSR, busi-nessmen and statesmen all agreed that the war would be followed by a worldwide crisis of far greater depth and severity than the one that occurred in 1920–21 in the wake of World War I. (Mathiex and Vincent 1973, p. 63)

The implementation of the Marshall Plan (1947–1951), with US $ 12.4 billion in loans and grants, was a reflection of the determination to avoid a new recession. It brought huge benefits to Allied nations and former Axis powers alike, and the Americans effectively footed most of the bill for France's first capital investment and modernisation plan. Thanks to this financial assistance, together with a recovery in production, increased productivity and an improvement in public finances, the inevitable period of high postwar inflation only lasted until early 1950. The financial situation also improved in Britain, which was soon able to turn down further Marshall Plan grants. The economic recovery soon made itself felt in a fall in unemployment, and the small size of their cohort meant that the baby boomers' parents had no trouble entering the labour market, thus proving Easterlin's theory[11] about the cycle of fertility—at least for this period. We can therefore draw a link between economic recovery, the hope it generated and fertility. We should not forget "the high number of unwanted births, to which we can add the equally high number of births that were desired but which occurred rather earlier than couples would have wished" (Leridon 1987). Nevertheless, as Henri Leridon states:

> It was not just the absence of effective family planning methods that made such a situation possible, but also a general context in which that "extra" child was not altogether one too many. (Leridon 1987, p. 280)

These newborns were thus assured of a warm reception, for children's place in society had radically changed. In addition to the desire to catch up with postponed childbearing and the pro-friendly policy, there was a more psychological factor, according to Christine Bard, who claims that government policies "cannot fully

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[11] Richard Easterlin noticed that American fertility occurred in cycles of expansion and retraction, with variations in fertility apparently linked to how easily young people were able to enter the job market. He argued that because the members of a small cohort find work more easily and enjoy better living standards, their fertility is higher. Twenty years down the line, the cohort is correspondingly larger, and its members therefore have greater difficulty entering the employment market, resulting in lower fertility (Easterlin 1974).

explain the baby boom, although psychological motivations are hard to pin down. The hopes that parents placed in their offspring to rebuild postwar society may well have played a role. The economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s doubtless created a climate of confidence, where upward social mobility became a possibility […]" (Bard 2001, p. 280).

Young households in particular now exuded an air of confidence and "happiness was in the cradle" (Sirinelli 2003, p. 46). Children could be brought into the world without the fear of losing them because of high infant mortality or war looming on the horizon. The availability of new household appliances meant that it was henceforth possible to bring several children up without being worn down by household chores. Couples could relax in front of the television, go on holiday, and drive (instead of walking everywhere) in their newly purchased 2CV. Annie Ernaux describes this extraordinary period in her novel *Les Années*:

> The restrictions were over and there was a stream of novelties, spread out just enough for us to greet each one with the same rapturous astonishment… These extraordinary things came out of nowhere, just like in a fairytale. There was something for everyone: ballpoint pens, shampoo refill pouches, Bulgomme and Gerflex, Tampax and depilatory creams, Gilac plastic, Tergal, strip lighting, hazelnut milk chocolate, VéloSoleX mopeds and chlorophyll toothpaste… We were bowled over by these inventions that put an end to centuries and centuries of gestures and efforts…. (Ernaux 2008, p. 42)

Nothing could dent the unshakeable faith in the future, for each new day was better than the day before, and women found that they had a genuine role to play in improving everyday existence.

This optimism can seem surprising, given the unsatisfactory living conditions that ordinary people had to put up with, not least postwar rationing and poor housing (of which more later). In 1946, when the baby boom first started, everyday life was still extremely tough. Postwar disillusionment had also set in and would last for a decade. Food shortages were still a fact of life and rationing continued in France until February 1949. It took the French four and a half years to return to their prewar standard of living. As Sauvy (1978) points out, the supply system that had been so long in the planning failed to work properly. As late as 1954, the government of Pierre Mendès France had to introduce free school milk to make up for food shortages in French households. This deprivation must have been particularly hard for the French to bear, given that most of them had assumed that the Liberation would put an end to their problems and they would be able to enjoy the consumer goods they had discovered when the GIs landed in Normandy. The shortages that characterised the postwar years stemmed from the catastrophic situation in which both France and Britain (Kynaston 2007) found themselves. Demographically, France had lost nearly 600,000 men and women, and Britain more than 400,000. In both countries, agricultural production had been hit hard and industrial production harder still. The transport infrastructure had been damaged, and a proportion of the housing stock destroyed. The French and British governments embarked on extremely ambitious reconstruction programmes involving in-depth economic (nationalisation of energy companies, airlines and banks) and social (creation of the social security system in France in 1945) reforms. Some of the key societal reforms had

been planned during the war, in anticipation of postwar reconstruction. The year 1941, for instance, saw the formation of a group chaired by William Beveridge, who was determined to stamp out the "five giant evils" of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. Forming the basis for new legislation on industrial injuries, social insurance, national assistance and the creation of a national health service, the resulting Beveridge Report (Beveridge 1942), mentioned earlier, emphasised the importance of full employment and income security. According to David Kynaston (2007), the consequences of the war continued to make themselves felt until 1957, with a culture of austerity linked to rationing and poor housing conditions. Jean Sirinelli (2003) draws a similar conclusion about the situation in France.

Although the first postwar decade can be seen as one of restrictions and frugality, the two subsequent ones (1955–1975) were characterised by growth, with increased consumption, and far higher standards of living. The two baby boom waves therefore occurred in totally different conditions, the first (1946–1953) in times of shortages and rationing, the second, starting in 1960, in full economic prosperity. For this reason, Guy Desplanques (1988a) has offered different interpretations for each wave. In line with Coleman and Salt (1992)'s analysis, he attributes the high figures in the second half of the 1940s to 'catch-up' births and the extremely pro-family climate, and those in the 1960s to the 30 years of economic growth referred to in France as the *Glorious Thirty*. Not all researchers are entirely convinced by these a posteriori attempts to rationalise human behaviour (Van Bavel and Reher 2010). Desplanques (1988a) maintains that the baby boom is "a still unexplained demographic accident", a mystery and a puzzle, while Yvonne Knibiehler (1997) views it not as one but as three puzzles.

2.2   An Enigma—The Parents of the Baby Boomers

Without willing parents, the baby boom would never have happened, and the model of the family with several children would have remained firmly on the drawing board. Given the demographic history of the first half of the twentieth century, this willingness was certainly not a foregone conclusion, and herein lies the puzzle. For how, in the space of just a few decades, did society move from the model of a family with just one or two children to what the French call the *numerous family*? If we are fully to understand this phenomenon, we need to look more closely at the people directly responsible for the baby boom, namely the baby boomers' parents, whose demographic behaviour contrasted so markedly with that of their own parents.

2.2.1   The Baby Boomers' Grandmothers

The mothers of the first wave of baby boomers (1946–1954) were born between the early 1900s (those who had children late) and the end of the 1930s (those who
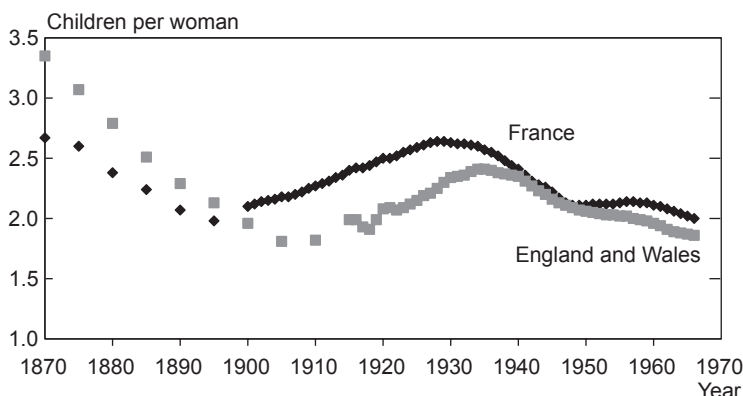
Fig. 2.4 Lifetime fertility (Completed, or lifetime, fertility is the average number of children born to women belonging to the same cohort once they have reached the end of their reproductive life (at 50 years, to all intents and purposes). It is the sum of the age-specific fertility rates of a cohort). (Source: INED database www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

had them very early). On average, however, it was the 1920–1930 generations that fuelled the baby boom[12]. Their own mothers, that is the baby boomers' grandmothers, mainly belonged to the 1880–1910 generations, which had their families in the interwar period. These were women who restricted their fertility and who—especially in France—spurned parenthood (23 % of women in the 1900 generation never had children[13]). A further characteristic of these generations is that one-child families were more numerous than two-child families (24 % of women born in 1900 had one child and only 22 % had two). When David Coleman and John Salt examined the numbers of children produced by couples who married in 1921–1925 and 1931–1935 in Britain (Coleman and Salt 1992) they, too, found a high level of infertility and a higher proportion of one-child families than two-child families, although there were also many families with more than four children (over 18 %) (Fig. 2.4).

As Jean-Pierre Bardet writes, in the nineteenth century, "with each successive generation, and even with each successive decade, the French became increasingly reluctant to have large families" (Bardet 1988, p. 363) and adopted whichever family planning methods they could—mainly coitus interruptus, as condoms were not only expensive and difficult to find, but were also associated with venereal disease.

In France, the abolition of primogeniture in 1790–1791, in the wake of the French Revolution, and the introduction of equal inheritance under the new Napoleonic Code are frequently cited as reasons for this decline, in that farmers decided to have fewer children to avoid their land being parcelled out. Another factor is the rise of

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[12] In France, women belonging to the 1920–1930 generations had their first child at the age of 24–25 years on average, and their last at around 31 years.

[13] It should, however, be emphasised that some of these women remained single due to the shortage of men in a generation decimated by the Great War.

individualism that took hold in the Enlightenment, and the birth of the *modern family*, characterised by a closer relationship within the couple and the advent of a new notion of childhood, as a result of school attendance (Aries 1973). Although there were still plenty of large families around, especially in the working classes, the atmosphere was dominated by Malthusian ideas, witness Balzac's novels[14], where "having a third child constituted a lapse of attention that compromised the successful transmission of the family inheritance" (Bardet and Le Bras 1988, p. 368). As Adeline Daumard (1996) has so clearly demonstrated for Paris between 1815 and 1848, it was above all the middle classes that limited the size of their families. The upper bourgeoisie continued to have more children, while the working classes also proved reluctant to give up their large families, even if family planning was viewed by the upper echelons as the passport to upward social mobility and greater prosperity. French economists also espoused Malthusian ideas, as Jean-Baptiste Say revealed:

> We should therefore encourage men to make savings, not children… It is savings that allow families to consume, in addition to the income from their industry, their labours, their talents, it is another income, that generated by their capital…. (Say, cited by Charbit 1981, p. 63)

The behaviour of British couples in the nineteenth century was quite different from that of their French counterparts, whose "demographic growth kept pace with their economic growth" (Bédarida 1990, p. 29). Industrialisation had failed to dent the birth rate, so large families remained common. Family planning only took hold in around 1875–1880, but did so with a vengeance, totally modifying women's behaviour and the attitudes of society towards the family. The number of children per family plummeted from six in around 1870 to 2.3. in 1915[15]. Following the publication in 1854 of George Drysdale's book advocating contraception as a means of fighting poverty, prostitution and celibacy, neo-Malthusian ideas forcibly entered English society, upsetting both the moral and the religious order. This radical shift in mentalities can be explained not only by the link established between poverty and large families, but also by the emergence of the feminist movement in 1870–1880, even if liberating women from the slavery of motherhood was less of a priority than campaigning for sexual equality and women's suffrage (granted in 1918 to British women over 30). For this reason, François Bédarida (1990) claims that the decline in the birth rate from this period onwards stemmed primarily from recourse to practices such as coitus interruptus, despite the Church's condemnation of contraception and cajoling from politicians to have more children in order to halt population decline. The falling birth rate was therefore the result of a combination of factors, rather than of any single obvious cause.

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[14] We find similar portrayals of the Malthusian climate in Zola's novels, but here, the intent is to criticise it, as Zola was an active campaigner within the National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population, founded by Jacques Bertillon in 1896, and used his fiction to expound his natalist theses.

[15] Bédarida (1990) underscores the impact of the Bradlaugh-Besant trial in 1877, which revolved around the use of birth control to combat poverty and overcrowding.

When the fertility figures are broken down according to social class, they show that the elite was very much in the family planning vanguard, practising contraception from the late eighteenth century onwards. In France, we can identify three different attitudes to birth control. The most radical attitude was displayed by the bourgeoisie, apart from a brief childbearing spree that began in 1870, prompted by alarmist talk of population loss. Farmers adopted a more nuanced approach, while manual workers initially carried on much as before, even if Malthusianism did start to make inroads among the urban working classes in the early twentieth century. In Britain, the most enthusiastic practitioners of birth control were again the bourgeoisie, especially the liberal professions. The *cultured* classes went in for more sophisticated forms of contraception, taking advantage of the greater availability of spermicides and condoms (commonly referred to as "a little something for the weekend"). By around 1890–1899, the number of children had become inversely proportional to the family's position in the social hierarchy, ranging from just 2.8 children for the liberal professions to 5.11 for manual labourers. In England, this sparked Eugenicist fears that the country would be "depopulated of its elites and become a country numerically dominated by the lower classes, starting with mental retards and alcoholics" (Bédarida 1990). In 1914, the pattern was much the same, but the gaps had started to close, with couples with modest occupations (e.g., manual worker or office clerk) deciding to have fewer children in order to give them a better upbringing and above all an education that would allow them to rise above their station and ascend the social ladder. This ambition, shared by both French and British parents in the late nineteenth century, was an illustration of the law of *social capillarity* developed by Arsène Dumont (1890), whereby family planning was socially valued and signalled a desire to distance oneself from the proletariat. The priority for women to escape the condition of the nineteenth-century working mother, is eloquently described by Yvonne Knibiehler:

> Industrialisation was to produce whole new groups of mothers who worked outside the home for 12 to 14 hours a day and returned to their dwelling dazed, exhausted and at the end of their tether—sometimes incapable of performing even the most fundamental maternal tasks…. (Knibiehler 1997, p. 232)

Writing at the time, Jules Simon commented:

> A woman who has become a worker is no longer a woman… she lives under the domination of a foreman, in the midst of companions of dubious morality, in perpetual contact with men, separated from her husband and children… So the family is no more. (Simon 1986, cited by Knibiehler 1997, p. 233)

Although most women never found themselves in such a desperate situation[16], the mere spectre of it was enough to deter them from childbearing, as a means of avoiding misery and overpopulation—an idea that had been widely put about by the neo-Malthusians[17]. It also gave rise to the ideal of the perfect housewife (Knibiehler 2004a). The model of the stay-at-home mother had been propounded by Rousseau,

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[16] M. Perrot (1987) reminds us that 38 % of women worked at home, according to the 1896 census.

[17] Bradlaugh-Besant trial in England in 1877.

whose precepts were later taken up by French physicians and enthusiastically disseminated by the conservative philosopher Louis de Bonald[18]. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the model was energetically promoted by philanthropists and social Catholics, as well as by Frédéric Le Play (1879) and his disciples, who held that women should "follow their natural destiny of wife and mother". The same was true in Victorian Britain, where the young were encouraged "to worship the hearth without the altar" (Chesterton 1936). Unlike the extremists who espoused sexual freedom, the dominant English feminist movement never questioned the rules of family life and the principles of duty and discipline. Their priority was to obtain civil and political rights, and in 1903 they founded the Women's Social and Political Union. In late-nineteenth century France, despite the fact that Utopian Socialism had brought with it a feminist current, and despite the events of 1848, and the actions and writings of women like George Sand and Hubertine Auclert, the *first suffragettes*, the bourgeois model of the housewife inexorably spread to the lower levels of society. Henceforth, "going out to work was the sign of a particularly poor and debased condition" (Prost 1987c, p. 40), and for the Catholic Church, the woman's place was clearly in the home:

> …a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of children and the well-being of the family. (*Rerum Novarum* 1891)

Forty years on, this discourse had not changed one iota ("Mothers, concentrating on household duties, should work primarily in the home" (Pius XI 1931)), but cracks were starting to appear in the edifice, what with advances in medical care and better access to education. If they were unable to remain at home, at least wage-earning women were now afforded a degree of protection in the workplace. In France, the Engerand Act of 1909 meant that women could be sure of having a job to go back to if they took maternity leave, while the Strauss Act of 1913 made this leave mandatory and introduced a small daily allowance for women after they had given birth, even if these Acts were primarily passed to protect women's reproductive capacity and reduce infant mortality (Bard 2001). For it should be emphasised that not all women were housewives. Widows and single women worked, but so, too, did married women whose household income was not enough to make ends meet. Furthermore, some women in the bourgeoisie started to make inroads into professions such as barrister, pharmacist or physician that had hitherto been a strictly male preserve.

The baby boomers' grandmothers born in the late nineteenth century therefore benefited from what was perceived as a vastly improved status compared with previous generations. However, they also belonged to the generations that would be traumatised by the Great War, which was fought when they were aged between 15 and 35 years. From the 1920s onwards, they would also be haunted by the fear of a

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[18] Bonald believed that society imposed itself on the individual. For him, a family resembled a political and hierarchical society in miniature. On no account was this domestic unit to be dissolved, as it was natural and played a protective role. Furthermore, it was a component of the political bond, the only possible basis for society. Like the king, the head of the family was invested in a divine presence, and represented the foundation stone of society and the State (Damon 2005).

fresh global conflict, and after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, they would experience the Great Depression and its attendant wave of mass unemployment. These factors created a climate in which women refused to have a large family, only to see their children turned into cannon fodder in the event of war or exploited by factory owners. Nelly Roussel's assertion that women would have "a reasonable number" of children only if they could be certain that they were "not working to fertilise the battlefields", and if they were given "serious guarantees of peace" (1919, cited by Knibiehler and Fouquet 1977, p. 297) perfectly illustrate the neo-Malthusian ideas of the time. Roughly translated as *breeding like rabbits*, the term *lapinisme* used by French neo-Malthusians was eagerly taken up by the middle classes, and the *womb strike* that Nelly Roussel and fellow feminist Marie Huot (Knibiehler and Fouquet 1977) had advocated before the 1914–1918 war gained a considerable following after it, despite a surge of patriotism and a law passed in 1920 banning abortion and contraception propaganda. Neither the State's natalist policy nor the Church's influence managed to alter mindsets, and women born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to have extremely small families. In England, François Bédarida paints a similar picture of the interwar years:

> It had become the turn of large families to be regarded with pity. With children now a rarity, pets—dogs and cats—now took pride of place in the home. Their ubiquity became a mark of civilisation. (Bédarida 1990, p. 321)

In the 1920–1930s, English feminists such as Stella Browne, Dora Russell and Marie Stopes[19] campaigned ardently for birth control and abortion. In both countries, women belonging to the generations of the late nineteenth century came to regard family planning as a significant advance and a form of emancipation, in that they were no longer condemned to a career of childbearing. As Knibiehler concludes, "No longer was childbearing an inevitable function of women's bodies. No longer was it their sole destiny" (Knibiehler 2004a, p. 321).

This was all the more true given that reforms had granted women greater access to education—a genuine "turning point in women's history" (Knibiehler 2004a). In France, virtually all the baby boomers' grandmothers belonged to the primary school certificate generation, in contrast to their own mothers and grandmothers, who were often illiterate or barely able to read and write, worn down by their double day of work in the fields or factory and in the home. They were brought up in a period of "secular faith"[20], shaped by the Third Republic's model of education and imbued with the values of that nascent republic, namely secularism, morality, belief in progress and above all faith in education, with free primary schooling (1881) and compulsory school attendance up to the age of 13 (1882). Although France was still a Catholic country, the period 1905–1914 was dominated by guerrilla warfare between the proponents of secular and Catholic education, pitting schoolmaster against priest (Prost 1968). Similar tensions existed in Britain. As for secondary

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[19] In 1918, Marie Stopes published *Married Love*, which was to prove hugely popular. In 1921, she open the country's first family planning clinic, in London.

[20] Expression used in 1911 by Ferdinand Buisson, head of primary education from 1879 to 1896, cited in Prost (1968).

education for girls, although it had become something of an issue among the upper classes in the 1860s, its primary purpose was seen as turning out young women who could hold intelligent conversations with their husbands and educate their children. As Thierry Blöss and Alain Frickey (Blöss and Frickey 1994) put it, "women of the bourgeoisie had to be cultivated, but this culture had to be disinterested, as there was no question of them exercising a profession". This gradually led to the emergence of secondary secular education in Europe. By 1880, a limited provision for girls had been established in England, and universities were starting to accept small numbers of women students. In France, the Camille Sée Act of 1880 introduced state-run *lycées* for girls, and by so doing, opened the door to higher education. Although take-up was initially low[21] (there were only 33,000 girls in secondary education in 1914), access to education gradually transformed the female condition. This was initially restricted to the upper classes, but soon filtered down through to the middle classes. The men who drafted the legislation were nonetheless acutely conscious of the potential risks involved in "tearing girls away from the Church but not from the hearth […] raising the level of instruction for girls without lessening their dependence on their husbands" (Blöss and Frickey 1994). While the education dispensed to bourgeois girls was intended to furnish them with the culture they needed to be a helpmeet to their husbands, working-class girls were taught the housekeeping knowledge that had been lost by women going out to work in factories. For Isaac Joseph, the goal was to "domesticate the family" and to restore a social order that had been destroyed by rampant industrialisation and urbanisation (Joseph 1976), and this family discipline could best be achieved by educating girls. Coaxing women back into the home had become an obsession by the end of the nineteenth century, not just for men of the cloth but for politicians of all persuasions, witness Proudhon's famous comment that only two careers were open to women: "housewife or harlot" (Proudhon 1849). Girls attending primary school were taught that they should stay at home and look after their interior, especially since they would benefit from technological advances such as electricity[22], running water (for some) and gas heating—all the conditions they needed to create a *home, sweet home*, keep their menfolk from going out in the evenings and prevent them from spending all their time in the pub or café. Above all, these new mod cons would enable them to devote more of their time to their children. A whole host of professionals was standing by to help them in this mission, not least doctors, nurses and social workers. However, even though the woman's place was indeed primarily in the home at the start of the twentieth century, changes were already underway, at least in Britain, with the development of social services, where women would play a key role.

In the course of the interwar period, this ideal of the French stay-at-home mother, so prevalent among the ruling classes, became politicised, mobilising social

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[21] In 1909, only around a 100 girls took the baccalaureate in France. By 1921, there were still only 25,000 girls attending secondary school, although changes were afoot within the bourgeoisie, with girls studying longer in order to enter careers that were generally linked to childbearing (nurses), childrearing (teachers) or social work.

[22] In 1938, 35 % of French households had electricity.

Catholics and most of the right wing (Knibiehler 1997). It was accompanied by an emphasis on the need for parents (read *mothers*) to develop deep and special bonds with their children. The baby boomers' grandmothers were thus intent on giving their children the best possible family environment and encouraging them to continue their education.

2.2.2   The Baby Boomers' Mothers

The fact that the generations of women born at the end of the nineteenth century were some of the least fertile in history makes it even more incredible that they should have engendered some of the most fertile generations of the twentieth century. While the former proudly restricted the size of their families, the latter gladly underwent successive pregnancies, in what was a truly spectacular break with the past. The first sign of things to come was a dwindling hostility to the idea of having children. In France, 17 % of women born in 1920 and 13 % of those born in 1930 remained childless, compared with 23 % for the generations of the 1900s. The proportion of those who had only one child also fell, from 23 % of women born in 1900 to 17.5 % of women born in 1920. The "period of the scarce child" (Rollet 1999) was therefore at an end. True, two-child families only increased by a single percentage point, but this modest rise had "a considerable aggregate effect" (Rosental 2003, p. 213). It was, however, families with three or four children that would account for the *bulk* of the baby boom, and their numbers rose by more than 9 % between 1900 and 1930. Very large families (more than five children) underwent a more moderate increase of 3 %. As we have seen, in England the recovery in the birth rate began later and took a rather different shape in Britain. Although there was a reduction (9.7 %) in the proportion of women married between 1941 and 1945 who remained childless, compared with those who sealed the knot between 1921 and 1925 (18 %), there was a considerable rise in the number of families with one or two children and a fall in those with more than four children.

These statistics raise several questions:

- Why did these women, who were born during the "period of the scarce child" (Rollet 1999) break ranks with their own mothers and grandmothers who belonged to—and practised—the Malthusian culture?
- Why, given that they were better educated than their mothers and had worked in industry and the services to keep the country going while their husbands were away fighting, did they go back to hearth and home after the war?
- Why did they meekly submit to their husbands' authority just as they were starting to obtain a modicum of civil rights?

Yvonne Knibiehler sheds some useful light on the subject, hypothesising that "the baby boom was an important, if not crucial, expression of feminine citizenship" (Knibiehler 1997, p. 21). Women had simultaneously obtained civil recognition and a raft of social rights. In France, they had been granted the right to vote in 1944 (in the United Kingdom, women over 30 had been able to vote since 1918 and all

adult women, that is those aged 21 and over, since 1928). As far as family matters were concerned, it was now easier to obtain a divorce, women could enter the magistracy and their wages were no longer systematically lower than those of men. "The progress stopped there", however, is the verdict of Pascale Goetschel and Bénédicte Toucheboeuf. "In a context of reconstruction, people preferred a policy that preserved the family to one that favoured emancipation and all the uncertainty that went with it" (Goetschel and Toucheboeuf 2004). Everything seemed to push women in the direction of the home. For Sylvie Chaperon (2000), "the promotion of equality was accompanied by more rigid partitioning of roles, especially within the family". Motherhood was now surrounded by a special aura, and in France childless couples were a rarity. In Britain, which had always had a higher proportion of infertile women[23], the State was keen to define a place in the family for all the women who had to relinquish the posts they had held during the war. Finch and Summerfield (2004) argue that central to the postwar policy of social reconstruction was a desire to consolidate family life after all the disruption of the war and to create a future where marriage and family would form the foundation of a better life.

Even so, women born in the interwar years could easily have followed the example set by their own mothers, staying at home, but restricting their offspring to one or two children. We again turn to Yvonne Knibiehler for illumination, and to an account by a woman born in 1923 of how she was primed by her teachers:

> In 1938 and 1939 they taught me civic instruction, with an emphasis on demography: France was short of children…. It was the duty of every French woman and man to strive to have a family with at least three children: at 16 (in 1939), I was already determined to have three children, and that is what I had. (Knibiehler 1997, p. 49)

It was not, therefore, the introduction of family allowance or the conditions that prevailed after the war that influenced her decision to have a large family, but rather the views of her teachers. This example highlights the importance of a factor we have tended to glide over so far, that is, the socialisation of the baby boomers' parents, for although they were brought up in families displaying Malthusian behaviour, their generations were the first to experience truly extensive socialisation. The effects of primary (family) socialisation were lessened by secondary socialisation in the form of school, Church and sociability networks (Lahire 1998). If we are to understand how the baby boom came about, we therefore need to try and identify the processes that resulted in these generations having such different values from their parents, and to do that, we must return to the period 1920–1945 to study the contexts in which France's interwar youth was socialised.

As we have seen, the few children who were born in the interwar period were the objects of lavish attention and "were exceptionally precious: for their mourning parents and grandparents, they were the prime source of comfort, the vital consolation, a new reason to live and to hope" (Knibiehler 1997, p. 49). During their childhood, they were immersed in a peculiar context in which women wore three hats:

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[23] Twenty-one percent of all women born in 1920 remained childless. This figure was just 13 % for the 1930s generations. Source: *Population Trends* 2002, p. 108.

housekeeper, attentive spouse and eagle-eyed educator. Their parents held education in particularly high esteem, not least because secondary schooling became free of charge, and therefore more accessible, in 1928–1930 (see Prost 1968), which is precisely when the children born in 1920 reached first-form age. In 1936, the school leaving age was raised to 14 and the number of students taking the baccalaureate increased, as did the proportion of female *bacheliers*. The more prosperous classes became less hostile to the concept of working women, especially after the Great War, such that it was no longer the preserve of the working classes, and young girls from *good families* commonly took up job as teachers, nurses or social workers after passing their school certificate or baccalaureate. While many of them left work when their first or second child came along, a small number chose to carve out a career for themselves. A similar process of educational democratisation took place in Britain in the wake of World War I. Egalitarian aspirations were accompanied by the demands of feminists who viewed girls' education as the best passport to emancipation. In 1918, the Fisher Act made education compulsory up to the age of 14, and the number of secondary-school pupils doubled, rising from 300,000 in 1914 to 600,000 in 1935 (Bédarida 1990[24]).

Returning to the account of Yvonne Knibiehler (1997)'s baby boomer mother, we can identify two salient points: the influence of teachers on their pupils' future fertility and the arrival of demography in the curriculum. In her analysis of how this discipline was taught, Virginie de Luca (2005) describes the way in which population issues first came to be broached in schools, examining the impact of the natalist and family propaganda that was spread by the National Alliance for the Increase of the French Population from 1920 onwards. "The supervisory authority [French Education Ministry] therefore readily acknowledged the need to create a climate that was favourable to the birth rate". Henceforth, history and geography lessons would contain elements of demography and prompt discussions about the birth rate. For boys, the emphasis would be on the theoretical and scientific aspects (interpreting tables, producing graphs), but the teaching dispensed to girls would focus on notions of childcare and hygiene, corresponding to the objectives of reducing infant mortality and increasing the birth rate (de Luca 2005). Together, the two strands of teaching would weave a *family-friendly climate*. While it is difficult to gauge the precise impact of this natalist propaganda on the demographic behaviour of generations born and educated in France between the two World Wars, its presence in schools must have had some effect. Especially since the raising of the school-leaving age meant that the classroom became an increasingly important place of socialisation.

2.2.3   Youth Movements: An Early Source of Emancipation for the Baby Boomers' Mothers

Secondary education was not the only factor that contributed to young people's (and more especially young girls') autonomy from their parents. This, at least, is

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[24] Bédarida stresses that these figures are only rough estimates, owing to a lack of statistical data for state-run schools.

the view of Jean-François Sirinelli (2003), who claims that not one but "two new factors emerged in the interwar period that were to affect the future in this regard", referring to secondary school and youth movements. Perhaps to compensate for the Church's dwindling influence on children's education, the extension of State (i.e. secular) education was accompanied by the development of numerous youth organisations. These were intended to provide a framework for young people and prepare them for adulthood. This was an entirely new phenomenon that came to characterise the interwar years. Although nineteenth-century France had had its fair share of youth clubs and children's holiday camps, these new organisations were original because their young members were led by their peers. In France, the *Eclaireurs*[25] came first, followed by Catholic structures, such as Young Catholic Workers (JOC), Young Catholic Farmers (JAC), Young Catholic Students (JEC) and finally the French Youth Hostel League in 1930. Other players included the Socialist Faucons Rouges, the Christian Democrat Jeune Garde du Sillon and a bevy of overtly political organisations, including the Young Communists. Aimed specifically at young people, they were, according to Antoine Prost, one of the great innovations of the interwar years, and proved "spectacularly popular" (Prost 1987a). Maurice Crubelier and Gérard Cholvy have calculated that approximately one in seven children or adolescents belonged to a youth organisation—a far from negligible proportion (Cholvy 1985; Crubellier 1979).

The best known and most emblematic was the scout movement, founded in England by Lieutenant-General Baden-Powell in 1907, after he had tested his ideas at an experimental camp on Brownsea Island with 20 or so boys. It stirred tremendous enthusiasm, and a great many young boys were soon setting up their own scout troops, forcing Baden-Powell to create a national group. Troops soon sprang up in other parts of the English-speaking world—notably the United States in 1915—, before spreading to other countries, such as Chile. Girls refused to be left out of this great adventure, and in 1910, the Girl Guides Association was established. In the first decades of the twentieth century, and above all in the interwar period, the scout movement grew to such an extent in Britain that "in many ways the Scouts and Guides defined youth in interwar Britain" (Proctor 2002). In France, the scout movement adapted itself to the national context, insofar as the *Eclaireurs* were joined in 1920 by the National Catholic Federation of Scouts of France. Girls were initially excluded, but 1923 saw the founding of Guides of France. However, Marie-Thérèse Cheroutre stresses that:

> The air of suspicion surrounding the male scout movement in France, on account of its English, Protestant and military origin, was compounded by the radical criticism that it risked diverting girls away from their feminine vocation and destroying family life. (Cheroutre 2002, p. 46)

Baden-Powell had anticipated this criticism and parried it by arguing that while boy scouts could organise themselves, it was a very different matter for girls, who needed to be guided and led, as it was necessary to "train women of character, given their role and the extent of their influence—as mothers or as teachers –, so that the boys of this country could become men of character" (Cheroutre 2002).

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[25] Protestant scout movement.

Large numbers of young girls were thus prepared to fulfil this role of companion and, as Yvonne Knibiehler (2004a) puts it, became "vigorous Catholic scions". By 1933, scout and guide numbers had reached the 100,000 mark[26], and by 1939 there were 23,000 girl guides. Although these figures may seem modest in relation to the sizes of these generations, we can assume that the scout movement's influence spread well beyond its small circle of members within French and British society, not least in France because it featured in one of the highly popular Bécassine comic books (*Bécassine Fait du Scoutisme*) published in 1931.

For thousands of French, English, American, Canadian and Belgian young people, the scout troop was a place where they could learn about life beyond the confines of school and family. In France, parents often had difficulty understanding why camping held such an allure—why their children were so keen to *rough it* in a tent with none of the mod cons they had scrimped and saved for. Even the uniform, with its shorts for boys and unbecomingly flat shoes for girls, perplexed them. For these generations of young people, however, it was a means of setting themselves apart from their parents without creating a clash, for how could they enter into conflict with what Prost (1987a) has dubbed the "generation of sacrifice", made up as it was of veterans of the Great War? Guiding allowed young girls to escape the domestic space and gain autonomy. They learned this autonomy while on camp, and the ability to shoulder responsibility when they graduated to patrol leader.

One of the paradoxes of the guiding movement was that it taught girls to be resourceful and to fend for themselves in what was sometimes a difficult environment, all the while underscoring the importance of devotion to others, bearing in mind the help and support they would later be expected to give to husband and children. Girls had the focus firmly on the family but, unlike their mothers, remained open to the outside world. This ambiguity would persist beyond the war in both France and Britain:

> Girls and women wanted to escape the dependent roles that were assigned to them in marriage, family life and the work place. Guiding, by bureaucratizing, created a space for them to assume positions of power within an organisation and provided Guides with the thrill of autonomy and power. (Proctor 2002, p. 113)

This contradiction presaged the radical revolution in women's roles in society that was to take place in the 1960s. For while some women accepted their allotted place alongside husband and children, others aspired to more egalitarian relations and embarked on careers as the logical follow-on from their youthful commitments, even if most of them gave up work a few years later with the birth of their children.

As a final note, it should be pointed out that it was the upper classes that sent their children to the scouts, and it was the upper classes that were thus inculcated with the values of honour, loyalty and openness to others. Children from *good families* who had been brought up to obey the Scout Law would later play a part in the baby boom, and those who went on to become politicians and senior managers would bring to their work the sense of responsibility they had learned as scouts. In

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[26] In the same year, the JOC had 50,000 young members, while in 1936, the JEC had 20,000 members.

France, the scout movement therefore served as a vector for Catholic right-wing family values, which stated that a woman's place was with her children, even if she had benefitted from secondary and even higher education. Desplanques' analyses[27] highlight the role the upper classes played in the baby boom, while those of Fabienne Daguet (2002a) clearly show that although academically qualified women born between 1925 and 1949 had fewer children than their more poorly educated counterparts, it was because they more often remained single. They consistently numbered three times as many husbandless and childless women among their ranks, but when they did start families, they had just as many children as women with only the lower secondary school diploma. For these generations, therefore, family did indeed take precedence over career.

The scout movement does not, of course, account for the baby boom observed in the upper and middle classes, but when it is set alongside other factors, such as the government's pro-family policy, the reconstruction effort and the subsequent economic growth, it does go some way to explaining why some baby boomers' mothers, while acknowledging that their place was in the home, nevertheless demanded a degree of autonomy both in society and within the family, via their children's education. Moreover, the movement was active in both France and Britain, as well as in other countries affected by the baby boom, such as Belgium and the United States. As we have seen, it was not the only means of conveying the values of the Church and the right wing—be it Catholic or Protestant. Other religious youth organisations also helped to disseminate ideas about the role of women, not least the JOC in France. This Catholic movement boasted more than 120,000 members in 1937 (Sanchez 2008) and rivalled the influence of the Young Communists (100,000 members) on working-class youth. It is important to bear in mind that the Communist Party became pro-natalist in 1935.[28] As a result, after World War II, Communist and Catholic alike defended the family and the stay-at-home mother, as Sylvie Chaperon (2000) emphasises in her introduction to *Les Années Beauvoir*: "The Union of French Women, born out of the women's resistance movement and prewar Communist organisations, had a policy of openness, especially to Catholics…".

Given that every party and movement sought to consolidate the model of the stay-at-home mother after World War II, we cannot afford to ignore the effect that all these different forms of socialisation had on these very special generations of women. The fact that all these organisations moved in the same direction, helping to create a pro-family climate, may thus be one of the explanations for the baby boom. In the 1920s, the seed had fallen on barren ground, but this time it found fertile soil.

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[27] In France, the extent of the baby boom varied according to social status, with the continuation of existing disparities. The most privileged classes maintained their high fertility rates, while the middle classes also contributed to the increase in fertility by moving from one to two children per family on average. It was essentially senior managers and members of the liberal professions, followed by middle-ranking managers, who had large families (Desplanques 1988b).

[28] Stalin adopted the first natalist measures in 1934, when the Soviet Family Code introduced penalties for divorce and banned abortion.

2.3   Conclusion

Enigma, *puzzle*, *mystery* are just some of the words that have been used to describe the postwar recovery in the birth rate. Coming after a steady decline in fertility that had lasted more than a 100 years in France, and 70 years in Britain, the baby boom was and still is an extraordinary event in demographic history—in terms not just of its size but also of its length, which remains unexplained to this day. Two main types of explanations have been put forward: economic ones, with the end to unemployment and the business upturn while war was still raging, followed by the Glorious Thirty Years in France; and political ones, with the introduction of family allowances in France back in 1938 and above all the establishment of a welfare state for which plans had been laid in the throes of war (Beveridge Report in Britain and National Resistance Council in France). These do not, however, suffice to solve the baby boom conundrum, and we must therefore look for psychological reasons, too. Despite the difficult material conditions that prevailed in the 5 years following the war, linked to food and housing shortages, hope shone bright. In contrast to the 1920s, the peace seemed lasting and the economic recovery vigorous. The adults needed children to help them forget their deadly past and build a *better world* founded on solidarity. Now that they could finally look forward to the future, couples did not hesitate to have several children. And therein lies the mystery, for why did the generations born between 1915 and 1930, and brought up in a period where children were a rarity, go on to have large families? Why did women who had benefitted from better education accept the model of the stay-at-home mother en masse? The generations to which the baby boomers' parents belonged were the first to experience such extensive secondary socialisation, not only through attending school, but also through joining the popular youth movements of the interwar period. These movements gave them a taste of communal living and, in some cases, a chance to assume responsibility. By briefly escaping from the domestic space to which women had previously been confined, the future mothers of the baby boomers gained a taste of autonomy and needed a way of expressing it. This may be at least part of the reason why these women born between 1915 and 1930 chose to shake off the Malthusian mantle and break with their mothers and grandmothers, just as their baby boom daughters would later break with them, when contraception and salaried work brought them emancipation.

Chapter 3
The Baby Boomers' Childhood

The baby boomers grew up in a context of hope mingled with political, economic and social uncertainty. They represented confidence in a new world order—a world without war aspired by both the British and the French alike. With them, a page was turned on the trauma of the Great War, the Depression of the 1930s and World War II. In France, there was a desire to make up for a delay caused by what Christian Stoffaes neatly summarises as ruralism, provincialism, Malthusianism and the "small is beautiful" cult (Gauchon 2008, p. 14). The French postwar economic model was therefore a counter-model, designed to put an end to the Malthusian practices of previous generations of mothers and grandmothers, the timid and conservative style of capitalism denounced in the Clémentel Report[1] and the world of small-time business owners that stood in the way of economies of scale and thus of progress. This drive for modernisation would be spearheaded by the State in France, but also in Britain, where the Welfare State proposed by Lord Beveridge in 1942 was introduced to take care of the nation's citizens "from the cradle to the grave" (Beveridge 1944).[2]

Although the baby boom symbolised the emergence of this new society, it did raise concerns in some quarters and even prompted some people to have a change of heart, as Alfred Sauvy (1956) observed at the time. "In some conservative, traditionally anti-Malthusian circles, an opposing current of thought has developed over the past few years, the mounting family allowance bill, the cost of building schools and, more generally, the growing population, explain[ing] this turnaround" (Rosental 2003, p. 203).

As we saw in Chap. 2, the baby boom soon became a public policy issue, dictating the size of investment in schools and housing. Even so, the fact that it took some time to acknowledge the existence of the baby boom helps to explain the delays in house building that occurred on both sides of the Channel, where priority was given to industrial reconstruction. The baby boomers therefore spent their early child-

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[1] Report produced in 1921 by French Senator Etienne Clémentel on the importance of research and development for national production.

[2] In actual fact, the expression *Welfare State* was first used in 1941, by William Temple, the then Archbishop of York.

hood in a context of austerity and shortages, despite the optimism surrounding the construction of a new society. As Sirinelli rightly emphasises, "these baby boomers certainly did not spend all their early years floating in an amniotic fluid of prosperity. Quite the contrary, these postwar babies experienced some quite difficult times" (Sirinelli 2003, p. 52).

This is an important historical reminder, as we tend to forget these years of harshness and privation, and depict the first few generations of baby boomers as *gilded* generations, on whom the fates smiled.

3.1 Living Conditions During the Baby Boomers' Childhood and Adolescence

3.1.1 Housing Problems

In 1945, when the very first baby boomers were born, the housing situation was quite simply catastrophic. In France,[3] the parlous state of the housing stock (mean age: more than 100 years) stemmed from the crucial lack of interwar construction, linked to the reluctance of investors to buy to let following the introduction of rent controls during the Great War. The housing crisis was therefore both quantitative and qualitative.[4] Antoine Prost (1987b) is trenchant in his assessment: "housing for all, which had been an objective since the end of the nineteenth century, had still not been achieved by the early 1950s. Housing and town planning were still stuck in the nineteenth century." This situation was certainly not unique to France. In Britain, very little house building had taken place between the two wars, and in major cities approximately 4 million houses had been damaged or destroyed during the Blitz, thus worsening the state of the remaining housing stock (Mullins and Murie 1985), which was already in a very poor state (more than 70 % of units dated from the nineteenth or early twentieth century; Marwick 2003, p. 4).

Given the urgency of the situation, the French and British governments had no choice but to intervene, albeit on different timescales. When a similar situation had arisen in Britain after the Great War, there had been general public agreement that the government should take the necessary measures to build new houses, witness the slogan *Homes fit for Heroes*. The upshot was the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919, better known as the Addison Act (Short 1982). In France, however, the prevailing liberal view had been that there should be no state intervention in the economy (Lefebvre et al. 1992), and housing should therefore remain the business of the private sector. It was to take a very grave housing shortage, arising from the dearth of house building between 1918 and 1940 and the

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[3] During World War II, 500,000 housing units were destroyed and 1,400,000 damaged in France (Merlin 1988). In Britain, the housing shortage was put at 1.5 million units in 1950 (Marwick 2003).

[4] Scarcely 1 % of housing units had an inside toilet, a bathroom, and central heating (Merlin 1988).

destruction wrought during World War II, to force the French Government to start casting around for solutions to meet the growing demand for housing from migrants and baby boomers.

Accordingly, even though the two countries had similar numbers of households, massive state intervention began somewhat earlier in Britain, even if it only really gained momentum in the early 1950s, after the first generations of baby boomers had been born, with the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1952 (Marwick 2003). In France, following a brutal wake-up call in 1954,[5] a number of measures were taken to boost house building, not least the provision of home loans via the Crédit Foncier mortgage bank (Topalov 1987). Two pieces of legislation were also introduced to stimulate private investment in the rented sector: the Act of 1948, which lifted rent controls on housing units built after 1 January 1949, and the Act of 1960. In Britain, private-sector rents were deregulated in the 1957 Rent Act.

Despite being "pampered by society" (Sirinelli 2003, p. 50), the children of the baby boom were therefore brought up in a context of housing shortages and a general lack of material comfort. Luc Arrondel's (2007) research has shown that it was the generations born before 1930 (i.e. the baby boomers' parents) who benefited the most from the golden age of home ownership (Taffin 1985). In France, for instance, they were able to take advantage of the attractive rates offered by the Crédit Foncier from 1953 onwards, and later on from the home ownership savings schemes created in 1965. Inflation then came along and lightened the burden of their mortgage repayments, which they were able to deduct from their income tax until 1997. Unlike earlier generations, they were thus able to amass a sizeable amount of real estate. Between 1954 and 1988, the proportion of home-owning households rose from 35 % to more than 50 %. From this point of view, the baby boomers can be viewed as *heirs*, to borrow the term used by Anne Laferrère (2007).

In Britain, the baby boomers' parents were present at the birth of the Welfare State (Beveridge Report, National Insurance Act of 1946, National Health Service Act of 1948, Housing Act of 1949). Although they embarked on their adult lives in very trying circumstances, especially in the suburbs of the country's industrial towns and cities, like their French counterparts, they subsequently witnessed an extraordinary improvement in housing conditions and benefited even more emphatically from the spread of home ownership, the Housing Act of 1980 enshrining the right to buy. For example, just 26 % of British households owned their home in 1946, but this figure then rose to 43 % in 1961, 55 % in 1979, 66 % in 1991 and 69.4 % in 2001 (Mullins 2003). Finally, 1946 saw the passing of the New Towns Act, designed to relieve pressure on existing urban areas by developing new, balanced communities where people would be able both to live and to work. This was to result in the building of 29 new towns (Bédarida 1990, p. 328).

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[5] Father Pierre's appeal of 1 February 1954, prompted by the deaths of homeless people in the freezing winter conditions.

3.1.2 Homes Gradually Become More Comfortable

According to Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet (2000), the place we live in has a crucial impact on our personal make-up and family morale, and while the baby boom generations have no clear memories of rationing and never suffered from being separated from one or both parents, unlike those born just before or during the war,[6] they readily recall the housing conditions they had to put up with when they were young.

According to the French 1946 census, immediately after the war, 63 % of apartment buildings had no running water. In 1954, 27 % of housing units had no indoor toilet, and only 10 % had a bath or shower (Merlin 2005). Responses to INED's *Event histories and contact circle* survey (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009) indicate that more than two thirds of baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1950) spent their early years in homes with no mod cons, other than either running water or an indoor toilet. Most of them therefore experienced poor living conditions during their childhood, whether it was on a farm or in a tenement where water had to be drawn from a tap on the landing or even down on the ground floor (Fig. 3.1).

As the baby boomers grew older, however, their housing conditions gradually improved as a result of urban regeneration schemes and the push to build new homes. As such, they benefited from the improvement in the housing stock at an earlier age than those born either just before or during the war. For example, the *Event histories and contact circle* survey data show that 59 % of the respondents born in France between 1946 and 1950 were living in homes with an indoor toilet and bathroom by the time they were 20 (i.e. between 1960 and 1970), compared with 37 % of the 1930–1934 generations at the same age (i.e. between 1950 and 1954). Their accounts reflect this extraordinary transformation—tantamount to a revolution—that took place in living standards, and clearly illustrate the knock-on effect it had on their desire for privacy and independence. Even so, at age 10, more than a third of respondents were still living in houses or flats with no mod cons, and more than one in five of them were still in this situation at age 15. In Britain, meanwhile, only one in three housing units had a bathroom.

When asked what life was like when they were young, the survey's respondents frequently referred to the water supply, which sometimes posed a very real problem, given that some households were without running water. As we have seen, people living in towns and cities often had to fetch their water from a tap on the landing or, worse still, on the ground floor, and some of them regularly used the municipal baths. Jean-Claude, who lived in a social housing unit (*habitation bon marché*) as a child, paints a picture of a privileged family, inasmuch as their flat had running water.

> There was running water. In 1940s apartment blocks there was running water. They're the brick buildings you can see along the Maréchal boulevards. There was running water,

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[6] Ludivine Bantigny (2007) explains that the return home of some 900,000 PoWs (mostly fathers) put a considerable strain on relations between children and their parents.
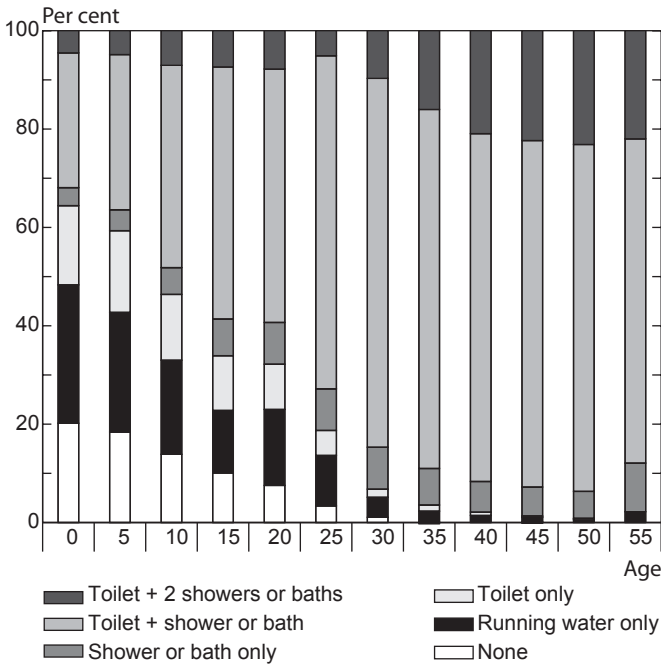
Fig. 3.1 Changes in the French baby boomers' living standards across their lifespan (cohort born between 1945 and 1950). (Source: *Event histories and contact circle survey*, Ile de France reference populations, 2001)

but they were built without bathrooms. So it was up to the tenants to decide whether they wanted to pay to have one installed, which seems totally extraordinary today.

Similarly, Suzanne describes just what an "event" it was in the village when her grandparents had a bathroom fitted:

Yes, I know there was a bathroom, and my grandparents were the first people in the village to have one. My grandparents, that's right. And it was quite an event, because living standards weren't what they were in towns, you know.

Conditions were indeed particularly tough in rural areas, as water had to be drawn from wells. Mireille sums up the complete absence of all mod cons in just a few sentences:

There wasn't a bathroom, so we'd have a bowl of water for washing. There wasn't any central heating, just wood-burning stoves because my mother was always in the house. Water had to be fetched from the well. We'd pump it up. That's what life in the sticks was really like.

As we have said, the baby boomers witnessed a genuine revolution in housing conditions, with many of them experiencing a transition from a harsh rural environment or tenement devoid of amenities to modern, urban society, especially in France. For some, it was a step-by-step process, beginning with the arrival of running water, so they would no longer have to fetch it from a well. Their parents would then have a

bathroom installed, so they would no longer have to get washed in the kitchen. Jean-Paul's account highlights just how important these episodes were in their residential trajectories:

> We didn't have a bathroom when I was small. When my parents bought the flat, they had a corner of the kitchen fitted out as a bathroom. What I mean is, there was a bathtub and a washbasin, but not a bathroom as such. In apartment blocks, there was what people used to call a *cabinet de toilette*, which is where my mother had the bathroom installed later on. It was a separate room, near the front door, with just a washbasin.

Rosie, who was born in 1954 and belonged to a family of five children, tells a similar tale. She lived in the suburbs, in a large three-storey house with her parents and brothers and sisters, as well as her grandfather, who actually owned the property and had his quarters on the ground floor. She describes the absence of mod cons and indoor washing facilities, all the while emphasising that the house had drinking water laid on. It was her father's DIY talents that enabled the family to enjoy a bathroom:

> I was born in 1954 and I lived in the suburbs until 1973, in Paris, the 15th *arrondissement*. Father was a Parisian and mother came from Eastern France. So I lived in this detached house for nineteen years, and back then there were no mod cons, there was diesel oil to put in the cooker, and as for a bathroom, there was an outside toilet and it was the same if you wanted a shower, you had to go out… We had drinking water laid on, but there wasn't a bathroom, but my father was quite good with his hands, so he made us a bathroom, but outside, not inside.

Along with the frequent absence of running water, the pervasive cold is another recurring theme. Some of our respondents lived in dwellings with very little heating, if any, regardless of whether they lived in the town or in the countryside. This is how Jean-Claude, the son of a senior manager, describes his childhood in a Parisian apartment:

> Every day, my parents would go down to the cellar, that's what people did back then. My parents would go down to fetch coal for our coal-burning stove.

While the main rooms would be kept reasonably warm—the kitchen with a coal or wood stove, the dining room or sitting room with a fireplace—, the bedrooms would have no form of heating. The baby boomers' parents therefore resorted to rudimentary methods, such as hotwater bottles, or bricks heated on the stove to serve as foot-warmers. Suzanne still remembers the freezing corridor in her childhood home:

> When it came to heating, the bedrooms were heated, but not very much. Not as much as the main rooms, and the corridor certainly wasn't heated because it was too big, very long, and it was glazed, so there was a lot of heat loss, so we definitely didn't linger there because it was freezing cold.

3.1.3   Overcrowded Dwellings

The lack of modern amenities was compounded by overcrowding. In both France and Britain, the postwar housing shortage was so severe[7] that many newly married

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[7] In 1951, "there was a shortfall of about a million and a half dwellings" (Marwick 2003).

couples had to live with their parents, even after the birth of their first, if not their second, child. It was generally the woman's parents who took the young couple in or who lived nearby (Young and Willmott 1957). Given the small size of housing units, the frequency of large sibships and the possible presence of grandparents—either because their family had moved in with them or had taken in a widowed father or mother—, the baby boomers often had to put up with cramped and over-crowded conditions.[8] For instance, the children might not have a bedroom, meaning that extra beds would have to be made up in the hall or dining room each evening, as Christine recalls:

> I didn't have a bedroom, so my bed was a wardrobe you had to open, and when it was closed you couldn't see that it was a bed. There was only one main room, and that was the dining room, where I slept. My mother had her bedroom…

Even when there was a bedroom for the children, they might well have to sleep two or three to a room, possibly even in the same bed. These conditions were certainly not restricted to the working and lower middle classes. Edouard, for instance, was born into a bourgeois Parisian family that owned a large 150-m^2 apartment. As it housed his father's surgery, however, the family only had one room left for the three children:

> It was quite a large apartment, as my father was a doctor and it contained his surgery. From what I can remember, the apartment measured 150 square metres. But as my father's work used up three rooms, that left only four—the dining room, the sitting room, and two bed-rooms, one for the kids and one for the parents.

Far from being atypical, this was actually the norm, and the question of each child having a room of his or her own simply never arose. For Edouard, who has fond memories of those early years, the layout of the apartment brought the family closer together, and he looks back with affection—and possibly through rose-tinted spectacles—at the extra moments of warmth and togetherness he shared with his father:

> And so what memories do you have of that space?
> Wonderful. Wonderful. My father was a GP, so we knew most of the patients. We were a very close-knit family. It was a nice district. And the house was nice, too. I've got really good memories, I'm fortunate to have wonderful memories. No, I was really fortunate in that regard.
> Did you father keep his work and his family life separate?
> We were just used to there being patients there, we knew that whenever there was a patient in the house…, but as soon as they'd gone, the doors would be opened and we'd have more room. Yes, there were plenty of comings and goings, but it was a family home for all that, and I can see us now, chatting together in my father's study. It was actually his surgery, but for us it was the same thing, and we felt at home there.

Other respondents, however, admit that they suffered from having to share, not least Paul, the oldest of six children. When he recalls his childhood, he says how much he would have liked to have room of his own where he could have some time to himself—a place to retreat to, to "rebuild himself" and escape the scrutiny of others. This is reminiscent of Oliver Schwartz's (1990) observations of working men who

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[8] The *Event histories and contact circle* survey found that two thirds of the generations born between 1946 and 1950 spent their early years in overcrowded accommodation.

seek out places where they can get back in touch with their masculinity (either with male friends or relatives, or on their own), find themselves and experience a brief sense of freedom:

> I had this thing when I was an adolescent, this dream of having a room of my own…. It was a real obsession … But there was no chance of it ever happening, there were always kids around screaming and crying, all of them younger than me, so there was never any peace and quiet to be had. I know I had a thing about it, and I think that's where I got my love of walking, you see, getting out of the house and going somewhere—anywhere—just to be on my own. We got on very well as a family, I wasn't abused in any way. I just needed to be alone, to go out and walk around the streets of Paris.

As Prost (1987b) points out, because individualism is now a fact of life, especially in the home, where everyone has an individual bedroom, and even an individual bathroom, both symbolising the privatisation of the family,

> It is hard to imagine the pressure that the family group exerted on its individual members back then. There was no way they could shut themselves off from it. Parents and children lived on top of each other as far as ordinary everyday activities were concerned. They had no choice but to get washed in full view of the other family members, who were invited to look away at strategic moments, to save embarrassment all round.

Our respondents' recollections are a good illustration of what Prost (1987b) calls "impossible privacy". For in 1946, there were more than three people in the average French household, but only 2.7 rooms in the average dwelling. Not until the mid-1960s did families finally have enough space to live in[9]. In England and Wales, there was a dire shortage of housing units after World War II—Marwick (2003) puts the figure for 1951 at one and a half million—and some 10 million households continued to occupy dilapidated homes or endure overcrowded conditions owing to family size and intergenerational cohabitation. The situation was much the same in Scotland, where families were forced to live together and share amenities:

> The worst conditions of all were in the decaying tenements of industrial Scotland… and in those larger houses in what had formerly been inner suburbs in London and the big towns, now divided into a multiplicity of, often, one-room flats: in this kind of accommodation primitive facilities were shared by several families—one lavatory on a landing, with, near it, one gas cooker on which several harried housewives had to prepare their meals. (Marwick 2003, p. 48)

Like their French counterparts, the English baby boomers' parents had tremendous difficulty finding a decent place of their own to live. They had to wait patiently for several years and put up with barely tolerable solutions in the meantime, such as boarding houses, insalubrious dwellings, caravans, and other forms of makeshift housing. The story told by Susan, who spent her childhood in Manchester, the city

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[9] According to the 1954 census, 31 % of four-person households in France had just one or two rooms in which to live, and this figure was 47 % in Paris (Cahen 1957). By 1962, the average size of dwellings had risen to 3.09 rooms, and the average number of people per household was just three, meaning that there was approximately one person per room (by 1999, this ratio had fallen to 0.62; Merlin 2005).

where she was born in 1949, is a case in point. She was brought up by her unmarried mother in typical postwar living conditions:

> Well, my mother was a single parent and she didn't own her own house for one thing, and she worked in a very low paid job. She never contemplated any life changes like moving house or any of those sorts of options. She was hard pressed to look after herself, and in terms of offering us kids anything other than a very basic safety net, she wasn't able to help with deposits on flats or paying university accommodation or any of those sorts of things. We didn't have central heating. And one of the things I'll always recall about the hard winters was my mum worked, and having to come in from school to a freezing cold house, and light a coal fire.

The lengthy process of family privatisation and individualisation that was to culminate in each child having a room of his or her own[10] therefore took place in waves (de Singly 1997), and we can trace the first wave back to the eighteenth century, when bourgeois families introduced the notion of upstairs and below stairs, in order to establish a demarcation line between family and servants (Eleb 1996). The second wave consisted in separating children from parents in order to ensure greater privacy on both sides. The third and last wave was marked by a shift from family privacy to personal privacy, "or rather their coexistence" (de Singly 1997). As we have seen, this individualisation did not mean that baby boomers had individual rooms. Indeed, sharing with brothers and sisters was more the norm, as it supposedly encouraged "socialisation via the sibship group"—a notion that has since fallen out of favour (de Singly 1997, p. 13).

3.1.4   The Arrival of Household Appliances

The accounts quoted above give us some idea of the difficulty of everyday existence for the baby boomers' parents, especially their mothers, and help us to appreciate just how much the domestic space was to change. For not only did housing conditions improve with urban regeneration and the building of homes with modern amenities, but household appliances started to appear in people's homes. Vaunting the merits of the Hoover washing machine in July 1950, a radio advertisement explained that it

> ….would satisfy the most banal wishes of housewives. The potential customer learned to avoid hours of chores each week, and the long and strenuous days spent doing the washing could become a thing of the past. (Leese 2006, p. 45)

Indeed, using one of the early washing machines is one of Sarah's clearest memories:

> The washing machine was, I remember, a Calor washing machine made from plastic. If you wanted to do the washing up, you had to do it first, by hand, then my mother would put the pipe in the sink for our first Calor washing machine. It made such a din, that machine. And it didn't dry the washing either. I can't remember where she would try to get it all dry, maybe next to the radiators or sometimes out in the yard, but it wasn't easy.

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[10] On the subject of children (and young adults) and their bedrooms, see Ramos (2002) and Glevarec (2010).

These marvels of modern technology started to arrive in the mid-1950s, and it is no exaggeration to say that the new-fangled refrigerators, washing machines, telephones and televisions brought about a revolution in the way people lived. In 1954, just 7.5 % of French households owned a fridge, and 8.4 % a washing machine. By 1968, however, these figures had soared to 72.5 and 49.9 %. Similarly, scarcely 8 % of British households had a fridge in the 1950s, but this figure rose to 33 % in 1962 and 69 % in 1971, by which time 64 % of households had a washing machine. In the early 1950s, telephones were still few and far between, and customers had to wait a very long time for lines to be installed. As for that ultimate symbol of consumerism—the car—, it gradually became more commonplace, with a third of French households owning one in 1960, and half in 1967 (70 % in 1973).

During their adolescence, the baby boomers therefore witnessed first-hand the birth of a new society in terms of both housing and mobility, as well as the stirrings of a modern consumer society that they themselves would help to build from 1960 onwards. To quote Jean-François Sirinelli (2003/2007), they henceforth belonged to "a world that that was about living life to the full, not merely surviving".

3.2 An Authoritarian Upbringing

There may have been a revolution in consumption, as well as in housing and living standards, ranging from the arrival of mod cons and the notion of the living room as a key space to the development of the outer suburbs, but the private lives of the families that inhabited these dwellings changed very little. True, the baby boomers' parents belonged to a generation of modernity, compared with the adults of the interwar period who remained very much in touch with their traditional, rural roots. Moreover, their mothers had refused to follow in their own mothers' Malthusian footsteps. The baby boom helped to "bring children out of the sphere of private life" (Kniebiehler 1997, p. 88) and women were henceforth far more receptive to the outside world, aided and abetted by doctors,[11] counsellors, psychologists and journalists.[12] This modernity nonetheless remained a very relative concept, not least because the media had helped to convey, and even to shape, an image of the contented housewife in the social imagination which then proceeded to take on a life of its own, as we saw in Chap. 2.

Although women's position in British society had changed since the beginning of the twentieth century, and more especially since the Second World War, they were still under pressure to become stay-at-home mothers (Marwick 2003), and the

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[11] France's mother and child welfare system (*Protection Maternelle et Infantile*, PMI) was established on 2 November 1945.

[12] In the United States, the baby boomers are sometimes referred to as the *Dr. Spock Generation*, as their mothers were deeply influenced by Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, published in 1946. This work was translated into French in 1952, and French mothers were also greatly influenced by Laurence Pernoud's *J'Attends un Enfant*, which first came out in 1956.

number of working women fell steeply from 7.75 million in June 1943 to 6 million in June 1947, when the reign of the *little emperors* (*enfants-roi*) commenced. Around this time, a great many studies and research papers were published on the role that mothers played in their children's upbringing. Maternal love, already regarded as a precious commodity, was now given a scientific seal of approval and presented as some kind of "vital vitamin" (Knibiehler 1997, p. 81). Ideas such as these were given a considerable airing in the British media, not least in Donald Winnicott's broadcast talks on *The Ordinary Devoted Mother and her Baby* and those of John Bowlby on the theme of *Maternal Care & Mental Health*, promoting the "sacred bond between mother and child". The notion that children should be the centre of attention, and the attendant changes in childrearing styles were especially apparent in the English-speaking world, where *enjoy your baby* become the motto of the Dr. Spock generation's mothers.

3.2.1   Children's Upbringing Within the Family Unit

3.2.1.1   Stricter Education in France

While fathers played an instrumental role, acting as go-betweens with the outside world, mothers took on all the childrearing responsibilities and had an altogether more expressive role (Parsons 1955). Despite this, the upbringing that French children received from their mothers was more or less a carbon copy of what had gone on in previous generations, in that it was heavily influenced by religion and respect for one's elders—and betters. For while women acquired relatively greater autonomy within the couple after the war, the place of children remained unchanged. They were still brought up to obey their parents, their teachers and the parish priest. As Prost (1987a) comments, "school, and indeed the entire community, ceaselessly inculcated young people with a respect for their elders". Just as they had been accustomed to obeying their parents in their youth, so the mothers and fathers of the baby boomers brought their children up according to strict and unbending rules, and did their best to pass on traditional family norms and values. In fact, the only difference was that the mothers were now more attentive to their offspring's wellbeing.

This, at any rate, is what Claudine Attias-Donfut, Nicole Lapierre and Martine Segalen (2002) found when they analysed data from the *Three generations* survey conducted in 1992 by the Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Vieillesse (CNAV), the public body that manages France's basic state pension fund. Styles of childrearing in France appeared to have changed very little between the transitional generations born in 1939–1942 and those of their parents, with 61 % of the former stating that they had been brought up strictly, compared with 62 % of the latter. However, this figure fell to 31 % for their children. Daniel, for instance, who was born in 1949 and lived with his working-class father, who had divorced and remarried, describes the education he received as "hard" and "severe", where you had to "keep to the straight and narrow". This harshness was also expressed physically:

> My father was very hard, someone I'd describe as quite macho. He was very much the macho man at home. Adorable, as nice as you could wish, but also quite vain, quite pretentious. He always had to be the best looking, and all that. We were brought up the hard way, we often felt the back of his hand. That's just how it was. Then again, there were three of us boys at home, so they had to keep a tight rein on us. We had to keep to the straight and narrow.

Although it is tempting to assume that working-class children received a more authoritarian education,[13] it was much the same story at every level of society.[14] As Élisabeth explains, severity—or perhaps we should say austerity—was very much the norm for French baby boomers. Born into a provincial bourgeois family in 1953, she describes strict parents and a stifling family atmosphere, characterised by a total lack of privacy and feelings of confinement. There was no opening onto the outside world, and none of the leisure activities and devices that adolescents dreamed of back then:

> We really had a very strict upbringing. We weren't allowed anything, or rather it's not so much that we weren't allowed anything as there was nothing to be allowed. There was just the house and the family. We had our first television set when Father had his first attack of jaundice, and our first colour set when he had his second attack. I wouldn't go so far as to say that Mother bought the first large screen when he died, but the truth's not far off. So we were a very inward-looking family, constantly on top of each other, no openness.

Children frequently had no private life and were at the beck and call of their parents, who would send them off on endless errands, be it shopping, looking after their younger brothers and sisters, or helping in the kitchen—especially the girls. For some respondents, like Nadia, family meals were like being in a play, where the children were expected to know their part and only speak when spoken to: "at my grandparents', we children had to be seen and not heard, and got served last." They were also forbidden to go out or spend the night elsewhere, as Isabelle recalls:

> We had a strict upbringing, we were never allowed to go out, and I never went to eat at a friend's house. As for sleepovers, they would have been out of the question. I wasn't even allowed to spend an afternoon there.

Élisabeth's narrative highlights the extent to which these family rules were internalised and therefore never questioned. "It wasn't so much that Father was strict, as we didn't pose the question in the first place"—a sentiment echoed by Nadia:

> Every weekend, we would visit my grandparents. That's just how it was and it didn't even occur to me to complain and say I didn't want to go. It was like that and not otherwise.

Others were aware of the family rules but were prepared to infringe them, especially once they had reached adolescence, even if it meant bringing their parents' wrath

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[13] According to François de Singly, "sociologists explained that the working class was 'authoritarian' because it reproduced within the home the relations that working men and women had to endure in the workplace (Kohn 1969)".

[14] A notion contradicted by Richard Hoggart (1957), who demonstrates that the time of childhood is a preserved time.

down on their heads. Disagreements were generally about fashion (long hair, jeans, girls wearing make-up), going out and (un)suitable friends.

As we read these accounts, we realise why the May 1968 protesters chose the slogan "It is forbidden to forbid". For as Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet explain, "through their attitudes, their behaviours and their rallying cries, high school and university students demanded a less rigid and more permissive education in 1968" (Baudelot and Establet 2000, p. 72).

We get a good idea of just how heavily this upbringing weighed on them from Élizabeth's description of her experience of the events of May 1968 at the age of 15:

> I see that in May 1968 I was the only one to go to school. I was all alone in the school! The headmistress had gone, there were no more monitors, no more teachers. My mother took me there every morning, saw me through the school gates and after that I waited until lunch time! "Great", I thought, "I'm all on my own", but we weren't allowed to say anything! She absolutely had to take me to school. But in any case after that she didn't have enough petrol, because there were petrol coupons in 1968, and Father had some because he was a surgeon, but Mother ran out, so that's why I stopped going in the end. That's just the way it was. We'd talk, but it wasn't open. If we expressed an opinion about something and they didn't agree with it, they'd get angry with us.

And yet, as we will see in greater detail in Chap. 5, change was afoot from the mid-1950s onwards, especially in Britain. Writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Françoise Sagan and Henry Miller were to have a profound effect on the baby boomers' mothers, sometimes prompting them to behave in a paradoxical and—to their young children—perplexing manner, switching between strict, unbending discipline and sudden bouts of permissiveness. Claire, born in 1945, readily recalls her mother's contradictions and anxieties:

> My mother was the sort who'd read Henry Miller, or really risqué stuff, then give me a ribbing if I was five minutes late getting back from school. Or if I got a letter from a boy, she'd open it… Things like that. It was pretty incoherent. I think she was scared I'd get pregnant too young and that's exactly what happened, of course, as soon as I got to Paris…

The baby boomers' upbringing appears to have been characterised by an uncommunicative and authoritarian relationship with their parents, based on inequality. It bore very little resemblance to the way the baby boomers would later bring up their own children, as we will see later on.

3.2.1.2   A More Liberal Upbringing for Some Baby Boomers

Although most of our respondents were brought up very strictly, some of the interviews provide glimpses of other, more flexible, styles of education, confirming the results of the CNAV's *Three generations* survey, where 39 % of the 1939–1942 generations deemed that they had been brought up in a tolerant, and even permissive, manner (Attias-Donfut et al. 2002). This is certainly what Marie-Christine Granjon (1985) found in the United States, where, instead of demanding obedience from their offspring, some well-off families sought to promote their autonomy through reflection and discussion. From an early age, these children were taught

to shoulder responsibilities and encouraged to share their parents' liberal humanist ideals. In France, these liberal parents generally belonged to progressive Christian movements and left-wing parties, particularly the Communist Party, or moved in the privileged intellectual circles of Paris and other major cities. When the war came to an end, they looked to a more just and united society. Paul, a barrister's son and the oldest of six children, acknowledges suffering from having to share a bedroom with his brothers and a general lack of privacy. However, he is careful to underline the considerable amount of freedom he enjoyed throughout his childhood and adolescence:

> Even so, they let me do more or less what I liked. My parents were pretty cool. I was soon allowed to go out alone and do whatever I liked, go to the cinema, the theatre, and all that, they were really very relaxed… I don't know why, but I had the reputation of being some-one they could trust, and I played that reputation for all it was worth.

Here, parenting was predicated not on obedience to a rigid set of norms and rules, but on communication and trust, as Vincent, the child of civil servants, explains:

> My mother always worked on the principle that she would trust me providing I didn't let her down. My father was far less laid-back, but my mother would always say, "I trust you", or "call me and let me know where you are". That's all there was to it. If I wanted to go out, I went out, but I had to let them know: "I won't be back for dinner today, I won't be back", and that's all.

These two men clearly had an opportunity to escape parental oversight when they were young and avoid adhering to certain principles. As such, their accounts—perhaps unsurprisingly—run totally counter to those of our female respondents Isabelle and Nadia. Throughout this period,[15] boys enjoyed far more freedom and far less supervision, especially when it came to their sexuality, to the extent that parents can be said to have operated double standards, forbidding one to do what the other was permitted to do[16].

Vincent's tale is particularly interesting, as it provides insight into the role of women and mothers. Membership of Resistance groups and youth movements had given some women a taste for freedom and independence. After France was liberated, a number of women became Communist Party militants or simply felt drawn to the values of equality and solidarity. Others espoused the progressive Christian movement, although they tended to be overshadowed by their traditional Catholic sisters (Chaperon 2000). They were determined to give their children a less rigid upbringing than the one they had received, and to allow them greater freedom, even if most respondents talk about their parents' severity and authoritarianism, especially those who grew up in villages or small towns, where any deviation was frowned upon and societal norms were omnipresent. Parents were subject to close scrutiny, and extended family members, neighbours, schoolteachers and the local parish

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[15] Even today, parents bring their sons and daughters up differently, as several sibship studies have shown that parents have gendered expectations and keep a closer eye on girls (Langevin 1999).

[16] These double standards were to persist, according to the Simon report of 1972 (Roussel 1975).

priest all felt free to judge them. As Thierry points out, "the 'What will people say?' was very important. Succeeding socially was everything."

These narratives also herald a new style of childrearing that would gradually come to the fore, especially in the 1970s. This was pioneered by Françoise Dolto, who declared that a child was a person whose desires and expectations should be respected. Children were no longer to be regarded as wax (Durkheim 1902–1903/1963) or putty in their parents' hands, and a new relationship emerged, where parents no longer imposed things on their children, but supported them (de Singly 1996) and guided them on their journey of self-discovery. This movement gained momentum during what some scholars have called *late modernity*, which began in the 1970s, when bonds between parents and children, but also between partners, started to be based more on affection, and there was a new emphasis on the values of autonomy and equality, with greater democracy in relations both between men and women and between parents and children. This marked the start of what Anthony Giddens (1992) dubbed the "pure relationship", which relies on trust, symmetry and equality between the sexes and the generations—a relationship totally unlike the one that baby boomers had with their parents during their childhood.

3.2.2   Religious Upbringing

Issues about the way that children were raised in the postwar period are inextricably bound up with the religious issues that affected French and British societies at the time. Although the religious authorities in France had been heavily compromised by their links with the Vichy Government, individual acts of solidarity with Jewish people, and the engagement of Catholics as well as Protestants in the Resistance gave rise to a Catholicism with a more social leaning, embodied in the Christian Democrat Popular Republican Movement[17]. The postwar period therefore saw a religious revival that helped to restore the Church's sway over society. Catholicism remained deeply entrenched in French society, despite the growing acceptance of secular education in both countries and men's growing disaffection with the Church—a trend that had begun in the nineteenth century with the rise of anticlerical republicanism. In France, therefore, religion "became a female sphere of excellence, a source of pride, generating a discreet feeling of moral superiority and even personal independence if the women's husbands took no interest in it" (Bard 2001, p. 108).

As a result, while approximately half of all women took Communion at Easter in the 1950s, only a third of men (31 %) did so. The figures for Sunday Communion were even lower, with more than four out of 10 women attending, but fewer than one in four men (Langlois 1995). In Britain, "religion was gradually relegated to the affairs of women, old people and the lower middle classes" (Bédarida 1990,

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[17] Cf. Marc Sangnier's movement *Le Sillon* (The Furrow) and Emmanuel Mounier's Personalist movement.

p. 344). That said, although society did become more secular, the influx of Irish and Polish migrants helped to sustain the Catholic community, and "religion continued to provide a protective umbrella under which the nation could conduct its affairs".

In a survey carried out shortly after the war in a district of London, four fifths of women stated that they believed in God, compared with only two thirds of men (Langlois 1995). This "sexual dimorphism", to quote the title of Claude Langlois' article, was to prevail on both sides of the Channel, not least because women were in charge of childrearing. For, as we have seen, the new definition of roles within the family (men going out to work, women guarding over hearth and home) meant that mothers exerted even greater influence over their children than they had done before. Fathers, especially if they belonged to the upper classes or worked particularly long hours, gave their partners free rein in caring for their offspring. Fully aware of their responsibilities, most of the baby boomers' mothers aspired to bring their children up in their religion, be it Catholic, Protestant or Jewish, and for Nadia, whose Catholic upbringing was particularly strict, attending Mass was a weekly ritual:

> Every Sunday morning, I went to Mass. I'd get up at half-past eight, and trot off to Mass simply because I had to go to Mass, and it never even occurred to me to say, "But why do I have to go to Mass?" because I'd been told that if I didn't go to Mass, I'd be committing a sin and so I just had to go. In those days, we were far less… That's the way it was back then.

We can see the process of primary socialisation (Lahire 2003) at work here, with the internalisation of family norms, the inability to question these norms and the difficulty of freeing oneself from what felt like *rules*. Like most young girls of her generation, Nadia was strongly influenced by the social norms conveyed by the Church. Only later did she seek to escape the straitjacket of the conjugal and family model advocated by the Church that her sister willingly donned:

> My mother never went out to work. She stayed at home and even had a home help. There was always someone in the house to look after us. I always attended religious schools run by nuns, because that's how education was. My family was deeply Catholic, and all that got to me, frustrated me, and I ended up asking myself, "But why did I have this…? I don't understand, they always told me that my religion was the true religion, not the others". So then I realised that there were other religions around, and that realisation really turned my world upside down. I saw that it was actually… well, not fanaticism, but that I had deeply Catholic parents, with certain really strong principles… My parents thought that I'd get married at 20 and have children and lead a sensible life like my sister…

Solène, who was born in 1949 to parents who ran a café and restaurant in the Auvergne, has a similar tale of a strongly Catholic upbringing that shaped her married and family life:

> My father came from a very Catholic, very principled background. Divorce, for instance, was something… well, you just didn't get divorced, it went down very badly. You could maybe separate, but certainly not get a divorce.

Although most of the baby boomers' primary socialisation[18] took place within a nuclear family unit, it is striking to see just how many respondents were separated

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[18] The term *primary socialisation* is generally used to designate the socialisation that takes place within the family, although it can also apply to the inculcation of knowledge and basic attitudes. A

from their parents at some juncture, perhaps because they were sent off to boarding school or placed in some sort of institution[19]. It is important to stress that family members did not all necessarily live under the same roof back then. Family circumstances, such as divorce or the death of a parent, or the difficulty of reconciling career and family life,[20] might result in the parental bond being severed at an early age (Clément 2002, 2009), with children sometimes being fostered, often by a family member.

Chantal, for example, was brought up by her strict Catholic grandparents after her mother died, while Patricia was looked after by her grandparents for around a decade until her mother remarried and was able to take care of her. Nadia still resents the way her mother sent her away when her little sister was born:

> And when my little sister was born, my parents packed me off to my grandmother! Because my mother was tired, or something, and I've actually never managed to find out exactly how long I stayed at my grandmother's. I've always resented what my mother did, and after I eventually returned, I was sent away again while my parents moved house.

Some of these situations may have arisen solely because of the cramped housing conditions described earlier. Nadine tells how her three brothers had to share one bedroom, while she and a younger sister occupied the other one. The family's youngest daughter lived with her grandparents:

> No, at that time my parents had a large flat measuring 120 square metres, so… but there were a lot of us living there, and the three little ones had to share a room. Yes, that's right, I was in with one of my sisters, and another of my sisters lived with my grandparents.

Sometimes, divorce or marital breakdown was the cause of the problem. Philippe, for instance, was placed in a hostel because his mother could not work and bring up eight children on her own at the same time. Éva Lelièvre, Géraldine Vivier and Christine Tichit (2008) point to the "role of the boarding school as a means of managing family situations where the children need to be looked after". The sort of *child circulation* and fostering that is more commonly observed in African countries was therefore fairly frequent in France and elsewhere in 1930–1950 (Kempeneers et al. 2008).

Religious institutions and boarding schools played a surprisingly important role in the baby boomers' schooling and thus in their socialisation. On 3 September 1940, the Vichy Government had repealed the acts of 1901 and 1904 banning religious congregations from teaching. When France was liberated, the Catholics were obviously keen not to return to the situation in 1939, and the issue of subsidies for private schools returned to the parliamentary debating chamber, resulting in the

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third definition refers to the socialisation that takes place in childhood, as opposed to adolescence (Darmon 2006).

[19] The *Event histories and contact circle* survey showed that 12 % of people living in the Paris region who were born between 1930 and 1950 spent at least 1 year in some sort of institutional setting before the age of 15, be it a boarding school (75 %), an orphanage, a sanatorium, a borstal or a hostel.

[20] According to the *Next of kin, close friends, and relatives* survey, these early separations were especially frequent among respondents whose parent(s) had died or divorced, or whose mother was in full time employment (Clément 2002, 2009; Lelièvre et al. 2005).

Marie & Barangé Act of 1951 and the Debré Act in 1959. According to Ludivine Bantigny (2007),

> One of the main problems during the postwar period was the inability of the authorities to cope with the massive surge in the primary school population…. The same old issues would crop up at the start of each new school year, with schools having to turning away large numbers of children and teachers complaining about large class sizes, their views echoed by parents. (Bantigny 2007, p. 81)

As there were simply too few state (i.e. secular) primary and, later, secondary schools in France, to cater for all the baby boomers, Catholicism remained one of the pillars of the French educational system. The growing pupil population meant that it was not feasible to end the subsidies allocated to private schools, as this would have resulted in many of them closing down. Furthermore, in addition to giving parents the freedom to choose between religious and secular education for their children, "pluralism fulfilled an educational function, in that private schools offered children a second chance" (Prost 1968, p. 480). In Britain, where the Anglican and Catholic churches constituted a powerful lobby, the Education Act of 1944 made religious education compulsory in all state schools. A number of French and British respondents therefore attended private boarding schools (especially those living outside the capital), Jesuit schools or religious institutions. Julia, for example, aged 54 years at the time of the interview, spent her entire childhood in boarding schools or religious institutions. She describes at some length the practices of baby boomer parents who belonged to the middle classes or worked abroad in the former colonies:

> I was sent home in inverted commas to boarding school because that was the tradition then for Brits abroad to send children back to home to boarding school. In those days there were a lot of small not very good boarding schools that supplied the ex-pat population of the world so in those days a lot of service people would send their children there. I was sent home at the age of five. So I spent time living with my grandmother and we would go back to India in the holidays. In the summer holidays there used to be a plane run by air India they don't exist anymore the lollipop special for all the children that were going out. I went to a convent in Jersey and then I went to the other school Melverley in Dorset and then I finished off a year in Guernsey in a convent.

While some, like Jacques, easily adapted to community life, others, such as Susan, have painful memories. She was educated in an institution run by nuns, and left the family home in 1968 to go to the University of Sussex:

> Sussex was quite famous in the late 60's in terms of being radical. And that did appeal. But it wasn't the nuns who pushed for me to go there. Just being in a convent was a great incentive to choose one of the most radical universities.

To conclude, although the family of the 1950–1970s is generally regarded as a particularly sturdy and permanent structure, its members did not always live under the same roof at the same time. While some baby boomers grew up in the sort of nuclear family described by Talcott Parsons (1955), others were exposed to several different socialisation spaces.

3.3   Mass Education

Just as their parents had witnessed the introduction of compulsory secondary education first hand, so the baby boomers contributed to a surge in pupil numbers that led to the expansion of education provision on both sides of the Channel, first at primary level then, from the early 1960s onwards, at secondary level, too.

3.3.1   Rising Numbers

The increase in pupil numbers was linked not just to the arrival of the baby boom generations, but also to major changes in the education system, not least the raising of the school-leaving age (Prost 1968). Since 1936, school attendance had been compulsory in France up to the age of 14 years, while the 1944 Butler Act had raised the school-leaving age to 15 in Britain. In 1959, the minimum age was raised to 16 years in France, although the Act only came into force in 1967 (affecting the 1953 cohort first). A similar measure came into effect in Britain in 1972. The median age at which French pupils left school was therefore 14 years for the 1900 cohort, 15 years for the 1937 one, 17 years for the baby boomers born in 1947 and 18 years for those born in 1958. According to Prost (1968), there was therefore a threefold increase in the total number of secondary-school pupils between 1949 and 1963, rising from 775,000 to 2,400,000. As Louis Chauvel comments,

> Never before had such a large, rapid and widespread movement been witnessed. It was a sudden and wholesale change, and is best described as an "educational explosion". The number of pupils passing the baccalaureate rose from 5.12 percent of the age group in 1950 to 20.17 percent in the space of 20 years. This was not a linear increase, however, for while there was an extraordinary rise in the median school-leaving age among the cohorts born between 1937 and 1947, there was a far more moderate increase for the 1950–1965 cohorts. (Chauvel 2002, p. 105)

The same thing happened in French universities, where student numbers tripled between 1962 and 1969, rising from 200,000 to 600,000. Once again, this increase cannot be laid entirely at the door of the baby boomers, as the gap between the generations born during (650,000) and after (850,000) the war was only 200,000.

In Britain, the increase in the school population began with the extension of compulsory schooling to 14 years in 1918, another factor being pressure from feminist movements, which felt that girls' education was the best guarantee of women's emancipation. The subsequent raising of the school-leaving age to 15 years (Butler Act) and the advent of the baby boom generations further swelled the ranks in the 1950s. Accordingly, pupil numbers in England and Wales rose from 300,000 in 1914 to 600,00 in 1935, and nearly 2 million in 1955 (Bédarida 1990). This pattern was replicated in higher education, with student numbers growing from 20,000 in 1900 to 50,000 in 1938, and 118,000 in 1962 (Halsey 1988).

Despite this truly pivotal episode in the history of education, the primary schools attended by French baby boomers continued to differ little from the Republican model instituted by Jules Ferry, while those across the Channel perpetuated a hierarchical system that had prevailed since the early twentieth century. Although there had been moves in both countries to democratise education, by enabling ever greater numbers of children to enter secondary and higher education, and thus climb the social ladder, equality of opportunity was still a far-off dream in 1950–1970. In France, INED's longitudinal survey tracking a cohort of 17,500 children for 10 years from the time they left primary school in 1962 (Girard and Bastide 1973) showed that, of the 22 % of cohort members who passed the baccalaureate, more than half were the children of managers, professionals and higher level intellectual occupations, a quarter were the offspring of clerical and sales workers, tradesmen and shopkeepers, 12 % manual workers and 8 % farmers. This was the first in a long series of studies highlighting the impact of social origin[21]—an impact confirmed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1964), who accused schools of reproducing inequality by favouring the perpetuation of the élite.

In Britain, the 1944 Butler Act, which introduced the so-called *educational ladder*, a two-tiered system whereby pupils leaving primary school went either to a classic grammar school or to one of the new-fangled secondary modern schools dispensing shorter, or more vocational training, did nothing to undermine the traditional hierarchies. These were kept alive by the public schools, which continued to educate the élite, and by the grammar schools, which only took bright pupils who had passed the 11 +, and tended to adopt the traditions and habits of the public schools (Bédarida 1990). The introduction of comprehensive schools in the early 1950s failed to put an end to educational elitism. Surveys such as the one conducted by the Nuffield Foundation in 1973 (Boyd 1973) which examined the family and educational background of senior civil servants, showed that the principle of meritocracy had made comparatively little difference.

3.3.2   Girls' Schools and Boys' Schools

Not only did schools do nothing to redress existing inequalities of opportunity, but they took care to maintain girls' feminine identity. Like the generations studied by Bantigny, the baby boomers attended single-sex schools[22] that dispensed quite distinct educational contents. As "clothing counts in the assignment and construction of identity" (Bantigny 2007), considerable emphasis was placed on appearance.

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[21] For every 4.6 pupils in the first year of secondary school whose parents belonged to the managers, professionals and higher level intellectual occupations category, there was just one pupil whose parents were farmers or manual workers (Mendras and Duboys-Fresney 2007).

[22] Although a French ministerial circular introduced co-education in 1957, it initially only concerned new schools. Moreover, religious institutions continued to resist co-education. As a result, in 1960, only 25 % of *lycées* were mixed-sex (Bantigny 2007).

Trousers, for instance, "were to remain an essentially masculine item of clothing that women could not wear without appearing vulgar", while school smocks (the famous blue "*blouse*") served to abolish distinctions, not least social ones, as Corinne recalls:

> At that time, we had to wear smocks. That meant that we were all dressed the same, which was good. We couldn't make comments about how people were dressed because we were all wearing smocks…

The rules were extremely strict, in *lycées* as well as in religious institutions. Claire talks about how girls were not allowed to wear make-up or nail varnish:

> I went to a girls' school in Angers… Really posh… no make-up or varnish, even clear, no bare legs before June 30th…. Above all, you weren't allowed to be seen staring at boys in the street, let alone talking to them…but even looking at them…. well.

Discipline was the watchword: lining up before they filed into the classroom, a minute's silence, daily morality lessons, being kept in for bad behaviour, detention, lines… These punishments were counterbalanced by reward pictures, teacher's congratulations, honour rolls and the like. Several baby boomers, such as Paul, bumped up against the rigidity and authority that prevailed in the enclosed world of the boys' school, where pupils were not even allowed to decide on the length of their hair, and girls were an endless source of fascination:

> I was educated in a single-sex *lycée*. For a whole period of my life, I wondered how on earth you got to meet girls and where…. Well, when I was fifteen…. It felt that something just had to give…. I don't know. I remember how the deputy head would wait at the school gates to send us to the barber's, and it wasn't hair down to here, it was just a little bit on the long side, not manly enough, so he'd send us off to the barber's…

As well as being physically separated, boys and girls were taught different things. In the 1960s, the aim throughout girls' primary and secondary education was to train them to be good wives and stay-at-home mothers. As a result, the education they received did not necessarily equip them either to enter higher education or to take up an occupation. Some respondents have clear memories of their sewing lessons, and Nadine, today an executive, describes how much she came to enjoy this subject and made sure her whole family benefited from it:

> Dressmaking is, well, as you know, I belong to a generation where when you went to school you were taught how to be a good housewife, and well, not many women went out to work at that time. And learning wasn't for girls. So when I arrived in first year, I had sewing lessons and lessons on… what was it called, domestic science, etc. So I learned to sew, I broke my mother's sewing machine a couple times, but then I got one of my own. And it's quite something, making something with your hands. And I found it, well, I liked what I made. I used the material I got to make pairs of trousers. And of course, as soon as I'd made myself a pair, my sisters wanted one, too. So there you are, that's how I spent my days.

Even sports lessons were gendered, as the emphasis was on "dance rhythm exercises, to avoid strenuous effort and preserve childbearing functions" (Bantigny 2007). In Britain, too,

> Female children were treated differently from male children, of course. The basic assumption in all classes was that girls would become wives and mothers, and should therefore be

treated accordingly. Middle-class families might often be willing to send a daughter to a private school, while sending sons to the state schools; but while a son would be encouraged to fight his way on up through the system to university, the daughter's education would usually be terminated much sooner. (Marwick 2003)

Despite all this, the mothers of female baby boomers no longer quite dared to pass on their housekeeping skills to their daughters, preferring instead to see them do well at school (Knibiehler 1997). Moreover, women who went out to work were no longer frowned upon, and rising education levels meant that some girls from better class families started to make inroads into hitherto male preserves. In most cases, however, marriage continued to bring an abrupt end to their careers. Only working-class girls learned skills that would enable them to go out to work and supplement the household income. Young baby boomers therefore continued to be exposed to a world view where each gender was assigned a separate and clearly defined role.

The rigidity of the school system, and the degree of hierarchy and authoritarianism that prevailed in religious schools and boarding schools, prompted several respondents, not least Philippe, to revolt against the harsh punishments that were meted out:

I found myself in a children's home with 72 kids, divided into groups, of course, where there was a particularly thick bunch of staff who hadn't had any specialist training. In fact, they hadn't had any training at all. I can remember that it was during the events of 1968 that three friends of ours ran away, this friend Gérard, him and two others, they'd had enough, and they'd got to Paris, but of course they were picked up and brought back to the institution we were in, and for a whole week they woke us up at three o' clock in the morning so that we could see just how they were being punished. They were kept in the punishment cell and their heads had been shaved. It was really very harsh.

The conditions in some of these boarding schools prompted a number of youngsters to leave school as soon as possible. Dennis, for one, could no longer stand the English school system and decided to leave at the age of 15:

I hated school, actually, but then once leaving school as early as possible, at 15, it was possible then to get work and do all that. Just doing several different jobs from 15 till I was about 25. I just did various things for 10 years. And it just seemed, of course, it isn't like that now, perhaps.

Louis Chauvel confirms that, "for the cohorts born between 1940 and 1955, leaving school early, between the ages of 14 and 15, was not a critical impediment: the individuals concerned were able to find places in the productive system without too much difficulty between 1955 and 1970" (Chauvel 2002, p. 109). This is certainly what we found in our interviews with French and British baby boomers (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). Some of our respondents were indeed able to leave school at a very young age, especially since it was a period of full employment, so unemployment was rare. There could be various reasons for them to do so: their parents might need them to help out on the farm or in the shop, or there might not be any money for them to go on to higher education or even to stay on at school, as was the case with Philippe and Dennis.

We can see here just how far the baby boomers came. For their experience of childhood both within the family and at school was one of an often inflexible and intractable world characterised by relationships of authority, even if one or two of

them paint a rather different picture of that period. And instead of perpetuating that experience, they chose to subvert and discard it, as we will see in the next chapter.

3.4 Conclusion

The postwar baby boomers, their parents and their grandparents belonged to three different generations, each with a different story to tell of the twentieth century. Born between 1880 and 1900, the baby boomers' grandparents witnessed the separation of Church and State, endured the Great War and lived in a colonial, *rentier*, and Malthusian society. They remained deeply rooted in the nineteenth century, whether these roots were rural (France) or industrial (Britain). Deeply affected by World War I and the Depression, they were to have very few children. The abiding childhood memories of the baby boomers' parents were also of the depressed 1930s, while the Second World War provided their main experience of adolescence. As young adults, they turned their faces resolutely towards the future, eagerly espousing the modernity and consumerism that came to the fore in the 1960s. Although they often broke with tradition by having large families, they still took their cue from previous generations as far as childrearing and moral standards were concerned. The baby boomers' youth was therefore the product of these ruptures and continuities with the past that occurred in the course of their parents' and grandparents' lives. The first generation not to experience the anxiety of living through a world war, the baby boomers escaped other conflicts, too, as many of their immediate elders found themselves embroiled in the Algerian War. Denied and hushed up, an event that nobody wanted to talk about (Bantigny 2007), this colonial war was to have a deep and lasting effect on those who fought in it. Although the baby boomers had to endure postwar austerity and most of them received a rigid and authoritarian upbringing, they were nonetheless sheltered from the harsher realities of life as children, living in a "timeless", "asepticised"[23] bubble. Some paint a picture of happy and uncomplicated family life, glossing over the problems caused by housing shortages, while others dwell more on what they perceive to be a severe, inflexible and hierarchical upbringing both in the home and at school—a straitjacket from which they were determined to break out. The early baby boomers emerged from a monochrome childhood into a Technicolor society in the grip of progress, and benefited fully from the Glorious Thirty via their parents' wage increases, which enhanced their own purchasing power. With their pocket money, they contributed to the emergence of the consumer society, becoming the founding members of a youth culture complete with its own clothes (symbolised by the popularity of blue jeans[24]), magazines and music. After this comfortable adolescence (Sirinelli 2003), they entered the adult world with confidence in their strength and number.

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[23] Everything the baby boomers came into contact with was carefully vetted, especially children's literature, as well as films (Sirinelli 2003).

[24] Between 1970 and 1976, sales of jeans in France increased by 300 % (Borne 1988).

Part II
Baby Boomers Against the Family

Chapter 4
The Family in Perpetual Motion

The first generations of baby boomers grew up in trying circumstances. On both sides of the Channel, they had to endure housing shortages resulting from war damage, but also from a dearth of house building during the interwar years. Even so, they rarely claim to have suffered as a result, and actually entertain fond memories of their early childhood, often depicting an ideal climate. These postwar generations are fully aware of the "easy" and "privileged" lives they led, compared with their parents, who bore the full brunt of war, and their immediate elders. We therefore have numerous accounts of sunny childhoods without a cloud in the sky. These offer a stark contrast with more sombre recollections of child circulation and separation from parents at an early age, as well as descriptions of families devoid of affection and an unbending education system. Given the startling difference between the stable and generally happy family units of the 1945–1965 era described by the baby boomers and the types of families they themselves went on to form, it may well be that they view the past through rose-tinted spectacles.

These two decades corresponding to the baby boomers' childhood are usually presented as the golden age—or "Twenty Glorious"[1]—of the family, where marriage was almost universal. Couples wed at an increasingly early age, and staying single was rare and, indeed, stigmatised[2] in a society that regarded motherhood as an almost blessed state. The family was often referred to in popular songs of that period, such as *Papa, maman, la bonne et moi*, sung by Robert Lamoureux in 1950, Mick Micheyl's *Ma maman*, dating from the same year, and *Maman la plus belle du monde*, made famous by Tino Rossi in 1958 (Sirinelli 2003). The family model described by Talcott Parsons may not always have corresponded to the reality, but it was presented as a social given and went largely unchallenged. Back then, it looked like being the only acceptable model for the foreseeable future, and nobody, not least the demographers, had any inkling of the changes that were about to take place. In actual fact, the harbingers of change were already present in the

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[1] According to Alain Norvez (1990), Alfred Sauvy suggested changing the expression "Thirty Glorious" to "Twenty Glorious", arguing that the demographic surge ended in 1965.

[2] We can associate this with the fear of remaining single and the attendant, unflattering image of the spinster (Bard 2001; Le Bras 1983).

late 1950s, which is precisely when the first baby boomers were nearing the end of their adolescence. However, they initially went unnoticed, and the full extent of the upheaval to come only became apparent in the English-speaking world in the 1960s, and in Europe in the spring of 1968. Thus it was that, in 1965, previously stable demographic indicators affirming the family as an institution started to shift, and soon had all the experts scratching their heads.

4.1 A New Mystery: The "Demographic Earthquake"[3] 1965–1985

4.1.1 Precursors

Fertility started to decrease in 1965, and a few years later, there was an attendant increase in divorce and nonmarital cohabitation rates. As Henri Mendras (1980) explains:

> For many people, 1968 was like a clap of thunder in a cloudless sky […]. However, a closer look at the curves and demographic events reveals that indicators were on move and demographic innovations on the increase as early as 1965. With hindsight, 1965 can be seen as absolutely pivotal, marking the first break with the great economic and demographic leap of the postwar period. It was to be a further three years before this break made itself felt and heard in public, with the all-too familiar social and above all cultural consequences […] and what is true for France is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, for all Western nations.

In France at least, nobody saw it coming:

> If, around 1960, an internationally renowned demographer had predicted a major fall in fertility and marriage rates, he would probably not have been taken seriously. Had that same demographer given even a rough estimate of current figures, he would surely have lost all credibility with his peers. The least we can say is that demographers failed to predict the recent changes, probably because they seemed so unlikely back then and represent an apparently inexplicable break with the past. (Roussel 1987a, p. 429)

This sudden reversal in what had been astonishingly stable indicators, was therefore met by incredulity, followed by perplexity, on the part of demographers, who were unable to explain them and identify their cause—or, more accurately, causes. Although many demographers have since quantified and qualified these changes, they "continue to resist a genuine a posteriori explanation" (Roussel 1987a, p. 430).

These changes were not limited to France, and family behaviour across the whole of Western Europe started to converge from 1965 onwards—a movement that was to gather momentum in the 1970s. Scandinavian countries were in the vanguard of this social revolution, just as they are today, with the legalisation of same-sex marriages (Festy 2006). However, despite national variations in speed and intensity, all the changes moved in the same direction and took place in the same order. Louis

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[3] Title inspired by Louis Roussel's comment that "a sort of earthquake completely overturned family behaviour in the space of 20 years" (Roussel 1987b).
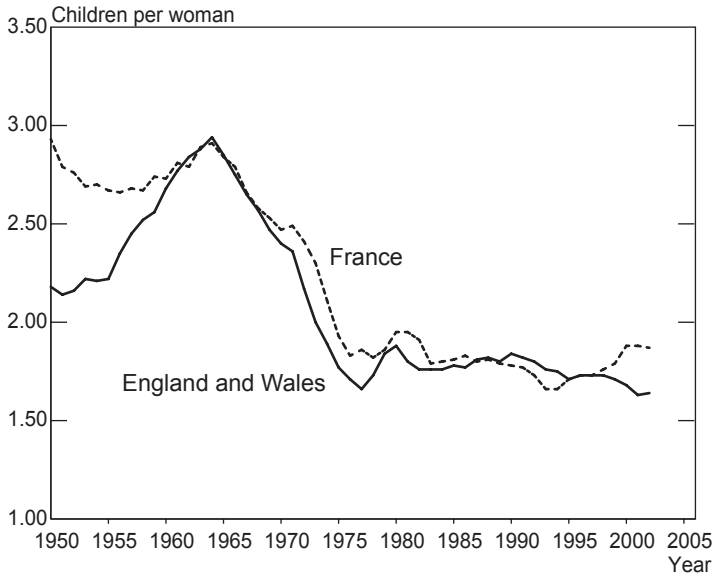
Fig. 4.1 Total fertility rates between 1950 and 2002 in France and England and Wales. (Source: INED database, www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

Roussel (1987a) emphasises that these changes concerned indicators of *legitimate* (de jure) behaviour first, such as fertility, divorce and marriage, followed by indicators of *illegitimate* (de facto) behaviour, such cohabitation and births outside marriage. France and Britain exhibited similar overall trends, and in his typology of European families based on demographic characteristics, Roussel (1992) places France in the same category as Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, although it would be wrong to assume that there was any sort of unity, as each country had its own set of specific cultural features (Lelièvre 1994).

Total fertility rates were remarkably similar in both countries, peaking at 2.9 in 1964 before dropping sharply (see Fig. 4.1). A prolonged period of low fertility ensued, with values rarely seen in peacetime, especially in England and Wales, where the figure fell to just 1.9 in 1976, compared with 2.1 in France. For Michel Louis Lévy (1982), the collapse in fertility in France between 1965 and 1975 cannot be attributed to a "refusal to have children", for "nearly all the couples that were physiologically able to have children—an increasingly large proportion as doctors advanced in the fight against sterility—had at least one".

Rather, it reflected a refusal to have a *large* family, and higher-order births (four or more) gradually declined after 1965, and more especially after 1972. Families with two or three children, now viewed as the ideal number, became the predominant model. The decline in marriage rates that began in 1973 can obviously not explain the fall in fertility that occurred between 1965 and 1975, but the greater availability of birth control techniques certainly had an impact. Although Henri Léridon (1987) is careful to point out that it is "only one of the contributing factors for this
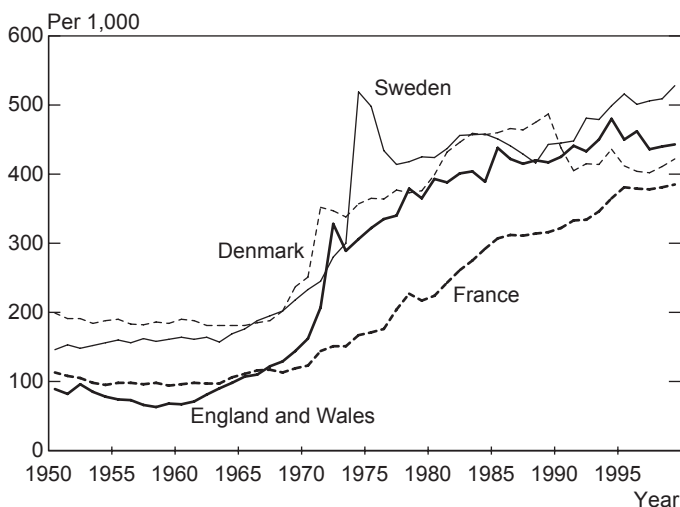
Fig. 4.2 Divorce rates (‰) between 1950 and 1990 in France, England and Wales, Denmark and Sweden. (Source: INED database, www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/ un_indicateur/)

profound cultural shift whose origins still largely escape us today", he amply demonstrates that the drop in fertility stemmed in roughly equal measure from a fall in the number of children desired by couples and more effective family planning.

Falling fertility was accompanied by rising divorce rates (see Fig. 4.2). Once again, Scandinavian countries were initially in the vanguard, although France soon caught up, as did Britain, where the rate doubled between 1970 and 1975. In France, divorce had been instituted in 1792, in the wake of the French Revolution, but was abolished after the Restoration in 1824 and remained so until the Nacquet Act of 27 July 1884.[4] Since then, there had been a steady increase in divorce numbers, with a surge after each world war (Sardon 1996).

Divorce figures stabilised between 1953 and 1963, but then started to rise again, gradually at first, then more steeply between 1970 and 1980 (the divorce rate doubled over this decade). The Act of 11 July 1975 clearly had an effect, in that it made the process easier by reintroducing the concept of mutual-consent divorce[5]. Henceforth, some couples that would have been unable to obtain a divorce under the previous

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[4] The divorce act of 1792 recognised spousal equality and the right to divorce by mutual consent. However, it was repealed in 1816 and only re-enacted in 1884. As mutual-consent divorce was regarded as a threat to the institution of the family, it was only legalised in 1975.

[5] Until 1975, divorce was only allowed under three conditions: adultery; a penalty involving loss of civil rights; and violence or serious injury or slander. However, wives could only ask for a divorce on the grounds of their husbands' adultery if it was committed in the conjugal home. With the 1975 act, adultery was depenalised, mutual-consent divorce was brought back and irretrievable breakdown became ground for divorce, even without the consent of both spouses (see Arnaud-Duc 1991). English legislation also distinguished between husbands and wives when it came to adultery (Stone 1990).
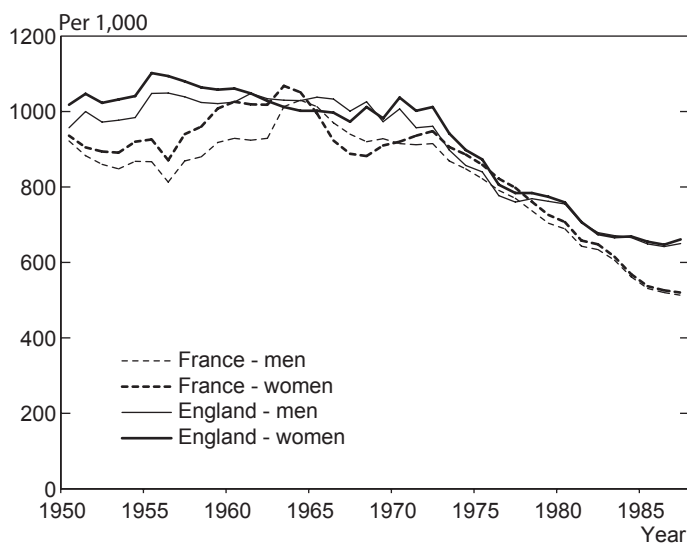
Fig. 4.3 Total first marriage rates for men and women in France and England and Wales between 1950 and 1997. (Source: INED database, www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

legislation were able to do so, and it was a similar picture across the Channel in the wake of the 1969 Divorce Reform Act. Even so, the rising divorce rate above all reflected the fact that, at least for couples that had formed since 1960, divorce was no longer regarded as a punishment for a particularly serious misdemeanour, but more as an acceptable solution in the face of marital conflict (Roussel 1975), representing a transition from what Pierre Guibentif (1983) refers to as "divorce-sanction" to "divorce-bankruptcy".

   Although divorce numbers started to rise in 1965, 1972 appears to have been the make or break year in the history of married couples in France. The institution of marriage was now weaker than it ever had been, and marriages, both first and second, were less numerous. Yet again, this was a trend that had begun as early as the second half of the 1960s in Sweden and Denmark. It was to take even longer to reach Britain than it had France (Fig. 4.3), for although the number of marriages and marriage rates peaked in 1959–1963 in Britain, and in 1963–1965 in France, the latter saw a slight drop between 1965 and 1972, whereas total first marriage rates for Britain remained stable until 1970. Thereafter, all these figures fell steadily, though not to comparable levels, as there was a later and shallower decline in first marriages in Britain. The explanation for this is that after falling continually for two centuries, age at marriage suddenly stabilised and started to rise rapidly, especially in France (Britain continued to have one of lowest mean ages at marriage in Europe). Similarly, further improvements in birth control, plus the subsequent legalisation of abortion, reduced the number of *shotgun weddings* (Léridon and

Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994),[6] that is, marriages triggered by an unplanned pregnancy. There was also, however, a degree of disaffection with the institution of marriage, witness the growing popularity of de facto unions that emerged in its stead.[7]

Although data on the proportion of unmarried individuals living together in Europe are somewhat scant and not particularly homogeneous, we can nevertheless see that Scandinavia once again played a pioneering role. Although France and Britain exhibited a similar trend, it was more marked in the former than in the latter, where nonmarital cohabitation remained less common (Lelièvre 1994). In France, the increase in cohabitation took place mainly between 1970 and 1980. At the start of that decade, it was still extremely infrequent, and popular mainly among older people as an "alternative to remarriage" (Daguet 1996). Only later did young single people start living together, with the result that direct marriages became less common. In 1965, for instance, only 10 % of marriages were preceded by cohabitation, but by 1975, this proportion had risen to nearly 40 %, subsequently climbing to 60 % in 1980 and 90 % in 1995 (Toulemon 1996).

Nonmarital cohabitation was initially just a stage on the way to marriage, and six out of 10 couples that were living together in 1968–1970 went on to seal the knot within 5 years (Léridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994). This prompted Louis Roussel to coin the term "juvenile cohabitation" in 1978, in order to capture the temporary, cautious—and infertile—nature of young couples' initial living arrangements. It was around that time that cohabitation started to gain a far higher profile. For young people, it became a desirable state and, indeed, a subject of pride. It was actually a practice that dated back to the Ancient Romans, who referred to it as *concubinatus*. Although they regarded it as a lawful union, it did not change the woman's station in life, and any resulting children were illegitimate. It became popular in the nineteenth century and was generally associated with the lower orders, whom social reformers held responsible for the disorganisation of family life. For those in the working classes, it was a marriage in all but name, an interim solution for couples that did not have enough money to make their union official. In the late nineteenth century, representations of concubinage started to shift, as anarchists challenged the unhappy arranged marriages of the upper bourgeoisie in the name of freedom, love and happiness, and feminists promoted free unions as the expression of ideal egalitarian relationships between the sexes (Battagliola 1995). Change was therefore threefold, concerning the way this practice was represented, its content, and its frequency. Furthermore, Catherine Villeneuve-Golkalp's analysis of trends in nonmarital unions since the late 1960s, based on INED's *Family situations* survey (1985), confirms that the spread of cohabitation was certainly not a top-down process, and researchers in both Europe and the United States no longer view the

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[6] Thus, in 1970, more than one bride in four was pregnant. This proportion started to fall in 1973 (Daguet 2002b).

[7] At least until 1980, or until the 1960 generation, for France (Léridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994). Conversely, in Britain, nonmarital cohabition appears to have staunched the decline in union formation by 1983 (Lelièvre 1994).

university campus as "the inevitable departure point for the spread of anti-marriage ideas to the rest of the population" (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994). Rather, as we saw earlier, it was a longstanding, albeit discreet, practice among members of the working class who did not consider themselves in the least to be going against the establishment. Thus, by the time the middle and upper classes started to appropriate this new form of partnership made popular by students, it had already been prevalent among the working classes for many decades. What is true, however, is that cohabitation "only became respectable […] once it had become a widespread practice within the class that sets the norms" (Chalvon-Demersay 1983), as reflected in its name change. For as the number of births outside marriage rose and over-35s increasingly started living together, the traditional term *concubinage* soon proved inadequate, and was therefore replaced by the expression *nonmarital cohabitation*. Living together became increasingly common, especially among the generations born after 1950 in France (Léridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994) and after 1960 in Britain (Lelièvre 1994), where it was to remain less widespread, reflecting disaffection not with marriage but with union formation in general. The upshot was that marriage, once a virtual inevitability in people' lives and the prerequisite for starting a family, became increasingly unpopular, taking place less frequently and at a later age. It no longer represented the transition to adulthood, no longer corresponded to people's first sexual experience (Bozon 1993), and was no longer closely bound up with plans to have children.

This trend had a demographic impact, in that the proportion of births outside marriage also increased, although the figures meant different things in France and Britain. After stagnating at 6–9% throughout the first half of the century (except for the two world wars and the immediate postwar period) and declining slightly in the 1950s, this proportion started to grow—slowly at first, but gathering speed in the 1980s, when it finally topped the 10% mark on both sides of the Channel (see Figs. 4.4 and 4.5).

Over the course of the next 5 years, this proportion virtually doubled, and the increase did not stop there, with the figure reaching 30% in 1990. We can only understand what was happening here if we adopt the method advocated by Francisco Munos-Perez (1991) and divide these babies into those conceived as a prelude to marriage and those conceived entirely outside this institutional framework. We then see they mainly belonged to the first category in the 1950s, and that their numbers peaked in 1972–1974. This can be explained by the liberalisation of sexual mores[8] at a time when marriage was still viewed very favourably, as evidenced by trends in first marriage rates (see Fig. 4.3). According to Munos-Perez 1991), the advent of

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[8] In May 1968, greater tolerance and sexual freedom were openly demanded, in an attempt to include sexuality in the general current of liberalisation and banalisation. The 1972 Simon Report on sexual behaviour in France, sometimes viewed as the French version of the Kinsey Report, revealed a degree of indulgence towards sex before marriage, providing it took place within a stable, loving relationship. There was, however, less indulgence towards women than towards men (Roussel 1975).
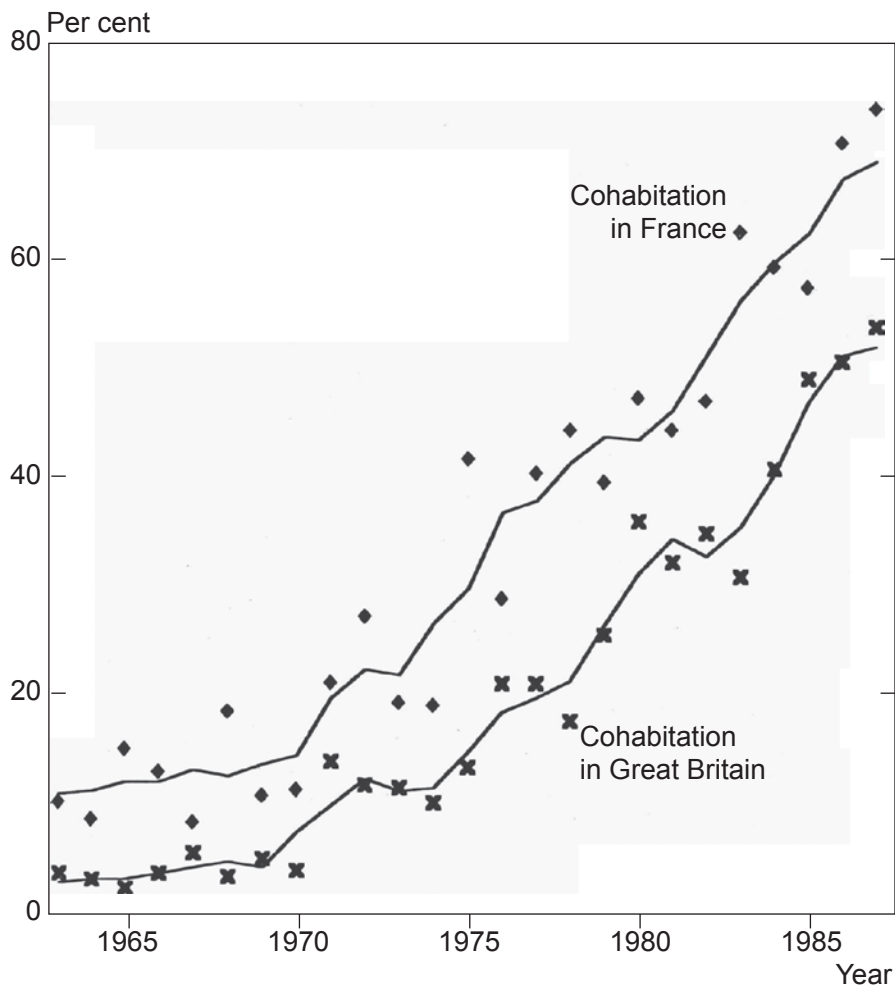
Fig. 4.4 Proportion of first marriages preceded by cohabitation in Britain and France. (Source: Lelièvre 1994, p. 67)

free family planning,[9] combined with the legalisation of abortion,[10] caused premarital *conceptions* to fall after 1975, but premarital *births* rose extremely rapidly, as a result of changes in the behaviour of cohabiting couples, more and more of whom chose to have children. Legislation introduced in France in 1972, designed to bring about equality between legitimate and illegitimate natural children seems not to have had any effect on these births. It did, however, have a considerable impact on

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[9] In 1967, the contraceptive pill was legalised in France and made available to unmarried women in Britain. In 1974, free family planning was introduced in both countries.

[10] 1968 in Britain (1967 Abortion Act) and 1975 in France (Veil Act).
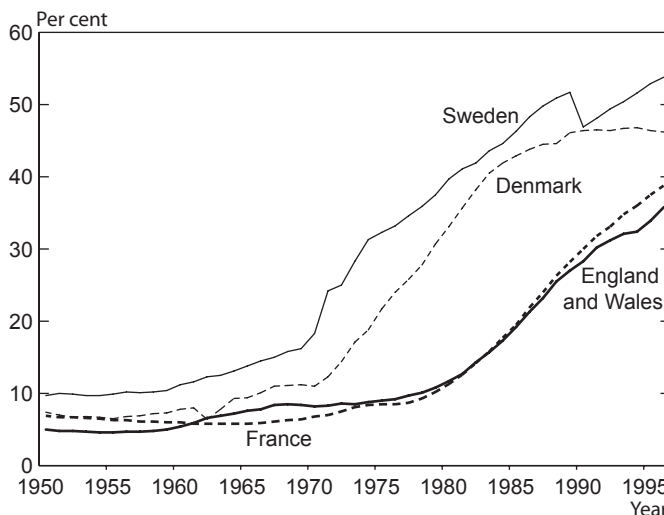
Fig. 4.5 Extramarital birth rates (%) between 1950 and 1995 in France, England and Wales, Denmark and Sweden. (Source: INED database, www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/pays_developpes/conjoncture/un_indicateur/)

the numbers of biological fathers, at all levels of society and in both urban and rural settings, who acknowledged their paternity, such that the proportion of children who were never acknowledged remained remarkably stable. Once again, there were important differences between France and Britain. As we have seen, nonmarital cohabitation was less popular among the British than it was among their French counterparts. As a result, births outside marriage were less likely to represent a deliberate choice on the part of the couple, and the children were less often acknowledged by both biological parents. Moreover, there was a higher proportion of teenage pregnancies, as there was for legitimate births. Declining fertility, a rising divorce rate, increasingly infrequent marriages taking place increasingly late in life, growing numbers of couples living together outside marriage and therefore more births out of wedlock all conspired to overturn the predominant image of the family.

4.1.2   Researchers' Explanations

A careful analysis of this chronological series reveals new demographic rhythms and modes of family life that were hitherto marginal and only weakly represented. Henceforth, *family* was no longer a singular noun, households became more diverse and increasing numbers of people lived on their own. For one of the most striking changes to society must surely be the rise of the single-person household,[11] under

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[11] In France, they represented 11.6 % of all households in 1956, 20 % in 1962 and 32.8 % in 2005.

the combined effects of population ageing, differential mortality and new attitudes towards marriage and other forms of union. Even more noteworthy than the multiplication of different family configurations is the fact that people ceased to regard a family as a lifelong commitment, heralding a new mobility (Roussel 1987a)—what Jean-Hugues Déchaux (2007) refers to as "conjugal nomadism". Not that second marriages were anything new, but from the 1980s onwards, instead of following the death of a spouse, owing to excess mortality among adult men and women's deaths during childbirth, they tended to take place in the wake of a divorce.

It is difficult to pinpoint what these changes actually meant and to disentangle their causes and consequences. As Irène Théry comments, "[…] we still do not fully understand what went on during this period" (Théry 2000, p. 194), even if we can narrow the field down somewhat. For a start, these transformations were so extensive and took place over such a long timescale that we can rule out any calendar effects. As for the possible impact of recession, Louis Roussel (1987a) emphasises that the signs had emerged several years beforehand, so even if the economic crisis "enhanced certain trends and modified certain movements, it did not actually trigger this series of changes". Many authors agree that contraception and family planning played an important role, by gradually allowing women to adopt a "regimen of infecundability".[12] We can therefore attribute the decline in fertility between 1965 and 1976 to the swift reduction in unwanted pregnancies, more widely spaced births and more effective birth control practices due to the greater availability of efficient contraceptives (pill and coil) and better use of traditional methods (coitus interruptus and abstinence) (Léridon 1987).

The ability to control their fertility meant that women could now plan when to have children and how many to have. It also altered their status, according to Roussel, for henceforth they were the ones in charge. There was thus a shift in the balance of power between partners and a quite dramatic role change (Roussel 1987a, p. 442), as "fully half the population demanded—and obtained—a new place both within the family and in society at large". Roussel cites the example of Scandinavian countries, where the new family models had first emerged, and which led the way in granting women a new social status (Roussel 1992).[13] For women were to play a fundamental role in bringing about social change, both by pursuing their education and by going out to work en masse, especially the mothers of young children. Because the huge rise in the number of working women and the fall in fertility took place simultaneously, researchers have been tempted to assume that it was the former that caused the latter. However, the link does not always have an obvious direction (Lollivier 1998; Véron 1988), and in some countries the

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[12] This term expresses the idea that women could now enter a state of permanent sterility, which they could interrupt as and when the couple wished to have a child, such that contraception now came before and not after procreation (Régnier-Lollier 2007).

[13] In Sweden, for instance, all women over 21, both married and unmarried, were given the right to vote in national elections in 1919, and exercised that right for the first time in 1921, the year in which no-fault divorce was introduced. Contraceptives went on open sale in 1946. Abortion in special cases was legalised in 1938 and the scope was gradually widened, culminating in the Abortion Act of 1974.

two phenomena simply did not coincide (contemporary examples would be Spain and Italy). Laurence Charton believes that "transformations in the family, particularly the fall in fertility, can be attributed less to an increase in paid employment and more to an informally egalitarian shift in the country's institutions" (Charton 2006, p. 66). This seems rather an over-simplification, however. For example, even though Portuguese women only gained the right to vote in 1976, and lived in a society characterised by conventional family units and family formation patterns, they nevertheless worked more often and for longer than their European sisters. On similar lines, some researchers have suggested that divorce numbers increased when women started going out to work and thereby gained financial independence. This argument is countered by Thierry Blöss and Alain Frickey (1994), who point out that although the financial independence argument is a convenient one, it cannot entirely explain the rising divorce figures. For instance, the highest demand for divorce came from women who were the least qualified and most poorly paid. What these indicators do show is that economic status was key to the emergence of a new female figure. When women entered the world of work and ceased to be just wives and mothers, Parsons' dichotomic vision of gendered roles (Michel 1970, 1973) soon came under threat.

The birth of this "new demographic regime" (Ferrand 2004) coincided with a whole raft of sex equality legislation, but it is impossible to tell whether these laws simply reflected new behaviour or actually initiated change. Unlike most authors, Théry (2000) takes the view that it was not solely a case of bringing the law into step with reality, and that there was instead a double transformation, both in behaviour and in norms, "without the one being the consequence of the other" (Théry 2000, p. 195). Relationships between men and women based on the inequality, hierarchy and authority embodied in the Napoleonic Code of 1804 therefore started to ebb during this period.

Just as a complex alchemy had given rise to a new conception of the family in the late 1940s, so another, equally potent mix was to do so in the late 1960s. These transformations have often been analysed from the triple perspective of individualism, privatism and pluralism. According to Théry (2000), through an initial process of individualism, the individual became the central unit, such that instead of the individual being at the service of the family, the family was at the service of each of its members. The logical extension of this individualism was privatism, where individuals were no longer prepared to allow lawmakers or society interfere with their private lives. Some researchers interpret this as a symptom of a more wholesale rejection of institutions, not least Louis Roussel, who claims that disaffection with marriage reflected a more general lowering of esteem for institutions, in as much as "following the institution meant immediately abandoning all hope of one day achieving self-fulfilment" (Roussel 1987a, p. 444). He goes on to reason that "if postmodernism translates as the desire to invent your life as you go along, then marital behaviour can certainly be said to have entered this new age". These processes of individualism and privatism blurred existing codes of conduct, leaving people free to invent their own families. The outcome was pluralism. Henceforth, union formation was a project that could vary from one couple to the next, and indeed

from one day to the next. Relationships had to procure a feeling of self-fulfilment for both partners, and were based on an ideal of genuine feelings (de Singly 2005), reminiscent of Giddens' (1992) so-called "pure relationship".

4.2   The Winds of Freedom

4.2.1   Stirrings of Revolution (1950–1960)

Having acknowledged that there was indeed a revolution in family life, we now need to determine why it took place exactly when it did. There is no escaping the fact that it coincided with the baby boomers' entry into adulthood, and that these baby boomers far outnumbered their elders, who belonged to age groups depleted by low birth rates. As we saw in Chap. 3, the baby boomers experienced a different type of primary socialisation from their parents, in that they had to endure conditions of austerity and shortage in childhood, but their adolescence and early adulthood coincided with the second half of the Glorious Thirty. They embarked on their adult lives at the very time when circumstances favoured challenges to the institution of the family and, more generally, to society, in what Henri Mendras and Laurence Duboys-Fresney (1988) have called the "second French Revolution". Michel Bozon makes clear that "the events of 1968 gave expression to changes that were already underway" (Bozon 2008, p. 117), and we would be wrong to say that society had not altered one iota since 1945 and that nothing changed until the baby boomers came along. Nor should we downplay the achievements of the generations born just before or during World War II, who paved the way for the huge transformations that would take place in the wake of May 1968, even if they will forever remain the *scriptio inferior* (Bantigny 2007) in the baby boomers' palimpsest (Sirinelli 2003).

The young people who immediately preceded the baby boomers were not entirely invisible. In France, there was the *blousons noirs* youth subculture, whose members wore the emblematic black leather jacket, while across the Channel there were the teddy boys, marginal adolescents who heralded the "entry into social history of a brand new entity, the teenager" (Bédarida 1990), and who were ardent fans of the new-fangled rock 'n' roll music that had come straight from the United States. Then there was the young novelists and playwrights, generally from the lower classes, who formed the Angry Young Men movement (1955–1959), and the students who enthusiastically supported the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). For, as John Prince (2008) underlines, these movements "sowed the seeds for phenomena that would gather momentum throughout the 1960s". France's May 1968 revolution was therefore just part of a decade-long series of protests that took part in a large number of countries, especially in the English-speaking world. It can only fully be understood if it is set against the backdrop of general unrest among students and workers, not least in Germany, Italy, the United States, Japan, Mexico and Brazil, not forgetting Czechoslovakia (the Prague Spring) and China (the Cultural Revolution).

To grasp what was really going on at the time, we need to look to the United States, where numerous protest movements[14] emerged. Marie-Christine Granjon (1985) believes that these can all be traced back to the Greensboro sit-ins, initiated by four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University on 1 February 1960. These civil rights protesters soon attracted considerable support, first from fellow black students, then from white students, too. Alongside them were peace campaigners and anti-nuclear test demonstrators. In their wake came demands for freedom of speech and the abolition of the death penalty, which helped to radicalise campuses and culminated in the Berkeley riots of 1964—riots that have never since been matched in extent and intensity.[15] Soon, every campus in the country seemed to have its own protest movement, with members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) movement making up the bulk of the New Left. In 1965, the SDS became one of the first groups to campaign against the Vietnam War,[16] staging strikes in around 50 universities in April 1968.[17] It is no coincidence that the movement of 22 March 1968 at the University of Nanterre near Paris began shortly after the demonstration organised by the French National Vietnam Committee (CVN) "for the victory of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism". In Britain, student protests reached a paroxysm between 1967 and 1970, with a large number of sit-ins, mostly in favour of nuclear disarmament and against capitalism, but British society was never seriously threatened in the way that French society was.[18] "At the end of the day," concludes François Bédarida (1990), "the revolutionary cry was never really much more than a murmur". This is not to say that Britain remained unchanged throughout, for as early as 1955, it experienced a titan clash between two value systems: one characterised by morality, tradition and religion, the other by a desire for freedom, change and independence. Societal norms were permanently modified by the advent of a youth culture that sometimes looked more like a counterculture, with its refusal of authority and rejection of all labels and boundaries, and its marked preference for communal living. Its members found expression through literature[19] and new writing, in the case of the Angry Young Men, as well as through film. They could be identified by the clothes they

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[14] These protests concerned issues ranging from civil rights to women's liberation, and mobilised community organisers, members of the revolutionary Weather Underground and the left-wing New America Movement (NAM), early environmentalists and gay rights campaigners.

[15] Notably the Free Speech Movement in autumn of that year.

[16] The students protested for peace but also, more concretely, against the draft. The summer and autumn of 1967 were to see violent demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

[17] In 1967–1968, there were some 3,463 recorded demonstrations at Columbia University (Granjon 1985).

[18] Even if many scholars, including Michel Crozier (1970), Alain Touraine (1972), Edgar Morin (1970) and Raymond Aron (1968), have since questioned this notion of a revolution in France, in that it did not fundamentally challenge the political system.

[19] A particularly significant event was the publication of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by Penguin Books in 1960.

wore, which is how the swinging 1960s came to be defined by Mary Quant's[20] mini skirt symbolising women's liberation, who "used her clothes to strengthen these ideas for women of the baby boom generation. Libertarian, market oriented and unconventional. Interviewed in the Guardian in 1967 she described her cut-out, see through dresses, her living for "good pornography, erotic but pleasing and her designs for body stocking with plastic soled feet" (Leese 2006, p. 85). Pop music[21] was also important, as Paul, one of our respondents, makes a point of mentioning:

> I've always loved music. When I was little, there was some classical music, which I loved, and I had a cousin a bit older than me who was great, because he introduced me to pop music, soul music, and all that. So I was really into the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, then Ray Charles and so on, at a very young age. There was a small group of us at the *lycée*, we were very dismissive of the *yéyés*, because we listened to real rock music, English stuff.

1963 saw the release of the Beatles' first chart-topping single *Please Please Me*, and the following year the Liverpudlian group received an ecstatic greeting from fans in New York. Then came the Rolling Stones, who had "a stronger pro-youth, anti-establishment, and altogether wilder image than the Beatles" (Marwick 2003). Pop music created a powerful bond between millions of teenagers the world over, who felt drawn to the group ambiance and recognised themselves in the lyrics, using them to express their rejection of the consumer society and the establishment, and above all their desire for a different, more permissive world.

If there is one change that Britain, France and the United States all had in common in the early 1950s and 1960s, it is the emergence of young people as the cultural and political movers and shakers. Students initially campaigned for greater sexual freedom and, more generally, for social change. Their targets included capitalism, the consumer society and, indeed, most traditional values and institutions, not least the family. These attacks against the family were nothing new. 1922 had seen the publication of Victor Margueritte's shocking novel *The Bachelor Girl*,[22] and the 1930s the notion of marriage as a long conversation (Théry 2001). There is plenty of evidence to support this gradual shift in mentalities, involving a mounting challenge to bourgeois conservatism and demands for more relaxed moral attitudes and greater sexual freedom. In 1948, for instance, Margaret Mead's famous book *Male and Female*, questioning the Western family and the traditional division of tasks within the household, came out in Britain and the United States. The following year witnessed the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, in which she railed against the female condition. This initially provoked scandal but little else, although it did spur some women to organise themselves and engage in positive

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[20] Mary Quant opened *Bazaar*, her first clothes shop, on the King's Road in London in 1955 (Marwick 2003).

[21] Christopher Booker (1969) counted some 350 groups in the city of Liverpool alone.

[22] In his foreword, Victor Margueritte wrote, "Let us grant our daughters, our wives, both legal and common-law, and all mothers (including teenage mothers), the freedoms we can no longer allow men despotically to monopolise".

action later on.[23] Further shockwaves were produced in 1954 by Françoise Sagan's novel *Hello Sadness*, and in 1963 by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which proved hugely popular worldwide, as women started to realise they were trapped in the role of submissive housewife. Friedan described the problems encountered by American homemakers in the middle classes, endlessly performing domestic chores in houses replete with gleaming household appliances. The result was neuroses and frustrations that could easily tip over into alcoholism and depression. Their sisters in France and Britain experienced similar bitterness and resentment. After the mid-1950s especially, many of them felt frustrated with the role of stay-at-home mother they had been saddled with by society. The researchers and writers among their ranks expressed these feelings in their work (Michel 1959; Michel and Texier 1964; Gavron 1966) and campaigned for greater availability of contraception. It was therefore the baby boomers' mothers who initiated the feminist campaigns that would later give way to the baby boomers' more radical demands concerning motherhood (Knibiehler 1997).

This brief foray into the past reveals that a sexual revolution was already underway by the mid-1960s. Its flames would subsequently be fanned by the events of May 1968. Above all, however, it shows that, to a very large extent, far from rebelling over attitudes and lifestyles (Bantigny 2007; Sirinelli 2003), the baby boomers simply picked up from where their parents had left off. The sexual revolution in the late 1960s was actually the culmination of a very long process, and it was no accident that the students protesting in Nanterre in March 1968 ostensibly took their lead from the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich[24], who had denounced the sexual repression exercised by society half a century early in his book *The Function of the Orgasm* (1927). In 1930, Reich, whose campaign for greater permissiveness was clearly part of a larger "struggle against capitalism with a view to creating a Communist society" (Le Goff 2007, p. 283) published *The Sexual Revolution*, attacking morality of all kinds and heralding the hedonist current of the 1960s and 1970s. He became a model for young Americans, who regarded sexual revolution as a "universal panacea, providing a cure for violence and aggressiveness among men" (Granjon 1985, p. 253). They adhered to his vision and his refusal to view frustration and repression as prerequisites for civilisation. They took up his critique of the suppression of sexual urges and desires, with all its negative consequences (submission to authority, aggressiveness, fascism) and applauded his attacks on institutions based on authority and obedience, starting with the family, the Church and the army. Wilhelm Reich influenced many philosophers, including Herbert Marcuse,

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[23] According to Christine Bard (2001), "there was an immediate scandal, but feminist organisations remained silent. […] this book radically denouncing male domination disturbed people. As did its emphasis on sexuality. Even so, they heralded future struggles."

[24] On 21 March 1968, on the occasion of a lecture given by Mme Revault d'Allonnes in Nanterre on the sexual revolution, Reich's manifesto entitled "What is sexual chaos? What sexual chaos is not!", which was first published in *Sexpol* in 1936 was reprinted and handed out by members of the Nanterre Cité Universitaire residents' association (source: http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/ histoire/mai_68/chronologie.asp). As M. Jaspard (1997) emphasises, with hindsight, the publication of *The Sexual Revolution* in France in 1968 seems to have been prophetic.

the author of *Eros and Civilization* (1955), who become one of the mentors of the student protest movement. The mid-1950s saw the emergence of the Beat Generation, whose members, nicknamed *beatniks*, rejected the lifestyle of the middle classes (from which most of them originated), associating it with sexual morality, violence, the army and war. These anti-conformists held that each individual should be allowed to live freely, unhindered by social constraints or preordained morality. Independence was to become a leitmotif of the demands made by the Berkeley students in the early 1960s, which is when a small number of young people, heirs to the Beat Generation, started to revolt against the mores of the American way of life, setting a cultural rebellion in motion. They wore their hair long, favoured jeans and boots, smoked pot and eschewed all sexual morality. According to Marie-Christine Granjon, "it was around San Francisco Bay, and more particularly at Berkeley, that student activism and the nascent counterculture were most likely to interact" (Granjon 1985, p. 253), but the two were actually brought together on the East coast, by Harvard professor Timothy Leary, who conducted a series of experiments involving psychedelic drugs. Leary was fired by his university in 1963, but found eager disciples within the counterculture that would morph into the hippie movement (Granjon 1985) in the second half of the 1960s.

The hippie culture rapidly became the dominant style in Britain. Contrasting with the violence of the Mods and Rockers, it preached pacifism, a return to nature, a quest for mystic exoticism, drug taking and sexual freedom (Wheen 1982). Unlike their counterparts in the United States, a country riven by race issues and the Vietnam War, British hippies remained largely nonpoliticised. The "not guilty" verdict in the trial of Penguin Books, which had been prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act for publishing the unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, ushered in a new morality, or permissive society (Wheen 1982). Edinburgh University don George Morrison Carstairs Prince described this new atmosphere in a talk on the BBC as follows: "The popular morality is now a wasteland. It is littered with the debris of broken convictions. A new concept is emerging, of sexual relationships as a source of pleasure, but also as a source of mutual encountering of personalities in which each explores the other and at the same time discovers new depths in himself or herself" (1998).

This liberalisation of sexual mores was made easier by the advent of the contraceptive pill in 1961, the Abortion Act and the Family Planning Act, both passed in 1967, and the 1969 Divorce Reform Act. Across in France, although society appeared on the surface to be less affected by political and cultural protest movements than Britain and the United States, change was nonetheless afoot. For Michel Bozon (2009), it was in the 1960s that the pendulum finally swung. Even though the contraceptive pill was not yet legally available, women now looked to have sex before marriage and wanted their unions to be "based on sexual relations". The resulting mismatch between what society expected them to do and what they actually did[25]

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[25] In the INED survey Attitudes of different generations to marriage, the family and divorce in France, conducted in 1969, 41% of female respondents deemed that sexual relations between fiancés were "regrettable but desirable" (Roussel 1975).

explains the rise in premarital conceptions from 1965 onwards, reaching a historical peak in 1970–1972 (Prioux 1976).

4.2.2   The Pendulum Swings in France: The Baby Boomers and May 1968

How did these apparently docile generations of baby boomers end up joining this protest movement, some of them even making an active contribution? How were they affected by the turbulent atmosphere that reigned during their adolescence and early adulthood, starting with the agitation of May 1968? How do they describe their journey towards independence and rebellion? For unlike previous generations, there was nothing in their childhood or adolescence to set the alarm bells ringing, and the generation gap only opened up once they had ceased to be consumers and turned into protesters. These baby boomers, whose secondary socialisation mostly took place in high school and, for some, at university, were a fundamentally carefree generation, and listening to *yéyé* music played on the *Salut les copains* radio programme was initially the sum total of their revolt. Their first step towards freedom was therefore what Annabelle describes as a "gentle change":

> The 'sixties, for instance, the *yéyé* years, as they call them, I really found them, well, compared with what had gone before, there was definitely something going on. Even then, things were changing, but it was—how shall I put it?—a gentle change, where nobody got hurt.

In 1968, French society looked prudish and straitlaced compared with British and American society. Elsewhere, high-profile protests and demonstrations had been taking place for nearly a decade, but in France they erupted very suddenly and seemed to come out of nowhere. Since the late 1950s, British society had been swept along by a current of liberalisation, with "a considerable loosening of morals, especially among young people" (Prince 1998), and in 1963 the pace of change quickened. Not to be outdone, older adults started to question the notion of faithfulness in marriage, divorcing more often and living together before remarrying. Throughout this time, France appeared to stay on the sidelines, making the events of 1968 even more momentous, as nobody expected there to be such a seismic shift, least of all journalist Pierre Viansson-Ponté, who wrote an article presciently entitled "France is feeling bored":

> Our young people are bored. Students in Spain, Italy, Belgium, Algeria, Japan, America, Egypt, Germany and even Poland are out in the streets demonstrating, protesting, fighting. They are convinced that there are battles to be won, demands to be heard. That, at the very least, the prevailing absurdity must be met with a feeling of the absurd. French students, on the other hand, are more concerned with whether the girls at Nanterre or Antony will be allowed free access to the boys' rooms, which, let's face it, is a rather reductionist view of human rights.

When France did finally rouse itself from its deep slumber, the seismic events of 1968 rocked every stratum of society. None of the country's institutions escaped the

shockwaves, be it the family, the Church, schools or universities. In this climate of hostility to tradition and the establishment, matched by demands for greater freedom and independence, the student movements took up the anti-authoritarian and libertarian ideas of Reich and Marcuse. Thus, "the calls for a sexual revolution in the 1960s and 1970s grew out of a desire to escape from relations of domination, that is, from the family, patriarchal and phallocratic norms associated with capitalist domination that reined in sexuality". Men and women alike therefore viewed the issue of repression and sexual freedom in political terms.

Before we go any further, it is important to stress once more that although the baby boomers witnessed all these transformations, they were not the sole protagonists. As we have said, it was in 1965 that social indicators, especially family-related ones, started to move. However, as the oldest of the baby boomers had scarcely turned 20 at that point, they obviously did not contribute much to the rise in divorce rates or the fall in fertility. Rather, it was the wartime generations that set the wheels in motion. The baby boomers were the ones who provided the momentum—and who stole all the limelight. Their achievement was to force society to acknowledge that the set of moral rules by which they as individuals had been governed, along with their families, was henceforth obsolete. They also managed, albeit with some difficulty, to convince it that marriage was not the only form of union and that children did not have to be raised in nuclear family units, though again they were not the instigators of change. The same applies to the events of May 1968. We sometimes forget that there were several 1968 generations, for in our rather distorted view of things, the baby boomers are synonymous with the *soixante-huitards*. A number of our respondents, like Charles, did indeed play an active role in the student protest movements. Similarly, Hervé, born in 1946 was "enough of an adult to commit myself to it", and took part in many demonstrations, even setting up a newspaper, while Yann's account shows that it was not necessary to be a militant to espouse the ideas of the protest movements. Many others, however, remained passive spectators, and for some, the events passed them by completely.

Jean-François Sirinelli (2003), too, stresses that May 1968 involved several "generational strata". The oldest participants, born during World War II, were the mentors, and the baby boomers the "foot soldiers", lending the movement its statistical size and historical importance, even if this is not generally how we think of them. The archetypal *soixante-huitard* was a "young, necessarily engaged, urban student" (Sirinelli 2003). Furthermore, that student was male.[26] The fact remains that whether they were leaders, foot soldiers, protagonists or bystanders, male or female, all the baby boomers lived through this period of "catalysis, awakening and acceleration" (Sirinelli 2003, p. 267), and many of them now use it as shorthand to define themselves. In so doing, they are not far from the truth (Sirinelli 2003), for

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[26] Women students are assumed to have taken a backseat. As Christine Bard (2001) makes clear, "The way the students themselves symbolised the movement left very little room for women. […] revolt tends to be a male concept in the collective imagination, pitting men against men, sons against fathers, and the students made believe they were Resistance workers fighting the 'CRS-SS'".

while "two generations 'made' May 1968, only one of them—the second—'was made' by it" (Sirinelli 2003, p. 269). May 1968 certainly did not end when summer came, and for the baby boomers, it was truly a case of before and after 1968. As members of the swollen ranks of the postwar generations, they were to be the main beneficiaries of the events of that year, reaping its rewards without necessarily doing any of the hard work. In what was a traumatised society, they could lay claim to the gains of May 1968 and, through sheer strength of numbers, impose new forms of behaviour. They could even eclipse the preceding generations,[27] taking credit for their exploits.

This is why, even if our youngest respondents were just 15 years old in 1968 and did not necessarily experience the events firsthand, they still benefited from greater freedom, as Thierry explains. It is not so much what happened in that famous month of May that marked the baby boomers as the period that came after, when established society was challenged with ideas about workers' self-management and participation, the family was called into question, and sexual freedom was finally achieved through the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1967 and the legalisation of abortion in 1975. They therefore entered university or the adult world in a totally different climate and wholeheartedly espoused the new ideas about changing society:

> I'm still the product of the 68 generation. I'm 51 years old now, so I was 17 back then and I grew up with all the peace and love stuff, even if I was a bit young for all that. Well… there was no such thing as AIDS back then. Anyway, there was a lot of freedom, there was nothing you couldn't talk about in the 1970s-1980s. I lived a student's life in Lyon, and really it was the life of Reilly. So lots of freedom and lots of opportunities for travelling. As I told you, I spent one summer in America, I came here. So lots of freedom.

They were immersed in a very special atmosphere, where hopes of changing society were combined with the possibility of leading an alternative lifestyle, or "living better", as Hervé puts it a little ruefully:

> I originally wanted to sell cheeses in the Larzac region. That gives you some idea of what we were looking for. Nature… not material possessions, but personal wellbeing.

The story of the baby boomers is therefore very different from that of their parents and grandparents, the generation gap being exacerbated by the sudden and dizzying changes that took place during what Sirinelli (2003) calls the "Decisive Twenty" (1965–1985) and Mendras (1988) the "Second French Revolution". Their contribution was to apply the slogan "It is forbidden to forbid" to both their partnerships and their families, establishing an entirely new set of norms in the process.

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[27] The recollections of sociologist Michel Marié (1989), who was born between the two wars, is highly significant in this respect. "I began to take the measure of this generational phenomenon at the end of the 1960s. The new generation burst onto the scene far more noisily than my own one had done…. Probably better trained, more specialised, and much more concerned with theory, it wasn't long before they spoke out loud and clear (May 1968)…. Up to then, we had always held our elders in great respect. We had to put up a good show in front of our juniors, but just as we were beginning to find our voice, we were drowned out by that of the *soixante-huitards*."

4.3 Conclusion

In the 1960s, people started to hanker after a new society—one with greater freedom, especially sexual freedom—, and sought to move beyond the narrow confines of traditional family life. This state of mind found expression in several publications in the early 1970s. In 1975, for instance, the French quarterly *Autrement* devoted an entire issue to answering the question "Is the family finished?", and Michel Field and Jean-Marie Brohm published their book *Jeunesse et Révolution*. Meanwhile, over in England, David Cooper, a psychiatrist and leading member of the Anti-psychiatry movement, published *The Death of the Family* in 1970, which was swiftly translated into French. Both books shot the family down in flames, portraying it as a stifling and oppressive structure. Cooper described how some individuals could be alienated by the family, an institution that exudes normality and instils conformism. "Characteristically, in a family a child is indoctrinated with the desire to become a certain sort of son or daughter (then husband, wife, father, mother), with a totally enjoined, minutely prescribed 'freedom' to move within the narrow interstices of a rigid lattice of relationship" (Cooper 1970, p. 27). For Field and Brohm (1975), the family institution was characterised by repression and sexual inhibition. They condemned the oppression of women, "who appear to the child solely in their exclusive function of mother and spouse", and denounced the authoritarian model where the father is the "figure of authority, prefiguring those other models of schoolteacher, policeman, priest, boss—and, for the young person, the adult as such".

Feminists and advocates of anti-authoritarian upbringing were delighted to see this institution being called into question and decried as the locus of sexual and generational domination, an instrument of inequality. Back then, women could not work, open a bank account or take decisions affecting the family without their husbands' assent. Indeed it is the discrepancy between young women's aspirations and family law as it then stood that partly explains why some of them preferred to stay single (Yonnet 2006). It is also one of the reasons why nonmarital cohabitation was so popular.

The family, especially the couple, was public enemy number one as far as the baby boomers were concerned. They needed to escape its clutches in order to invent and experience new, freer and more egalitarian forms of communal living. Some groups were particularly keen to avoid the trammels of monogamous marriage and attendant notions of faithfulness, and when Charles Fourier's *Le Nouveau Monde amoureux* was published in 1967, more than 150 years after it was written, it received an "enthusiastic greeting" and enjoyed an "astonishingly wide readership" (Bozon 2005, p. 130). Communities testing alternative lifestyles sprang up across Britain, France and the United States, encapsulated in Gérard Mauger (1975)'s description of one such community in the Parisian suburb of Les Lilas. Although there were several thousand of them in America, elsewhere their numbers remained low. However, even though these sexual experiments never concerned more than a few people and were always short-lived, they left a lasting impression on people's minds and are remembered as a sort of "*enchanted interlude* where everything was sexually possible" (Bozon 2008).

Chapter 5
Rebellious Teenagers

The baby boomers reached adulthood between 1965 and 1974—a time when authority of all kinds was coming under fire, as was the whole notion of the family as an institution. They therefore moved out of the parental home in a general climate of protest and aspirations for change. How far the baby boomers shared these aspirations depended on how strict an upbringing they had received, whether their mother had stayed at home or gone out to work, and the social class of their parents. This is why it is important not to standardise their trajectories, even though they may share some common denominators. In the main, for instance, their departure from the parental home was driven by an irrepressible desire for independence, autonomy and an opportunity to live—or more accurately *invent*—their lives. Many of our respondents describe leaving home as putting an end to what their lives had been so far, as it allowed them to learn how to live independently, untroubled by social norms and parental authority. More prosaically, it meant they could finally have a room of their own, instead of having to share with their siblings. Henceforth, they could choose their own friends and were no longer answerable to anyone. For some young people, this desire for freedom manifested itself particularly brutally, if not painfully, meaning that they left home in an atmosphere of conflict and opposition. At other times, it was an altogether more timid affair, such that moving out was not so much a break as a continuation.

5.1 Residential Separation

5.1.1 *Keeping the Family at Arm's Length*

The nature of the bond between children and parents inevitably dictated the time and the manner in which the residential separation took place. Several respondents mention the family climate that reigned during their adolescence and their entry into adulthood, and underscore the troubled relationship they had with their parents, often to do with their lack of freedom and independence. This was certainly the case

for Nadia, who rebelled against the excessively strict way she was brought up by her parents, members of the Catholic landed bourgeoisie in Northern France. At that time, girls' education did not have the same importance in those circles as it does today, the main goal being to *marry well*:

> I didn't have much of an education. It was still the time when parents would say, "Well, she's got her secretarial diploma so she'll be able to get a job. In any case, once she's married she won't need to work". That's still how people reasoned back then.

Nadia received an extremely strict upbringing, with "very principled" parents who sent her to convent schools, and her revolt was therefore all the more extreme. It led her to reject everything "wholesale" and to rebel by going abroad well before she had reached the age of 18. After spending a year in England, this youthful globetrotter left for Germany, where she stayed for several years, working first as an au pair, then as a secretary for the French troops stationed there. However, army discipline did not go down at all well with our young rebel, nor did the German mindset:

> After a while, I'd had enough. It was always the same thing. And so I went on a secretarial course so that I could find a job in a German company. After the course, it was really, really hard, because I just didn't share the German mindset. The Germans are very rigid and organized, and me not at all, and I hated working as a secretary in the German sector. They're very, very rigorous, very rigid, and they never give an inch. And so one fine day I decided to go back to France.

No sooner had she arrived in France than she set off for the United States:

> I had this sudden flash of inspiration and spent six months travelling around the United States, with just a rucksack. I said to myself, "Off I go", and off I went. I'd think about what to do next when I got back.

When she finally returned to France, she fully intending to go abroad again, rather than settle down and "put down roots":

> Because I didn't really want to settle down. Perhaps I was afraid of putting down roots.

Now that she had got to know Germany and the United States, she decided it was time to explore the Spanish-speaking world. The fates were to decide otherwise, however, and at 32, she moved to Paris, where she met a young Gabonese man and had a child. Her new parental responsibilities did not prevent her from travelling, although she did have to organise things differently. No longer able to travel with just a rucksack, she stayed with friends and acquaintances instead. By this means, she was able to explore much of the African continent, including Togo, Burkina Faso and Mali. However, these trips soon came to an end when she and her husband separated, and she never got to visit Gabon, too afraid to leave her daughter with him. Nadia was never to settle down with a family—or indeed with a job. She viewed herself as someone extremely independent, her daughter being the only fixed point in her life, along with her parents, with whom she remained on good terms until they died. For despite a rebellious youth spent on the margins of society, Nadia never broke off ties with her family. It transpires that it was regular subsidies from her parents that allowed her to enjoy such a comfortable existence, given her precarious employment status. As a result, despite her chaotic beginnings and despite only

working as a supply secretary in a ministry, Nadia owned a large 100 square metre flat in Paris at the time of the interview, together with a flat in Brittany she had just inherited from her father, who died in 2005, and land that was waiting to be divided between her and her brother and sister. Unlike Paul, whose trajectory is described below, Nadia had the best of both worlds, in that she could rebel without suffering the consequences and did not need to fear for the future, thanks to her family's "close protection".

Nadia's revolt was a revolt against the fate her parents had reserved for her—a Catholic married woman with several children, which is what her elder sister became. In some instances, however, young people left home because they did not want to be associated with the social class their parents represented. This is how it was for Thierry, who was born in Lyon in 1951. He went through several phases before distancing himself definitively from his father—a doctor—and his family environment, which he describes as "provincial and petit bourgeois, no skeletons in the cupboard, no divorces, where nothing ever happened… a quiet life". He describes his parents as "socialites" who attached considerable importance to "social success"—something that left Thierry completely cold, as he wanted to be an artist. Unlike his more dutiful elder siblings, Thierry refused to follow the conventional route traced out for him by his father. He initially deviated from it quite cautiously, by deciding to study architecture—a choice his father condemned as unreasonable and not sufficiently prestigious:

> No, no. In those circles even architecture…. I'd say it was above all my father. You had to be a doctor, a soldier… careers like that. The law, the judiciary, the army, and that was about it. So even architecture wasn't seen as at all respectable. Even at that stage, I had to fight, or at least stand up to my father, to get to do architecture. It was regarded as a bit of a failure, it was the fine arts, so not very brilliant. Certainly not ideal. And if I'd listened to what my heart was telling me, I'd have moved to Paris straight after my baccalaureate, and gone to film school, drama school, something along those lines, but that would have been out of the question. So I started out doing architecture, and in my second year, I also enrolled at drama school.

Although he went on to qualify as an architect, he never practised the profession, except to design his current home. After acquiring a taste for freedom as a student in Lyon and during numerous trips abroad, including to the United States, he took a firmer stand, moving to Paris and becoming an actor—something he had long dreamed of doing. This departure reflected a desire to break away from his family and to "live an adventure", shaking off the trammels of family and provincial life:

> I should say right from the start that I came here to distance myself from my family and friends, see them less often, detach myself from them, cut the umbilical cord a bit. It was a deliberate move. I also wanted to succeed in my chosen profession. But I certainly enjoyed cutting loose.

This particular "adventure" was clearly kept under close tabs. Although his father was not happy with the decision he had made, Thierry was initially given a room by a female friend of his parents and he often saw his paternal aunt. His mother, who was altogether more accessible and more sensitive to the arts, frequently visited him in Paris, and although this was not something his father ever did, they managed to maintain a relationship of sorts.

Not all departures were so sudden. As we have seen, Paul, who was born in Paris in 1951, had received a far more relaxed upbringing than most of his fellow respondents, his parents always ready to listen and keep the communication channels open. He describes his parents as "very cool", allowing him to come and go pretty much as he liked. This climate of trust was in total contrast to the one that reigned at his *lycée*, where everything was under tight control, including hair length. Indeed, it was that which prompted Paul to rebel and to take an active part in the events of May 1968, which he sees retrospectively as crucially enabling society to move forward:

> I can't imagine what my life would have been like without [May '68], because that was really what we needed when we were adolescents.

Paul, who used music as his outlet or refuge, is typical of those whose thirst for freedom and new experiences did not require them to break away from their family. Quite the contrary, says Paul, remembering how his mother asked his brother to find out about the cannabis plants one of her friends had asked her to water. Indeed, when he left home at 17 to live according to the ideas of May 1968, he did so with his parents' blessing. He experimented with several forms of communal living, returning home whenever they did not work out, even if his parents' lifestyle was not at all in sync with his own, if his description of their flat is anything to go by: "Part of my father's 'marketing plan' was to live somewhere swanky, somewhere that would give them a bit more status. So it was always in a Haussmannian apartment building."

After May 1968, he settled in a community and worked on and off. He then went to Peru on a "whim", and ended up staying there for 7 years:

> I was really sick of Paris, sick of France… I just went off, just to see, and also I had a whole bunch of Peruvian friends I'd got to know in Paris. They were more or less, well, not quite, political refugees. A lot of people left like that because they couldn't stand it any longer, or because they thought they were going to end up in hot water, and left before they were chucked out. They said "Why don't you come, too?" and off I went.

After several months of extreme hardship, he eventually found a job through his network of friends, giving private French lessons. He could now earn a more than decent living by working just 5 hours a day. Shortly afterwards, he contracted a marriage of convenience in order to obtain a residence permit. When he returned to France, he had a series of precarious jobs in art galleries and later as a translator. This particular atypical trajectory cannot be explained by generational conflict, because throughout his life, Paul remained on excellent terms with his family. When he came back from Peru, for instance, his brother found him a flat through his concierge. Even so, at the time of the interview, his status remained shaky, for unlike Nadia, he never took advantage of his parents' wealth. Similar instances of a liberal family upbringing and rebellion against a stifling educational system have been observed by American sociologists, for while authoritarian parents have often been cited as one of the main causes of youthful revolt, the actual explanation is less clearcut, witness the academic controversy that arose in the wake of the student protests in the United States in the mid-1960s. Several contradictory hypotheses

were put forward, based on either generational conflict or generational complicity. According to Lewis Feuer, for instance, author of *The Conflict of Generations* (1969), it was the perceived illegitimacy of paternal authority and the concentration of power in the previous generation's hands that prompted young people to rebel against what they viewed as an alienating society. Bruno Bettelheim, on the other hand, in a slim volume entitled *Obsolete Youth: Towards a Psychograph of Adolescent Rebellion*, denounced the way in which parents combined laxist and permissive upbringing with arbitrary prohibitions. According to him, this combination of freedom and repression disorientated young people and led them to rebel against their parents. As for Edgar Morin, he deemed that American youth had generally received an authoritarian upbringing, albeit slightly more relaxed than the one their parents had experienced in the 1920–1930s. For him, their rebellion stemmed more from a conflict between two societal ideologies: the "individualism of ownership, acquisition and possession" favoured by their parents, and "the individualism of sensation, enjoyment and exaltation" (Morin 1970, p. 515).

One of the champions of the generational complicity theory was Richard Flacks (1967), who claimed that well-to-do parents encouraged their children to take responsibility and not to heed other people's opinions. These children therefore shared their parents' values and their ideals of liberal humanism that encompassed freedom, equality, justice and happiness (Granjon 1985). This hypothesis was supported by Kenneth Keniston (1971), who made a distinction between "political activists", who wanted to live according to the beliefs with which they had been inculcated within the family, and "cultural activists", who were generally in conflict with their parents. Even so, he highlighted ambiguities in the way the baby boomers were brought up by their parents, oscillating between adherence to traditional rules and no rules at all. As a result, these spoilt children and adolescents had no taste for hard work and no sense of limits. For those who argued the case for intergenerational harmony, it was the gulf between this more liberal upbringing and the worlds of work and education, which continued to be characterised by authority, discipline and the competitive spirit, that triggered the student protest movement. This theory was taken up by Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus (1970), who described how young people who had been treated as autonomous individuals by their parents suddenly came up against an impersonal and authoritarian university bureaucracy that had become even more rigid with the opening of large campuses, providing an unwelcome foretaste of the world of work. Out of this grew the need to recreate spaces where their personal identity was in harmony with the community. While this is a fascinating debate, it is difficult to say which side is right. Indeed, they are probably both right, as we can find girls and boys who rebelled against their authoritarian families (like Nadia) and others who grew up in a more liberal family atmosphere, only to rebel against the university system and society in general (like Paul and Charles). Nor can we ignore the role that gender played in determining the way they were brought up, with girls often being kept under tighter supervision than boys.

Not that this was Linda's experience. Born in London in 1947, she was to have a "hectic trajectory". By the time she was 22, she had already lived in every corner of England, having left her family at the age of 16 to study music in a college in the

Southwest. Two years after that, she became a student at Newcastle University, and subsequently moved to London University, where she shared a flat with a man who later rose to fame as the presenter of a rock and contemporary music programme on television:

> I had left my parental home; I had an independence that I didn't have at home. I mean for example I am a very short-sighted person and as a child I always had to wear glasses and I disliked wearing glasses painfully. So as soon as I escaped from my mother at sixteen. I stopped wearing my glasses and spent the next 5 years as blind as a bat but very happy. If I had been at home, they would have said "wear your glasses."

Unlike Nadia, her departure was absolutely not driven by a desire to escape from a stifling family atmosphere. Nor was it a sign of rebellion against her parents' social background, as it was in Thierry's case. In actual fact, leaving home at an early age was quite a common practice in England, and certainly not restricted to the middle or upper classes, as Cécile Van de Velde (2008) explains for more recent generations. The most striking example is that of Dennis, who left school at 15. He describes with passion the sense of freedom he had when he left home and the prevailing optimism:

> It just felt that you could almost do anything. I think there was an optimism about the 60's. I know that there was very poor housing, there was poverty, there was a lot of racial discrimination, and all the kind of social issues that were around. But through the trendy, swinging 60's and all that kind of stuff, there was a sense of kind of freedom of young people that could have their say, almost like you could do what you want. I remember conversations with my dad about that I didn't want to settle down in a job, and of course I was the antipathy of what he did."

We can also cite the example of Maureen, aged 59 at the time of the survey, who left her very working-class home in the Medway Towns in Kent at the age of 19 to "explore" London. She initially moved in with one of her sisters, who shared a flat with some of her fellow students, and later rented a flat with a friend in Hampstead, where they stayed for 6 years:

> I left home when I was 19. I was the second sister and my other sister had just moved previously to university and I came to stay with her and ended up staying with her.

Theirs were fluid trajectories, moved by a free and carefree spirit that meant that they occasionally strayed off the beaten path. While there were sometimes family conflicts in the background, this was not always the case by any means. The common denominator here is a feeling of being able to invent their lives and remain firmly in control of them. The fact that our respondents' narratives contain such frequent references to their schooling and, above all, to their time at university, shows that, for the generations responsible for the "school explosion", their experiences at primary school, boarding school and university helped them forge their autonomy.

5.1.2 Residential Separation, Study and Work

The postwar school explosion was quite unprecedented, and the generations born immediately after the war were its first beneficiaries. Our respondents' parents laid

great store by education, regarding it as a means of climbing the "social ladder" and placing considerable emphasis on "doing well at school". We can hear the pride in Suzanne's voice as she announces that "I come from a farming background, but we all went on to higher education". Although it is true to say that girls benefitted from the school explosion, characterised not just by mass schooling but also by more years spent in education, there are one or two provisos. As we saw in Nadia's narrative, "marrying well" was a tempting prospect for many girls at that time, especially in certain circles—including hers. Paul's account, meanwhile, is an example of the unfavourable light in which some people viewed the education system at the time, seeing it as authoritarian. Even so, the expansion of this system was to transform young people's relationship not just with school, henceforth a locus of sociability, but also with their parents. Although it comes in for severe criticism from some of our respondents, in particular Jacques and Philippe, boarding school represented the first step towards independence, helping them build their autonomy and prepare for adult life. On occasion, it also introduced children to a "new world". Suzanne, for example, the oldest of five children, had her "first contact" with urban life—her "first shock"—when she started at secondary school, describing the system of buses and trains that allowed her to cover the 7 miles separating school from her parents' farm.

For some people, going to secondary school brought their first separation from their parents, while a large number of respondents left home when they went to university. This was particularly true in England, where the building of the *new*, or *plate glass*, universities of Kent, Essex, Sussex, York and East Anglia, among others, meant that young people from poorer backgrounds now had access—albeit limited—to higher education. Those baby boomers who belonged to the middle and working classes were able to take advantage of the new education policy and choose a university a couple of 100 miles away from the family home. Julia, who spent her childhood in a succession of boarding schools, describes her feeling of liberation when she went away to university:

> I was leading a very secluded life in a very middle class traditional way in as much as finishing school at school and very cut off from what was going on out there. I was at schools where we didn't watch television. I was very not in touch with the wider world. So when I moved and was independent it was all a very mind blowing experience. Then when I met somebody who lived at Bristol University I went down there and thought wow…!

At that time, going to university was something of a rite of passage, where children moved out of the parental home for good and embarked on adult life. Susan was born in 1949 into a Liverpudlian working-class family, and left home at 19 to study at the University of Sussex. When asked by the interviewer why she had gone all the way to Sussex, she clearly found the question highly incongruous, given just how obvious the answer seemed to her:

> You don't need to ask that question, do you? This was the university of its time; it was really in the vanguard in terms of, I suppose, people breaking out of confines of various sorts of behaviour, from intellectual ways of dealing with your university experience to people who are quite radical and so on. So it's quite an expression for me of getting away from a confined sort of environment.

Barbara expresses similar sentiments in relation to the hard job young people have leaving home today[1]:

> But they do come back because in some cases they don't have the option these days unless they rent. I would never have dreamt of going home after university. I went to university in Nottingham and then came back and lived in West London for a while and then rented in upper Norwood which is where I bought my first flat.

In France, too, leaving home was perceived of as a means of achieving long-awaited freedom and autonomy. Back then, however, becoming a student generally meant leaving one's home town or village and going to Paris or some other major city like Lyon, because that was where the universities were. As Corsican-born Charles recalls:

> I left Corsica, because back then, if you wanted to go on to higher education after the baccalaureate, you had to go to Aix, Marseilles or Nice. And so I went to Nice, which is where I found my first job. So I lived through the events of May '68. I was a very enthusiastic barricade builder, I was in the thick of it in May '68. Let's say I enjoyed fighting that particular fight…

Because the events of May 1968 coincided with his leaving home, they amplified his feeling of freedom and speeded his way to independence. Higher education also provided Claire with an opportunity to cut loose from her family. Born in 1945, she spent her childhood in Bazas and left for Bordeaux to study law, before moving to Paris, where she had her first sexual experience without contraceptives, which had not yet been legalised in France:

> Bordeaux was great because it's a nice city where students rule the roost. And I didn't have my parents on my back all the time. So it was good. I met a man and followed him to Paris, and there… well, it was in 1963–64, I'd only slept with him five times, ten at the most, when I got pregnant…

5.1.3   Residential Separation and an Employee's Job Market

It is important to emphasise that not all our respondents were able to take advantage of the new mass education. It was not yet equally accessible to all, such that many more young people were in employment than in high school or university. Some of our respondents emerged from the education system at a very early age, especially since it was a period of full employment, making unemployment virtually a thing of the past.[2] They had a variety of reasons for doing so, some of them financial.

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[1] Cécile van de Velde (2008) shows that going to university is still regarded as a rite of passage, when teenagers have to start standing on their own two feet. However, whereas it also used to mean leaving home for good, young people are increasingly moving back in with their parents, often because of the difficult housing market. This is experienced as a necessity rather than a choice, if they are forced to remain there for any length of time.

[2] In 1968, the French unemployment rate in the first 2 years after leaving school or university was 5 %, compared with 33 % in 1994 (Chauvel 2002).

Their parents might need them to help out on the farm or in the shop, or might not be able to put them through university. Nor was the education system to everyone's liking: Dennis, for one, simply could not stand to remain in school a minute longer than he had to. There were also those who longed for autonomy and a chance to escape parental supervision. Most of our baby boomers highlight the ease with which they entered the job market, as Western Europe was then enjoying the height of prosperity (1965–1975). They talk about a golden age of employment, where they could change jobs at the drop of a hat, and were convinced they were in for a bright future. Suzanne describes just how easily she found work when she moved to Paris with her husband, stressing that she was "spoilt for choice". After finding a job in the personnel department of a human resources division, she cast around for something else to do, and serendipitously became a proofreader, after an advertisement ("Publishing house looking for intelligent employee") caught her imagination. She was shocked by the wording of the advert, but curiosity got the better of her. She went for an interview at the publishers' and decided to take up a job offer there, thus becoming a proofreader quite "by chance":

> And then I saw an ad one day that really caught my eye. I thought they were way out of line. They'd got some nerve. Especially as I'd worked in a personnel department where we used to advertise for staff, and thirty years ago we'd never have allowed ourselves to put that. It was shocking, even. I actually had a job I was due to start in a few days' time, but I went anyway. Really out of curiosity, you know. And ended up staying there.

When asked to describe his occupational trajectory, Jacques recalls how he went for an interview as a designer the very day after he finished his national service. He was hired on the spot and remained there for 33 years:

> And so I finished with the army and the next day I went and introduced myself, armed with all the usual portfolios that people put together in the artistic professions. And so he took a look and said, "You start tomorrow morning". And that was that. And I spent thirty-three years there—I never left.

Edouard also explains how, back then, "you knew where you could go, they pointed us in the right direction" with a "career plan". Lastly, Martin, who brought up the tail end of the baby boom, talks about his adolescence and the almost surreal "opulence" of the job market:

> They had such hope in the future. Everything was doing well. Companies were expanding, so they needed to take on more staff. I can remember seeing companies, when I was a lad, going out to look for staff. Just imagine! They'd go out into the streets and see if anyone would come and work for them. Whereas now, people queue to find work. So that created a totally different state of mind.

Another factor that emerges from these narratives is the draw of the bright lights. In many respects, the large flows of baby boomers to Paris or London in the 1960s and 1970s corresponded to the classic models of urban migration, in that these young people were driven by better job opportunities and the pursuit of higher education. Not that these were the only reasons, as they were also eager to escape the straitjacket of provincial life and enjoy greater freedom (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). Many of them rejected the lifestyle associated with rural and provincial communities, and

were looking for new experiences that only city life could offer them. For some of them, Paris and London offered them the perfect setting in which to promote the ideals of the 1960s counterculture, live according to their aspirations and participate in the sexual revolution, well away from their parents' disapproving eyes. Their narratives clearly convey the attraction they felt for this cosmopolitan life. Judith, for instance, one of our youngest respondents, who was born in 1954, moved to London with her boyfriend after graduating from York University. Paris, meanwhile, exercised its charms on Thierry via his television screen:

> I'd already been to Paris as a tourist, so I already knew my way around the city and I felt really drawn to it. I liked the fun and glamour side of Paris you saw on television. And I just felt I was going round in circles in Lyon. Back then, it wasn't as culturally developed as it is now. It's more interesting now. The city was dirtier, less interesting culturally. […] I felt I'd seen all there was to see of the little bands, the bands that interested me. And I was ambitious back then, I wanted to succeed. So I decided to try my luck in Paris. I saw it as a challenge. But it was still a real adventure and I worked really, really hard to succeed.

Armed with an accounts secretary diploma, Carole was 19 when she moved to Paris, sharing a bedsit there with her older brother. In her description of what it was like when she arrived, she associates the city with the "magnificent" 1970s:

> There was something magnificent about 1970s Paris. It was a really special place. I came straight from the sticks and I was just 19. I used to eat at a little restaurant nearby—we were at number 79 and the restaurant was at number 75—where there was a real mix of occupations. We'd eat together there every lunchtime, people from the courtyard, plus a mechanic from the street opposite, a surveyor who worked a bit further away, and a carpenter. And there I was, and it felt really great, all these men hovering over me because I was this young thing who'd just arrived.

As we have seen, leaving home to find work or go to university often entailed picking up one's roots and migrating to the capital or nearest big city, meaning that on top of residential autonomy came an introduction to city life, the student experience or the world of work. If we had to choose just one word to describe the baby boomers, it would therefore have to be *freedom*, as this is what comes through most clearly in their interviews. Freedom to invent their own lives. Freedom, too, to choose the occupation they wanted, however unconventional, for many of our respondents ventured into the arts. We saw earlier how Thierry became a stage actor, working in several theatre companies and making a name for himself in radio. He also worked in a shop at weekends, and later put his training as an architect and an actor to good use by teaching interpersonal communication skills. William, meanwhile, who spent his entire childhood in Norwich, left home at 18 to attend Queen Elizabeth College in London, where he could hang out in jazz clubs:

> I just want to get out of the house really. London was quite an attractive kind of a place. I suppose that was because when I was in the sixth form we used to come down here quite a lot. We used to go to down to the Flamingo Club in Wardour Street, sometimes come down and stay out all night in London. That was quite an attractive thing to do. So we used to tell our parents that we were going to the sixth form dance and we'd probably stay around the corner with so and so and then we'd get in a car and drive down to London, stay out all night in the Flamingo.

The winds of freedom did not always blow quite this strongly. Other moves were more cautious, even if they, too, reflected a need for autonomy. This was certainly

true for Annabelle and Nadine, who both left the parental home, one to move two numbers down from them, the other 500 yards away. This may seem a far remove from Nadia's experience, but it does not necessarily mean that their desire for freedom was any less intense. Both Annabelle and Nadine left home because they wanted to live on their own, and did so with their parents' blessing, or at least their acceptance. Nadine would later marry, then divorce, while Annabelle lived on and off with a partner before permanently living on her own. We are a long way away here from the stories of women born just before or during the war, who would never have contemplated leaving their parents in order to live on their own (Clément 2009). Leaving home other than to get married was not the done thing, and was usually a last resort when family relations had irrevocably broken down, although it could sometimes be because their particular conception or image of womanhood did not necessarily involve marriage, then an all-powerful institution. The speed of change from one generation to the next was therefore phenomenal, although it is important to remember that our respondents' generations were far from homogeneous, and although all the baby boomers lived through the momentous events of the 1960s in Britain and May 1968 in France, these events did not always have the same significance for them[3].

5.2   Girls Against Motherhood

5.2.1   Liberation for and Through Women?

It is important not to overlook the major role played by women in May 1968. For although it often looks as though they took a backseat[4], the events nonetheless proved to be a turning point for all who took part. Julie Pagis' (2009) study of the women who played an active role in it shows just how differently it was experienced by men and by women. If anything, May 1968 was more significant for women, who describe it as having a huge impact on their political, family and conjugal life histories. According to these women, there could be "no return to the old order, and things were never the same again" (Pagis 2009, p. 101). Pagis cites the example of

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[3] Instead of a sudden and dramatic moment of revelation à la May 1968, Britain experienced a gradual revolution throughout the 1960s (Marwick 2003).

[4] Anne Zelensky (2008) writes that "In the great commemorative circus that surrounds May 1968, little mention is made of the role that women played in what we called the 'revolution'. Nobody cannot deny they were present, alongside their Leftist boyfriends. Mostly in the shadows. It was 'down with hierarchy, authority, roles' but only in words, not in deeds, because it was still the girls who worked the coffeemaker and the Roneo machine. At the time, they didn't say anything. After all, it takes more than a month to shed a time-honoured tradition of service. But 2 years later, they flocked to join the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes, or MLF, as the media called it, by analogy with the American Women's Lib. By then, they were completely disillusioned and wanted their own movement, where they could talk about things that mattered to them, and print their own manifestos."

Noëlla, born in 1948 to a right-wing Catholic family of modest tradesmen in Bordeaux, whose story is too eloquent not to be included here:

> I think I can say I was born in 1968… I woke up from a kind of sleep induced by my upbringing, with all the constraints, all the guilt that had been heaped up on me… Maybe I'm exaggerating, but for me these were the most important events in my life, when everything truly began. (Pagis 2009, p. 97)

It gave women a sense of generational belonging that men did not necessarily have, for there was "no equivalent men's movement to give them a new identity in the wake of May 1968, a peg on which to hang their life histories" (Pagis 2009, p. 115). As a result:

> It is easier for women to reconstruct their life stories so that they have a before- and after-1968, because they can portray the events of 1968 as the point at which their lives switched from a state of sexual conservatism to "women's liberation", even if, objectively, this switch took place not in 1968 but in 1970. (Pagis 2009, p. 114)

May 1968 marked the start in France of a second feminist wave that was emerging all over the world, especially in the United States. Even so, as Julie de Dardel (2007) is careful to point out, the French women's liberation organisation (MLF) actually came about because of women's conflictual relationship with this protest movement. Its male protagonists had refused to champion the women's cause, dismissing it as a sideshow to the main event (class war). Disappointed by this lack of recognition and far from satisfied by the theses and strategies propounded by the traditional Communists and leftist groups, the feminists therefore disengaged from this movement. Having got hold of the writings of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, they made sexual liberation—hitherto instrumentalised by men—their key demand. They had a different reading of it from men, and viewed it from a very different perspective. For them, the exploitative system was not the capitalist system but the patriarchal one, which they identified as their "enemy number one" (Delphy 1970/1998). They also held that it was in the private sphere that these relationships of male dominance prevailed, where women's sexuality was appropriated by men in the shape of the State, the family doctor, and the head of the family, be it the husband or the father. In 1956, just 1 year after Pincus invented the pill, Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé founded La Maternité Heureuse, which was renamed the French Family Planning Movement (MFPF) 4 years later. However, as Michèle Ferrand (2004) underlines, its stated aim was not so much to reject motherhood, still portrayed as women's chief role in life, as to plan it. Thus, feminists not only asserted their individual freedom by seeking to reappropriate their bodies, hence slogans such as "Our wombs belong to us" and "A baby if I want it when I want it", but also demanded the right to enjoy sexual intercourse without having to worry about the risk of falling pregnant. This particular demand would only later be satisfied, and for the time being women continued to feel "fear in the belly" (Thébaud 1984), as Simone de Beauvoir put it.

Referred to as the "refusal generations" (Knibiehler 1997)[5], these women went against their mothers and denounced a social order they viewed as patriarchal,

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[5] It should be noted that women were divided over the issue of motherhood, witness the so-called *essentialist tendency* represented by Antoinette Fouque and her Pyschanalyse et Politique organization.

refusing to accept the inevitability of motherhood and demanding the right to define their own sexuality. Not by chance is the introduction of the contraceptive pill seen as one of the most decisive events in the twentieth century as far as women's history is concerned (Leridon 1987), although when it was passed in 1967, the Neuwirth Act initially "had very little impact, as the highly restrictive decrees of application took a long time to come through [1974], and the majority of doctors were hostile to the pill" (Knibiehler 2004b). Moreover, although this legislation legalised the pill, anti-conception propaganda[6] and abortion remained illegal. Feminists demanded total procreational freedom, and adopted the rallying cry "Contraception and abortion free and freely available to for everyone" (Ferrand 2004), not just so that women could enjoy their sexuality to the full, but also to make risky backstreet abortions a thing of the past.

In 1966, Betty Friedan had set up the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the United States, and France, too, became home to several feminist organizations, especially after 1970. This was the year the MLF was born, with the publication in October of a special issue of *Partisans* entitled "Women's Liberation, Year Zero". By then, it had already staged its first media coup[7], and a great many others were to follow. In April 1971, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published the "Manifesto of the 343"[8] famous or anonymous French women who publicly declared they had had an abortion. Although this meant they were exposing themselves to legal action, some were too famous[9] for this to happen, which further called the law into disrepute. Then came a manifesto of 252 doctors who supported the cause, followed by the Bobigny abortion trial in 1972, in which a 17-year-old girl, Marie-Claire, and her mother were defended by Gisèle Halimi, a lawyer and feminist activist who turned the court case into an indictment of the existing legislation. Finally, in 1974, the French Parliament passed the Veil Abortion Act, with 284 votes for and 189 votes against. It was reviewed after 5 years and confirmed by Parliament in 1979. The newfound availability of abortion and contraception allowed women to have a "decentred" sexuality that was "freed from the needs of reproduction" (Giddens 1992, p. 10). Sexual pleasure ceased to be a taboo subject, with the development of what Anthony Giddens called a more "plastic" sexuality. It also enabled women to assume equal partnership, all the while freeing their sexuality from the imperative of coitus, the "rule of the phallus" and the "overweening importance of male sexual experience" (Giddens 1992, p. 12). Even so, "in reality, the 'sexual revolution' remained gendered" (Rebreyend 2009), in that this emancipation chiefly concerned white, heterosexual men from well-to-do classes and preserved the model of male-dominated heterosexuality (Autain et al. 2002; but see also Holland et al. 2002).

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[6] This Act only legalised the pill as a means of regulating menstrual cycles and treating certain forms of sterility. It banned local female contraception, all the while authorising the sale of male condoms in order to combat sexually transmitted diseases (Leridon 1987).

[7] On 26 August 1970, demonstration at the Arc de Triomphe featuring banners with the words "Even more unknown than the unknown soldier: his wife".

[8] Nicknamed the "Manifesto of 343 sluts", inspired by a *Charlie Hebdo* cover headline.

[9] Not least Simone de Beauvoir, Catherine Deneuve, Marguerite Duras, Brigitte Fontaine, Gisèle Halimi, Bernadette Lafont, Violette Leduc, Ariane Mnouchkine, Jeanne Moreau, Marie-France Pisier, Yvette Roudy, Françoise Sagan and Nadine Trintignant.

Despite the prevalence of terms as *sexual revolution*[10], *sexual liberation*[11], and *sexual freedom*, Michel Bozon (2009b) claims that the whole notion of sexual revolution needs to be reassessed, both politically and scientifically, echoing sentiments first voiced by Michel Foucault in 1976. Bozon (2002) prefers to take the *sexual* out of *liberation*, for when interviewed, women who practised protected sex in the 1960s talk more of a release from fear and uncertainty, combined with the prospect of greater autonomy and more control over their life events calendar. Women seem to have adhered to "autonomy slogans such as 'My body belongs to me'—which has nothing to do with sexual liberation—rather than to credos of unrestrained sexual pleasure, which are more about sexual anarchy. At the end of the day, autonomy won out over unrestricted pleasure" (Bozon 2002). For this reason, he prefers to use the expression *individualisation of sexuality*. Several authors point out that the advent of contraception and legal abortion actually resulted in new norms and new procreational constraints being imposed on women (Bajos and Ferrand 2006). Nonetheless, even if we accept Maryse Jaspard's claim that the sexual revolution simply never took place and is just another urban myth, we can argue—as she does—that "even if the term 'sexual revolution' is a little over the top, a change definitely took place" (Jaspard 1997). Hitherto taboo terms such as *orgasm*, *women's oppression*, *contraception*, *abortion* and *homosexuality* first appeared in the slogans and public debates of May 1968, and they brought with them an acknowledgement of women's sexuality, frequently dominated by reproduction and governed by a sexual double standard (or double model)[12].

5.2.2   Female Trajectories: Different Timescales

The protest movement accompanying the sexual revolution radically altered the place of women in both the private and public spheres of society. It was a cultural revolution, in which female baby boomers were not only the chief beneficiaries but also the chief movers—or at least witnesses. Even so, as we have seen, the winds of freedom did not always blow with the same force or at the same time. Some women were already married with children, so even though the "second contraceptive revolution" (Leridon 1987) actually began in the 1950s, it did not immediately affect them. Claire, for instance, who was born in 1945, left home in 1963 to study in a university town, where she had her first sexual experiences without the pill. As

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[10] "*Sexual revolution* refers to the politicisation of the struggle against systems of sexual repression, and is part of a broader reformist and/or radical project to transform society" (Giami 2002).

[11] "*Sexual liberation* can be defined as obtaining the benefits of nonprocreative sex and the psychological satisfaction that is assumed to go with this (such as overcoming the processes that stand in the way of these benefits)" (Giami 2002).

[12] This sexual double standard was characterised by greater tolerance shown towards men by society and a principle of virginity, fidelity and exclusive love for women. This double standard comes through in the different standards of proof required to establish adultery in France. It was also practised in Britain (Stone 1990).

the movement gradually gained momentum, so other women gained more freedom, such that Odile, born just 6 years after Claire, has a very different tale to tell:

> I lived through the pill and all that, all those changes. It really was a fabulous sense of freedom. And it was real freedom, too, with none of the fear of AIDS that youngsters have to deal with now. We had a ball, it really was the discovery of freedom. It's quite true, it was total freedom!

In 1970, however, although 97 % of women of reproductive age knew about the pill, only 18 % of them had already used it, and withdrawal remained the primary method of birth control. Eight years later, this figure had risen to 54 %, and 28 % (Leridon 1987). Some women married without living with their partner first, and regretted not having this trial period, which would have given them time to make an informed choice. They therefore encouraged their children not to rush into marriage and to "make sure they chose the moment that was right for them" (Chalvon-Demersay 1983). Within the baby boom generations, we can observe several different timescales at work, each with its own logic. Laurent Toulemon (1994), for instance, claims that changes in women's status were linked to changes in the transition to adulthood. The baby boom generations certainly differed from their parents in that they left home earlier (Attias-Donfut 1995b) and there was a shorter transitional phase. Furthermore, from the 1960s onwards, the length of education steadily increased, while the age at marriage continuously decreased. As a result, the ages at which young people crossed the big three thresholds (finishing education, finding a job and starting a family) came ever closer, and family succeeded family without any real transition, especially for the 1946–1950 generations, according to Hervé Le Bras (1983):

> There was no room for the increasingly lengthy period of postadolescence we see today. People moved directly from one stage in the lifecycle to the next, without any transition. Scarcely had they finished their studies than they landed a job, and scarcely had they married than the first child arrived, followed by others in quick succession.

Despite the relative synchrony and even homogeneity of this model, not everyone reached these stages at the same age, and there were both social (Galland 1997) and gender-based differences. In the case of men, for instance, national service, constituted a clear demarcation line between adolescence and adulthood. Nor was this model destined to last for long: the events of May 1968 saw to that, by disrupting intergenerational and gender relations and modifying the stages that marked the entry into adulthood, in successive waves of changes. Conjugal and family trajectories felt the impact of these events, too, with the advent of ostensibly new types of union formation, such as nonmarital cohabitation.

Drawing on data yielded by the *Family situations* survey conducted by INED in 1985, Toulemon (1994) found that although the life events calendar became compressed for both men and women born between 1946 and 1950, women started to exhibit a new form of behaviour, in that they more frequently worked before forming their first union. The truly pivotal generations, however, were those born in 1951–1955. Women now left home earlier than men, and above all they left in order to live alone. At the same time, nonmarital unions became increasingly

popular, even if marriage swiftly ensued in general. The final 1956–1960 cohort (not represented by our sample) completed this process by generalising nonmarital cohabitation and turning it into a more durable state. The change in female status therefore took place in waves, with each generation of women moving further into uncharted waters, pioneering some new advance, and inventing a new model, be it paid employment, juvenile cohabitation, adult cohabitation or, a few years down the line, divorce. In many respects, the postwar generations were therefore transitional, pivotal generations, initiating new forms of behaviour that gave them greater autonomy from partner or family, and adopting new—and liberating—family, conjugal and occupational models.

5.2.3   Work, a Feminine Noun

The steep rise in the number of working women that can be traced back to the early 1960s was the driving force behind the massive social change seen in industrialised nations, above all the United States, Britain and France. In 1950, women had represented less than 20% of the economically active labour force in France and more than 30% in Britain. In 2008, this figure stood at above 45% in both countries. It was a change that was not immediately apparent in France, being masked by "the coming of age of the swollen baby boom generations, and the huge and sudden influx of colonists who had to be repatriated following Algerian independence" (Norvez 1990). It is important to bear in mind that female employment predated the 1960s and, indeed, the start of World War II. Women's work had long been a reality, not least because employers knew they could get away with paying women half as much as men (Bard 2001). What was new was the advent of jobs for women and female salaried employment (Maruani 2000).

Women's presence in the economically active labour force was therefore a fact of life in both Britain and France, and proportions remained fairly stable until 1950, although it is difficult to make comparisons, as figures are based on the total population rather than on the number of women of working age. To make matters worse, the definition of farming in France (Fouquet 1992) has changed with each successive survey, making it difficult to compare like with like.[13] Even so, we can safely assume that "women have always worked" (Schweitzer 2002), for in what was previously a predominantly rural and agrarian society, women, and indeed all family members, would be expected to help out on the farm or in the family business, and not just by carrying out the domestic chores. As such, "women's work corresponds to an extremely ancient economic activity" (Bédarida 1990, p. 379). The blurred boundaries between the private and occupational spheres, plus the fact that it was unpaid, meant that their work remained invisible for many centuries, uncounted and thus unrecognised. Only with the industrial revolution and the attendant separation

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[13] After eliminating age structure effects and variations in the definition of the active farming population, Alain Norvez (1990) reaches the same conclusion, namely that in 1962, the female employment rate stood at just 29%, the lowest figure since the beginning of the twentieth century.

between work and private life did working women achieve visibility. According to François Bédarida, "it was [the industrial revolution] that laid the long-term foundations for emancipation by shattering the patriarchal framework of work in the home" (Bédarida 1990, p. 379). Even so, the shift from farming to industry cannot entirely explain how working women achieved their new visibility, as some women already regularly worked outside the home in the pre-industrial period. Rather, it was the sudden spotlight on women's work (Scott 1991), condemned as a pathogenic social situation, that threw it into sharp relief. This led to the idea that women's wages were just a top-up, a source of extra income, and above all that their work disturbed the family equilibrium. While social inquirers and economists in the mid-nineteenth century denounced women's appalling working conditions, they also underlined the attendant risks of family breakdown and female immorality (Villermé 1840).[14] Thus, if middle-class women were so eager to adopt the housewife model, it is because work was regarded as deviant. It was also seen as demeaning, not just for them but also for their husbands, as it suggested that they could not provide for their families. Those middle-class women who did work were therefore looked down upon: only charity work was deemed respectable.[15] Women belonging to the Victorian bourgeoisie skilfully took on the rural family model and adapted it to urban industrial society by *sublimating* it. Henceforth, men were the sole owners of productive, knowledge or human capital, and had a duty to protect their womenfolk, who were reduced to *weak creatures* and *fragile flowers*. Action and command were for men, and submission and devotion for women. Coventry Patmore waxed lyrical about the "angel of the house" and John Ruskin about the "temple of the hearth", and "Home, Sweet Home" was the eternal refrain. From this perspective, working women, whether they were factory girls or blue-stockings[16], were both stigmatised and stigmatising, for this was an age when "an inactive woman embodied family prosperity" (Blunden 1982, p. 32).

In the Great War, women on both side of the Channel were asked to work in order to prevent the national economy from collapsing, but this did nothing to undermine the cult of the housewife. Although women had contributed to the war effort by taking up salaried jobs, replacing the men in the fields, the factories or the tertiary sector (schools, businesses, transport), as well as volunteering to be nurses, canteen workers, and so on, the war simply magnified the feminisation of certain

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[14] Joan Scott also cites J.-V. Daubié's *La Femme Pauvre au XIXe siècle* (1859) and J. Simon's *L'Ouvrière* (1861).

[15] See Katherine Blunden (1982) for the situation in Britain.

[16] Not only were female manual workers stigmatised but so, too, were women intellectuals. When women in France were admitted to the bar, its male members were not slow to voice their opposition. "Everything was grist to their mill. Women's lack of physical force, the difficulty they would have wielding legal Latin […], the danger of magistrates succumbing to their charms, given that women are, by nature, coquettish" (Arnaud-Duc 1991). They also found it hard to enter the field of art, where "[…] the most effective barrier was the idea that genius is exclusively masculine" (Higonnet 1992).

occupations[17], and meant that women were regarded as just "temporary replacements" in the others, the understanding being that when the men returned from the trenches, they would get their old jobs back and recover their role as head of the household. In France, women were held responsible for population decline and were thus supposed to go home and repopulate the country. The interwar period saw an even more intense pro-natalist offensive than before. On 26 May 1920, for instance, the Medal of the French Family was created, rewarding mothers who had had at least five legitimate children, and Mothers' Day was officially recognised in 1926. Women who went out to work were often singled out for criticism, for this was the period when a new figure emerged, that of the "queen of the household" (Bard 2001), and even if the number of women who worked was still quite high in 1920 (33 % of workers were female in France and 29 % in Britain), the general trend between 1921 and 1936 was for women to return to the home, with the result that the total number of working women in France fell from 8,393,999 to 7,081,000 over this period (Knibiehler 1997, p. 312). This figure reached its lowest point in 1961, when the model of the woman as guardian of the hearth was at its most popular (let us not forget that until 1965, husbands could prevent their wives from going out to work). From the 1960s onwards, this model finally began to crumble—slowly at first, then increasingly rapidly, as women no longer had to rely on being housewives or full time mothers to acquire social status.

Although the English model was rather similar, it started to disintegrate somewhat earlier, as British feminists were more successful at winning rights for women than their French sisters. As a result of campaigns launched towards the end of the nineteenth century, women over 30 were given the vote in 1918. The number of women working outside the home started to rise as early as 1951 in Britain, and did so increasingly rapidly. Although there were differences in the nature of female employment, with part-time work being far more common in Britain than it was in France, the reasons (Maruani 2000) behind this trend were broadly the same, starting with better education[18]. Women were both the chief beneficiaries and the driving force behind the expansion of the service sector, which broadened the range of occupations that were open to them. Then there were the medical advances and legal changes that gave women greater control over their careers and their family life. Last but not least, now that the model of the stay-at-home mother had spread to every layer of society, it ceased to be valued, and this reversal of the value system meant that women now had a different relationship to employment. Women belonging to the bourgeoisie now went out to work, and more importantly, so did young women who were either married or cohabited, with one or two young children. This

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[17] Françoise Thébaud (1992) underscores the "profoundly conservative nature of the war in terms of the relationship between the sexes", while Michelle Perrot (1987) comments that the war "put each sex back in its place", by reinforcing traditional mentalities.

[18] Girls were long excluded from the school system, and even when they did enter the school gates, they were not necessarily taught the same things as boys. In France, not until Léon Bérard issued his decree in March 1924 were girls allowed to sit the baccalaureate (boys had been sitting it for more than a century) and follow the same curriculum. In Britain, the 1919 Sex Disqualification Act allowed women to go to university and enter the liberal professions.

new model of the working woman who no longer gave up work when her children came along was to become increasingly widespread, witness today's rates of female employment, although the norm of occupational discontinuity still persists in Britain. According to Margaret Maruani (2000), this represented a genuine sociological break with the past and a radical transformation in women's relationship to work, with a shift away from the female model of economic inactivity, characterised by the purported choice between work and family, towards one of discontinuous, alternating activity (working, stopping, going back to work). This subsequently led to the model we are familiar with today, namely that of continuity and multitasking. Once again, we come back to this idea of the baby boom generations playing a pivotal role, ushering in the transition from Talcott Parsons' model of the family, where the woman does not go out to work, to today's model where both members of the couple go out to work, with some women resolving to perpetuate the housewife model they had inherited from their mothers and grandmothers, and others vowing to discard it. For although the baby boomers are often presented as highly innovative, pioneering greater independence for women, it is important to remember that no fewer than three female models coexisted at this time, one based on economic inactivity, one on discontinuous activity and one on full time activity. Thus, although women's work and the way it was represented had changed, there were crucial differences in timing, for even if these women lived through the same historical and societal events, they did not necessarily share the same vision of their place in the family and in society at large (Clément 2009).

Those women who did go out to work acquired financial independence and the status that went with it. Several studies have highlighted the impact on couples where women earned a salary. As well as making those women less dependent, it also reshaped gender roles and altered the nature of the bonds between the two partners, even if the initial objective of research in the United States on women who went out to work was to demonstrate its harmful effects on the family (i.e., on the child, the couple and the mother's health). The notions of spousal power (defined as the potential ability of one of the partners to influence the other partner's behaviour) and resource theory, both developed by Blood and Wolfe, allowed researchers to show that women's employment increased their power of decision making (Blood and Wolfe 1960). Andrée Michel (1973), who was one of the first in France to examine the impact of women's employment on how couples functioned and were organised, equating it with women's liberation and more egalitarian relations between partners. The upshot was that marriage (and, with it, the family) came to be criticised as a means of social reproduction and a mode of domination, with feminists condemning it as a "mode of domestic production characterised by the extortion of free work from a category of the population, namely married women. The marriage contract was simply a form of employment contract, even if that was not how it was presented, which enabled the husband to appropriate his wife's labour" (Delphy 1974). Although it was possible for liberation to take place within a couple, this had to be a "transformed couple", the "prototype of a new and egalitarian couple that was free—or had been freed" (Bozon 2009, p. 149). Henceforth, the cohabiting couple would therefore be viewed as the union that truly allowed for the expression of spontaneous love.

5.2.4   Cohabitation and Conjugal Relations

There were, of course, a variety of forms—and perceptions—of nonmarital cohabi-
tation, as Catherine Villeneuve-Gokalp (1994) emphasises. Louis Roussel (1986)
makes the distinction between idealist cohabitation, anticonformist cohabitation,
prudent cohabitation and engaged cohabitation, while Villeneuve-Gokalp (1994)
talks about preludes to marriage, tests, unions without commitment, ephemeral
unions and free unions[19]. The late 1960s were characterised by a higher proportion
of preludes to marriage (27 %) and free unions (24 %). The latter would subsequent-
ly dwindle to 8 % in the early '1980s, but never disappeared completely. Here once
more, the working classes stood apart from the rest, for between 1968 and 1972,
their unions frequently took the form of free unions (29 %), whereas in the other
classes, cohabitation was more often represented as a prelude to marriage. Meanings
and contents therefore differed according to social background, but also to sex. For
it was mainly men who adopted this lifestyle, except in the upper classes, where
women were keen to use their academic qualifications in the workplace (women
who cohabited generally went out to work). From this perspective, cohabitation was
viewed as a lifestyle with a different relationship to time than marriage—a union
in which the partners refused to commit for the long term, in order to preserve the
"spontaneity" and "authenticity" of their loving relations and avoid stereotyped
roles (Chalvon-Demersay 1983). For women in particular, it represented a means of
preserving their position in relationships with the opposite sex (Battagliola 1988),
constructing their autonomy and their independence, and developing their career
(de Singly 1986). Viewed from this angle, cohabitation can be seen as the product
of the "second modernity" (Beck 2001) or "late modernity" (Giddens 1992), terms
designating the acceleration of individualism in the 1960s that was characterised
by the "democratisation" of relations between men and women, and parents and
children. Men and women no longer wanted to take on a pre-established status.
Rather, they wanted to invent their own lives, and on that basis refused to institution-
alise their loving relationship, wishing to avert the risk of their affection fading to
duty. Some researchers have talked about "de-institutionalising the family", not least
Louis Roussel (1987), who sees the changes in the institution of marriage as reflect-
ing a more general disregard for institutions. However, it was the nature of marriage
itself that changed, in that it ceased to be a monopoly and became a private affair in-
stead—an affair of personal conscience (Théry 1996), where each partner had to be
allowed to achieve self-fulfilment through more flexible and negotiable roles. In this
free, egalitarian and ultimately risky contract that could be dissolved by common
consent, its partners formed a "duo" (Cavell 2005). Irène Théry (2001) claims that
the "duo" couple started to replace the "organic" couple back in the 1930s, subse-
quently spreading to every class in the 1970s with the expansion of female employ-
ment. In line with Cavell's conception of a "conversation" between the sexes, both

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[19] A union where the partners live together as though they were married. They have a child within
3 years of forming their union, and as this child strengthens their bond, they see no point in making
the union official (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994).

marriage partners now set out as equals and were recognised as such (something that had previously not been possible under the Napoleonic Code). Furthermore, they no longer had to stay together *until death do us part*. Now that their habitus had been shattered, in that they could no longer rely on a model inherited from earlier generations (Pagis 2009), women found themselves having to rewrite their job description as a wife (and mother), not without a degree of personal angst and even dissension within the couple. More generally, spouses instilled new meaning into the ties of marriage, with affection prevailing over institution. The primacy of affection, associated with the ideals of self-fulfilment, authenticity and affinity (de Singly 2007), gave rise to a form of conjugal and loving idolatry (Beck 2001) in some instances, but also brought with it an inbuilt possibility of the couple breaking up.[20]

5.3   Conclusion

The debates in the early 1970s about the imminent demise of the family are evidence of the youthful baby boomers' rebellious state of mind and desire for change. The writings of David Cooper (1972), Michel Field (Field and Brohm 1975) and the like marked an entire generation, which recognised itself in them. Despite being perpetrated by a minority, the attacks on the family caused researchers to set in motion a vast campaign of research and investigations aimed at finding out whether this institution really was in danger. In 1973, Ronald Fletcher (1973) asked "Is the family in decline? Is it diminishing in importance as a social institution? Is there a growing instability of marriage as a continual increase of divorce, a deterioration of family live? Is it true that present day parents are morally lax or irresponsible? Do husband and wife no longer desire loyalty and fidelity from each other? Do parents no longer love and respect their children or children their parents? Are the fundamental qualities of mutual care, love, loyalty, which have been the bedrock of human character no longer to be found in the family today?" Despite the uncertainty surrounding its future, Fletcher remained optimistic, expressing his belief that "the family is *not* less stable than hitherto. The standards of parenthood and parental authority have *not* deteriorated." His sentiments were echoed somewhat later by Henri Leridon (1992), where he asserted that "the family can continue, albeit in a different form" (Leridon 1992, p. 24). This is what the story of the baby boomers tells us, with rebellion bringing new family norms in its wake. But let there be no mistake: the transformations in union formation reflected huge changes in marriage and what it meant to people. Its rites were profoundly modified, in that marriage no longer constituted the entry into adulthood but instead the consecration of the couple. Despite all the changes that took place, the couple was never called into question and nor, for that matter, was marriage. Although it did decline, it remained the dominant model, with nonmarital unions representing only a minority—albeit a significant one—of all unions. To quote Sabine Chalvon-Demersay, "marriage was no longer

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[20] Examples abound in contemporary fiction (Chalvon-Demersay 1996).

the start of something, but the result" (Chalvon-Demersay 1983, p. 136), hence the weddings celebrated after the birth of the first or even the second child. Marriage continued to be the best recognised, or at least the most complete, form of union, although *family* moved a singular noun to a plural one. Among our 90 respondents, only 76 got married and only five remained single, which just goes to illustrate the strength of the couple, especially the married couple. Even so, nearly half (34) our married respondents subsequently divorced, though some, especially the men, went on to form another couple, in line with the statistics.

Even if it was less stable than before, the couple therefore remained a central reference. As Jean-Hugues Déchaux underlines, "since breaking up ceased to be anything out of the ordinary, the whole conception of living in a couple changed. Henceforth, couples lived with the idea that break-up would be the most likely outcome" (Déchaux 2007, p. 28). However, the fact that some of our respondents went on to form second unions shows that the couple remained as popular as ever. Indeed, it was precisely because partners demanded so much more of it that it became more unstable, or as Déchaux puts it, "more fragile and idolised, but more fragile because it was idolised" (Déchaux 2007, p. 40).

Part III
Baby Boomers in Alternative Families

Chapter 6
Life outside the Family: Working Women

According to the classic schema of the 1960s, life in the outside world was the preserve of men—the breadwinners—while the women—the homemakers—had the dubious privilege of being the queens of hearth and home. Although this is the model to which the postwar generations were exposed when they were growing up, they overwhelmingly chose to discard it and explore more autonomous forms of behaviour instead, either inventing new types of couples and families, or leading their lives completely outside this private sphere. Women were to play a "preponderant and entirely new role" (Blöss and Frickey 1994, p. 4) in all these transformations. Both the chief beneficiaries and main protagonists, they contributed to the rise in student numbers, the growth in the economically active population and the increase in service-sector jobs, as well as major demographic changes such as the decline in marriage rates and fertility, and the rise in divorce rates. As Margaret Maruani further emphasises, it was "one and the same generation of women that saw the liberalization of contraception and abortion laws, the advent of a radical feminist movement, the emergence of new family models and the rise in female employment, all of which took place at the end of the 1960s" (Maruani 2000, p. 10). She goes on to comment that "it is too great a coincidence not to be mentioned", even if it is difficult to find a causal link between all these different events, which is why she prefers to talk about a correlation, with "these phenomena form[ing] a whole". Whether it was causation or correlation, the fact remains that as soon as women started to receive a proper education and were able to control their fertility by deciding on the number and timing of their offspring, their trajectories started to diversify and their level of autonomy within the couple increased, radically altering the concept of the family in the process. Although women were still *supposed* to play just one role in society—that of stay-at-home mother—in reality, they could now devote themselves to their career, stay single, refuse to have children, and generally decide how to live their lives. It is important to remember that women's newly found independence also benefited men, as nonmarital cohabitation meant they no longer had to make a long-term commitment when they formed their first union, and their wives' jobs generated a useful second income, as well as serving as a cushion against unemployment. There was also the not insignificant detail that they could henceforth seek a divorce without the risk of leaving their wife and children
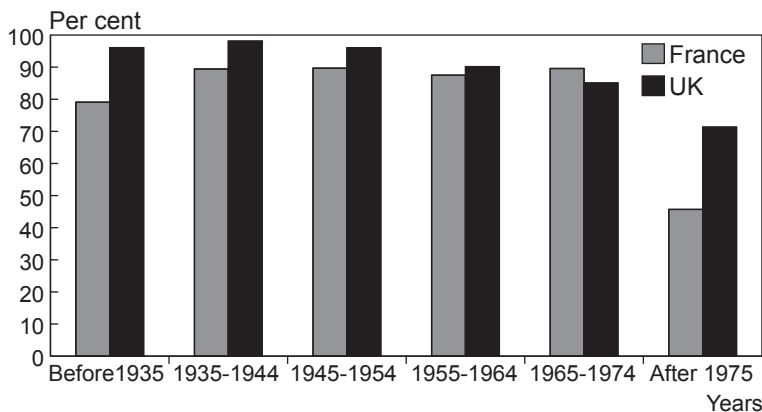
Fig. 6.1 Percentage of women in each cohort who were wage earners at some point in their lifetime in France and Great Britain. (Source: European Social Survey, Round 4, 2008–2009)

destitute (Bastard and Cardia-Vonèche 1984). Women's employment meant that life was no longer mapped out in advance, but instead presented series of choices, and paths that were once straight could take a new turn at any point.

6.1   Changes in Women's Work

As we saw in Chap 5, the rise in female employment was a pivotal point in Western societies, even if women had in fact always worked (Schweitzer 2002), be it in the home, the field or the factory. In France, Olivier Marchand and Claude Thélot (1991) have identified two main phases in the development of women's work in the twentieth-century. The first phase, extending from the 1900s to the 1960s, was characterized by a decline in female employment, after a full century of growth, while the second, starting in around 1965, saw a dramatic reversal in that trend. This turnaround in the 1960s can be attributed mainly to the massive entry of married women—with children—into the labour market (Norvez 1990), combined with a major shift in values, where the model of the working mother supplanted that of the stay-at-home—or full time—mother.

The specificity of the French situation comes through clearly in the data yielded by the *European Social Survey*, which show that more than 20% of French women born before 1935 never had paid employment, compared with 5% of their British counterparts. This figure was to fall to 10% for later generations (Fig. 6.1).

With the growth of the service sector and the change in mentalities, women were at long last able to move out of the private sphere and construct an identity for themselves on the twin foundations of career and financial autonomy (Dubé and Auger 1984). According to Dominique Méda (2001), far from being restricted to France, this is something that happened all over Europe. Today, with more than

70 % of women who are economically active, France and Britain both lie midway between the Southern European countries of Spain, Italy and Greece (65 %) and the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Finland (80 %) (Asfa Essafi and Buffeteau 2006). However, this apparent similarity masks a major difference in the number of hours that women work. In France, women's work is characterized by an inverted U-curve—as is men's—whereas British women more frequently work part time. Again according to the *European Social Survey*, 62 % of women belonging to the 1945–1954 generations were working full time in France in 2008, compared with just 39 % in Britain (authors' analysis).

On both sides of the Channel, the model of couples where both partners work had ousted the traditional one where only the man works by the early 1980s, but a 1991 Eurobarometer survey (Kempeneers and Lelièvre 1991) confirmed that while 42 % of women had discontinuous work histories in France, this figure rose to 69 % in Britain. Women therefore display very different levels of commitment to their careers, depending on which side of the Channel they are on, especially when family life is a factor. According to Catherine Hakim (2000), women in Britain cease to work full time as soon as they have their first child, regarding their wages as a top-up, and more frequently opt for part time work, dipping in and out of the labour market. French women, on the other hand, favour full time employment, as they have done for several generations now. This view is supported by Eurobarometer data showing that while French women do not feel the need to take a break or move to part time work when their first child arrives, the picture is very different in Britain, where huge numbers of women still go part time or even give up work altogether. In 1991, for instance, 48 % of women in France aged 34–44 years continued to work full time after the birth of their first child, compared with 13 % in Britain, while 15 % of French women opted for part time jobs, compared with a figure of 20.6 % for their British sisters. Meanwhile, 37 % of the former gave up work after the arrival of their first child, versus 66 % of the latter.

There are several historical explanations for these disparities (Hakim 2001). In France, for instance, socialization outside the family begins at a very early age—a legacy of the role that women played in the French Revolution (Plaisance 1986). In earlier centuries, children would be farmed out to wet nurses, and institutions were set up to look after the children of poor mothers while they were out at work. These *salles d'exile* gradually developed into nursery schools, being officially renamed *écoles maternelles* in 1881. Another explanation put forward by Hakim (1996) is that whereas women in Britain were socially and, indeed, legally obliged to quit their jobs when they married, no such bar ever existed in France. Lastly, the "creation of jobs for secondary earners" (Hakim 2000) in Britain, mainly through the expansion of the service sector, gave rise to a part time tradition there, as opposed to the full time tradition in France.

The careers of women born after the war lasted from the mid-1960s to the mid-2000s, during which time the labour market underwent profound transformations, with a first period characterized by full employment and industrial restructuring, and a second by economic crisis and rising unemployment from 1974 onwards. In both countries, the 1946–1954 generations entered the labour market at a time when

women's liberation movements were in full throttle and the model of women (and mothers) was undergoing a metamorphosis. For as we have shown, there was a radical shift in mentalities in the 1960s, meaning that women could now pursue their careers after getting married, and above all after the birth of their children, without attracting opprobrium from society, as had been the case earlier in the century. This does not mean that it was in any way straightforward, as the history of childcare arrangements after World War II was one of shortages (Norvez 1990), and our respondents complain loudly about the lack of day nurseries[1] and other facilities.

The baby boom generations are often portrayed as trailblazers, bringing greater independence for women. As we have seen, however, there were three different models of female employment, the proportions varying with each generation. The earliest generations, for example, born between 1946 and 1950, were influenced by the traditional schema of the housewife and tended to give up work after marriage, at least for the first few years. Born after 1950, their younger sisters tended to distance themselves from this schema, but still had to contend with the conflict between stay-at-home motherhood and the new social norm of going out to work (Neyrand 2000). The stay-at-home model therefore started to wane in the 1960s, supplanted by the models of alternation (working—staying at home—going back to work), or "secondary" employment (Battagliola 1987), and continuous full time employment (Desplanques and Saboulin 1986). Even though the full time model has proved particularly popular in France, the notion that the mother should be *available* to her children when they are small remains incredibly powerful, as revealed by figures produced by the French Research Centre for the Study and Monitoring of Living Standards (CREDOC), based on opinions expressed about women going out to work. In 2004, 57 % of respondents opined that women should work *if that is what they want*, corresponding to the ideology of free choice, but 21 % nonetheless stated that women should never go out to work if they have young children (Damon 2002), showing that women have yet to shake off their dual image.

These three models continue to coexist, especially in Britain, according to the typology devised by Hakim (2000), raising the question of how, if at all, they have changed over the past few decades. INED's *Event histories and contact circle* survey provided an opportunity to examine changes in the occupational trajectories of women living in the Paris region. It revealed that 48.5 % of the earliest generations of baby boomers (1946–1950) worked continuously up to the age of 50, compared with 23 % of those born during the war and 5 % of those born between 1930 and 1939 (Robette and Lelièvre 2009). Similarly, the proportion of women who worked for fewer than 10 years fell by half between the oldest (20 %) and youngest (10 %) generations. Since the 1970s, the pattern of female employment by age has increasingly come to resemble that of male employment. Even so, women's career paths remain strikingly diverse. The distinction between those who do not work, those who work, and those who switch between the two does not adequately

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[1] Not until the 1980s were claims about the detrimental effects of day care on child development challenged (Norvez 1990).

Table 6.1 Classification of "desired" female lifestyles in the twenty-first-century. (Source: Catherine Hakim (2000)

Home-centred	Adaptive	Work-centred
20% of women varies 10–30%	60% of women varies 40–80%	20% of women varies 10–30%
Family life and children are the main priorities throughout life	This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers	Childless women are concentrated here. Main priority in life is employment or equivalent activities in the public arena: politics, art, sport, etc.
Prefer *not* to work	Want to work, but *not* totally committed to work career	Committed to work or equivalent activities
Qualifications obtained for intellectual dowry	Qualifications obtained with the intention of working	Large investment in qualifications/training for employment or other activities
Responsive to social and family policy	*Very responsive* to all policies	Responsive to employment policies

capture women's personal investment in their work, as they do not all view their roles within the family and within society in the same way (Clément 2002, 2009). Some may stop working for a couple of years following the birth of their children, only to throw themselves back into their work, while others may keep on working throughout that period, but put their family firmly before their career.

   A good starting point is the typology of female lifestyles in industrialized societies in the twenty-first-century established by Hakim (Table 6.1) on the basis of women's centres of interest (Hakim 2001), also known as *preference theory*. According to this author, "preference theory essentially looks at the choice that women make between family work and outside employment, a genuine choice in twenty-first-century society" (Hakim 2001). It is a theory that is not without its critics, especially the use of terms such as *choice*, *preferences*, and *centres of interest*, and the notion of an "ideology of free choice" (Maruani 2000)[2] that is not necessarily one, and in any case is reserved exclusively for women. Part time work, for instance, can correspond to a variety of social practices, and may involve either choice, in terms of the number of hours worked or the way that time is organized, or compulsion, where employees are called to work very long (or very few) hours in a day, in a form of flexible underemployment. Before we address the question of what women want, we need to answer the less obvious question of "who can provide it" (Maruani 2000). In many cases, part time work is just a compromise and a "non-solution" as Alain Norvez (1990) puts it, which comes on top of the woman's domestic chores (Norvez 1990; Barrère-Maurisson 2003). Last but not least, this choice does not depend solely on the women, as their partners' careers (de Singly 2004; Barrère-Maurisson 2003) and opinions (Menahem 1998; de Singly 1996; Clément 2009), the state of the labour market and public factors also weigh in the balance. Even so, taking our lead from Hakim, we can make a distinction between women who

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[2] Marie Duru-Bellat (1992) also views this concept of "free choice" as primordial.

put their families first, those who focus on their careers, and those who come in between. In most cases, they attempt to reconcile[3] the two, in order to achieve some sort of work-life balance, working fewer hours or choosing a job that is compatible with their children's timetables, with housewives and career women remaining in the minority (approximately 20 %). We can even identify a fourth type of employment that chiefly concerns women who have had to reconsider their relationship to work in the wake of divorce or separation.

Our respondents' accounts are very much in line with the evidence yielded by major European surveys[4]. Two of the 47 women we interviewed had never looked for work, and 26 of them, including five British women, had worked continuously, never taking a break or switching to part time work (excluding sick leave and maternity leave). Most had entered the labour market at a very young age, without the benefit of a university education (especially the British women). Some had decided to continue their education after they were married or while they were expecting their first child, while others sought to boost their career prospects via continuing education or in-house training (e.g., chartered banker and insurance institutes)—a particularly popular solution in Britain, where people frequently go back into education in the course of their working lives. To analyse these apparently higher diverse trajectories, we will borrow from Hakim's typology, looking in turn at women who focus on hearth and home, those who concentrate on their careers, and those who fit their work around their childcare duties.

6.2   Women Who Devote Themselves to Hearth and Home

Although the past four decades have more or less seen off the stay-at-home mother model in France, some women, especially those at the two ends of the social spectrum (Djider and Lefranc 1995), still focus their energy on their *family project* (Bertaux-Wiame 1987). In Brittany, Yvonne Guichard-Claudic (1999) identified three types of explanations put forward by the nonworking wives of seafarers: *choice*, male pressure and generational membership. Not working (or giving up work) is often presented as the outcome of arbitration between two mutually exclusive extremes: work and motherhood. However, it may also be the result of an agreement or a compromise within the couple, as the male partner is obviously directly affected by his partner's decision—an issue discussed by François de Singly (2004). Furthermore, as Guichard-Claudic (1999) underlines, "it is not always easy to disentangle what women are forced to do and what they want to do, as there may be both an element of choice and an element of male pressure."

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[3] Marie-Agnès Barrère-Maurisson (2003) prefers to talk about *fitting them around* each other, rather than *reconciling* them, the aim being to make work and family life compatible according to a given set of constraints.

[4] In particular the Eurobarometers (Kempeneers and Lelièvre 1991).

Then there is the question of generation. Women may model themselves on their mother (Clément 2009), or refer to the conjugal model that predominated when they were married. It is important to remember that the first generations of baby boomers started their families in the mid-1960s, a time when the model of the housewife was still prevalent, especially in the upper and middle classes. Ten years on, it was a very different story, with women born after 1950 engaging in premarital cohabitation far more frequently (Toulemon 1994).

6.2.1   A Life Focused on Home and Family

Élisabeth's life is a good illustration of the trajectories followed by nonworking women in the upper and middle classes, who made family life and their children's upbringing their priority from the very outset, when they were not helping to further their husband's career. The daughter of a provincial worthy and a stay-at-home mother, Élisabeth was brought up extremely strictly. Her parents nonetheless agreed to let her go to Paris to prepare for the entrance exam to the School of Fine Arts. Once in the French capital, she lived in a "hostel run by nuns", which she left for a more "open" one after 2 years. The time she spent in these hostels gave her a breathing space between her family of origin and her family of procreation (Parsons 1955), and it was during this period that she met her future husband. Although she had spent 6 years in higher education, Élisabeth chose to stay at home to look after her two children. To her, the decision to follow in her mother's footsteps was an obvious one to take, even though it meant that there was not enough money coming in to rent—let alone buy—a flat in Paris large enough for the children to have separate bedrooms ("with just one wage earner, it's absolutely impossible"). Élisabeth enjoyed her student days, but insists that she did not study with a view to having a career, although her training in design did come in useful when she decorated her interior, and enabled her to make the most of its rather meagre proportions. Her life was therefore focused on the private sphere, represented by her children, her husband and her 64-square metre apartment. The argument that is most often put forward (by men and women alike) to justify staying at home is the lack of compatibility between the mother's job, the children's upbringing and… the husband's career. These types of families appear to work in the way that Talcott Parsons (1955) described, where the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the "homemaker" who looks after the children. It is a situation that can lead to regrets, especially once the children have left home and these women find themselves with "nothing left to do", as Elisabeth found out. Stay-at-home mothers often describe how they find self-fulfilment through their children, which is one of the reasons why they dread their departure and the gaping hole they will leave in the home. They often experience and represent their children's departure differently from their wage-earning sisters (Clément 2009; Wilbers and Lehr 1990), seeing their role change, and even become obsolete, when they reach what American sociologists (Glick and Parke 1965; Hareven 1978, 1994), and demographers (Le Bras 1988) call the *empty-nest* stage.

6.2.2   Stay-at-Home Mothers and Voluntary Work

The fact that these respondents did not go out to work does not mean that they did not go out at all, as Corinne's story shows us. The daughter of an artist and a stay-at-home mother, she trained as a primary-school teacher but, like Élisabeth, chose not to take up official employment, as her musician husband earned enough to keep her and their two children in relative comfort. Unlike Élisabeth, however, she threw herself into voluntary work, drawing on her teacher training:

> As my husband had a good job and I had a teaching qualification, I decided to reconcile the two by doing voluntary work, and so I gave lessons to the neighbourhood kids and took them to the country on holiday. So although I wasn't officially a teacher, I still used my teaching skills. I have a teaching qualification, and that gave me a set of skills. For me it was enough to have that diploma and then do things as I saw fit. I was lucky in that respect. So I did things, but on my own terms. Because when you work in a primary school, you don't get to choose your pupils. You just take what comes, whereas I preferred to do it on a basis of friendship. As I didn't make the families pay, they became my friends, not my employers. So we lived on very good terms with all our neighbours.

Corinne regarded her voluntary work as a genuine career—she even talks about "success"—made up of a wide range of activities, including helping local immigrants' children with their homework, catechism, prison visits, and assisting homeless people. Her choice was motivated by the additional freedom her unpaid status brought her, especially the freedom to forge friendships in her neighbourhood. Even so, her husband did not always agree with her lifestyle, and the problems the couple encountered suggest that he might have preferred her to work to "earn money" at some point, and perhaps be more financially independent.

These women who never took up the careers for which they had trained can be placed in the same category as women who stopped working almost as soon as they were married. Their husband's career was one of the reasons why they did so. Juliette, for example studied law and worked for a year in a barrister's chambers, but then gave up her career in order to promote her husband's, though not without a degree of reluctance. She initially devoted some of her time and energy to supporting her husband so that he could attend evening classes at technical college. Later on, when he was on business trips abroad, it was she who took on the day-to-day running of the household. As a result, she came to be regarded as the pillar of the entire family, and at the time of the interview, she was dividing her days between her grown-up children who still relied on her, and her ageing parents (especially her very frail father), who needed someone to do all their domestic chores and look after them on a daily basis. Odile also belongs in this category, for although she embarked on a career as a midwife, and continued to work for several years after her marriage, the arrival of her own children prompted her to take a close look at her career:

> After I got my baccalaureate, I studied to be a midwife. At that time, it was a three-year course. Now, I think, it's much longer. So I practised as a midwife until I had my children. As I'd had about enough, because it's quite a tough job, I stopped when I had my children.

And so you stopped after you had your first child?

Yes, that's it. It just wasn't possible anymore, especially as it was at D., so it was a long commute. I was doing 48-hour shifts, so I'd go up north to D. for 48 hours. I'd go there by train, and then I'd have 6 rest days. But it was because I had the children and also because I'd had enough of this very… All the problems, the deaths, the malformations had taken their toll. Afterwards, I wished I hadn't, but now I do other things, so that's just how it is.

Yes, it's funny, because it looks like a really amazing job, bringing babies into the world. But it's very tiring and the human responsibility means it's very stressful. Very stressful. In obstetrics, you know, things can happen… it can look like a completely normal labour, then all of a sudden there'll be a catastrophic haemorrhage. It's also your job to tell the mother when there's a malformation or something. I always slept badly the night before I started a shift, I was terrified there'd be some disaster. So yes, when I stopped, I felt relieved. Relieved at no longer having all that stress. But I still dream about my job, you know.

Odile felt worn down by all the stress her job entailed, which caused her a great deal of anxiety and upset. It also became increasingly difficult to reconcile work and family life when her children were born. These two factors led her to leave the labour market. Odile's children may have provided her with an opportunity—and perhaps also a justification—for her decision to stop working, but further down the road, it was a decision she came to regret. For as long as their children are still at home, women can point to their role as a wife and mother, but once they have moved out, they may well experience the empty nest syndrome, as Odile describes:

Not really. Only when Clément left home recently, and it's true that I'm a bit too… I've given my all to the family. You see? It's all been about my husband and children. And I've forgotten to think about myself.

Is that something you regret?

That's what people tell me.

OK, but what do you feel?

Well, it's true that… Well, I read a lot, I don't think I'm totally uneducated, but sometimes I think to myself that it's a rather hollow existence.

But at the same time, you were the one who chose to stay at home and look after your children.

Absolutely.

It was a choice?

Yes, definitely. It was a choice.

The feeling of having given their all to the family, neglecting themselves in the process, and the image that society reflects back to them ("that's what people say") make residential separation particularly difficult both for the children and for their mothers.[5] To "fill the void", Odile went back to work, but not to the job she had

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[5] When women do not go out to work, they tend to focus on their role of mother and monopolise childcare, resulting in a form of "single parenthood", or "matricentrality". As a consequence, the children of stay-at-home mothers sometimes feel reticent about *abandoning* the parental home—and above all their mother—and only leave at a later age and under other circumstances, such as union formation (Clément 2002, 2009).

done before. Instead, she took on the accounting and secretarial work for her husband's business. But as she emphasises, it was just "to help out" and it failed to give her a true sense of fulfilment, as her work was "secondary, subordinated to family imperatives or the husband's career needs" (Battagliola 1987). As Céline Clément comments, "doubt eventually sets in for these women who stay at home or work for their husbands" (Clément 2009, p. 113). They start to reflect on their "rather hollow" existence spent looking after husband and children, and wonder about just how useful their lives have been. They sometimes have an inferiority complex ("I don't think I'm totally uneducated"), and because the model of motherhood has undergone such a radical shift in French and British society, they feel devalued by the lack of a paid job. Although working women came in for considerable criticism in the interwar and postwar years, since the 1980s it has been the turn of housewives to be stigmatized, and work is now regarded as increasing women's value in society and enabling them to construct their identity. As Jean-Claude Kaufmann puts it, women who wish to become "…unique and irreplaceable household goddesses […] are simply hankering after a situation that no longer exists. And they are fully aware of the fact that this conservatism, this archaism is marginalised and devalued as society constantly moves forward" (Kaufmann 1988, p. 89).

6.3 Women Who Fit Their Work around Their Family

Some mothers see flexible working as a solution to the dilemma of how to reconcile motherhood, which often means staying at home and being excluded from public life, and full time work, where they end up doing a *double day*, combining a paid job in the workplace with an unpaid job in the home (Chesnais 1984). There are several alternatives: part time work, working from home, and even finding a career that is *compatible* with the school day, such as nurse or teacher. Although part time work is more popular in Britain, as we have seen, there is *part time* and *part time*. In France, according to Hakim (2001), it is a "long, four or five-day part time, and not a short or very short part time, as it is for English, German and Dutch women".

    For the majority of British women, once they have formed a couple, the husband becomes the main breadwinner and the wife continues to carry out the domestic chores, meaning that any part time job is viewed as a source of surplus income.

6.3.1 A Conscious Compromise

Ten of the 15 British women we interviewed temporarily stopped work or switched to part time work, sometimes working from home. This appears to have been a conscious decision on their part, and although it can also be explained by the lack of childcare provision, Hakim (2001) points out that, "until recently, there was no demand for it from women", as the norm whereby children should be brought up by their parents and not by an institution is a very powerful one in Britain. Women

have to make a choice: work or bring up their children. These cultural differences may explain why the women we talked to in London expressed fewer regrets that their Parisian counterparts, citing reasons like the one Julia gives:

> I became pregnant with David and I wanted to stay and work at home looking after the children. I didn't want anyone else to do it.

When her son was born, she gave up work because she wanted to bring her children up herself and commit herself to this task "full time". What is surprising about this is that Julia is a typical child of 1960s Britain. After a sheltered and traditional middle-class upbringing, she discovered a whole new world when she went to Bristol University, where she lived in a collective house for several years:

> I moved into a collective household—we are talking mid seventies… We rented. It had been established for a number of years and there were two children there and we lived as a family and we shared everything and took it in turns to cook and weekly meetings it was very democratic and shared care of the children. Wonderful. I still think it is quite an ideal way of living.

She describes it as a "mind-blowing experience", and has very special memories of that period, which is when she met her future husband. Together, they decided to leave the house and set up home in a flat, which Julia found very difficult, as she had to learn to make concessions. Opposed to the whole idea of marriage, she eventually agreed to make their union official for purely legal reasons, mostly to do with the arrival of their first son:

> My partner and I got married even though I'm dead set against the whole idea of marriage. I don't approve of it. For most of my life, I've spoken out against marriage. I see it as an outmoded institution. Even so, I was pregnant with my son, and the law stated that if I went completely mad or if I died, my mother could step in and become his legal guardian, and David wouldn't have any say in the matter. So we got married for legal reasons.

A French woman with Julia's upbringing and views on marriage might well have continued working after her children were born. She, however, decided to give up work in order to be with them during the week, but found a job on a Camden market stall at weekends. Ten years later, when her children were in their teens, she trained to be a mobile masseuse—an occupation that allowed her to keep an eye on them still.

Most of the women we interviewed in Paris also tried to strike some sort of work-life balance. Some of them, probably because they had anticipated their future domestic role, had chosen occupations or sectors that would make this easier, starting with teaching (Méda 2001), where the working hours and school holidays meant they could spend more time with their children. Others cut their working hours when their first, second or even third child was born, although Stéfan Lollivier (1998) claims that very few women waited for the birth of their third child to cut down on the hours they worked. Instead, they tended to give up their jobs before or just after the birth of their first child, in a form of "anticipated disinvestment" (de Singly 2004). Lastly, some women abandoned the world of work for a few years, then returned to the labour market. For these women, having a family was about realizing their ideal of life, and taking time out from their job, or at least cutting down

on the number of hours they worked, in order to be there for their children, helping them with their school work and taking them to their after-school activities, was part and parcel of that ideal. Like these women, Martine's career "came second", though not to her children. Employed by an insurance company in Paris, she took a three-year maternity leave when her third son was born. She then went back to work, but only part time, resuming full time employment when her youngest son turned ten years old. On the face of it, motherhood would appear to have been responsible for these changes in Martine's career, but we then discover that she had only ever regarded her job as a useful source of income, as her true passion lay in the theatre. Two evenings a week, plus Wednesday afternoons, she ran drama classes for children and adults, and put on shows once a month in her neighbourhood. Chantal's story is yet another example of women who were born into the bourgeoisie and who married men with good jobs. In these often deeply Catholic circles, women's work was accepted, and even valued, but only on the proviso that it did not impinge on family life and did not damage their husband's career. As a result, women were not defined by the job they did, and their husbands (Clément 2009) viewed their work more as a pastime or a hobby; a "way of escaping boredom"[6].

This resulted in an unequal distribution of tasks, in that women continued to be labelled as "household goddesses" and were thus expected to run the entire household. This is what Chantal realised as she supported her husband in his progression up the civil service career ladder. Born into the provincial upper bourgeoisie, she married at 19, when she was only halfway through her studies. After the birth of her first son, she managed to finish her degree via a correspondence course, but when her second son came along, she found it impossible to reconcile family life and preparation for the CAPES secondary school teaching diploma, mainly owing to her husband's repeated absences, although his presence also added to her "workload", as they led "a very busy social life whenever he was around". Between 1968 and 1983, she worked as a supply teacher, but only sporadically, as she followed her husband from post to post. If she could not find work, she refused to remain idle, teaching catechism or giving gym classes on a voluntary basis—an activity that soon turned into a passion and which she hoped she could turn into a career. For like many women from well-to-do backgrounds who had dabbled in voluntary work, Chantal trained for a new occupation once her children were grown up. Her husband had been posted to the Paris region in 1983, and the couple had at last settled permanently in the southern suburbs, but the discourse of the education authority was very disheartening, and the posts on offer all involved frequent and lengthy commutes. With four of her friends, she therefore embarked on a three-year gym instructor's course—against her husband's wishes, who would have preferred her to remain at home and continue leading the socialite lifestyle that was so crucial for his career. For as François de Singly (2004) has demonstrated, having a wife is a definite advantage for a man, especially when that wife does not work and can therefore devote all her time and energy to enhancing the couple's social value, building its relational and cultural capital, shouldering all the domestic responsibilities, and giving priority to the husband's occupational trajectory. All this, Chantal

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[6] See François de Singly (1996)'s portrait of the "Husband".

had done to perfection, but now, despite her husband's opposition, she threw herself into a gruelling voluntary gymnastics training programme, spending the odd week away on residential courses:

> It was a course on voluntary gymnastics organized by the federation. It was very hard, though God knows I was used to doing intellectual work…. It was more intellectual than physical… And I'd never imagined it would be like that. There were five of us at the start, but by the end there were only two of us left. We really had to hang on in there, and help each other to keep going. At one point, I actually said something, because I thought the training instructors were being very harsh, and instead of encouraging people, they tended to… make them freak out… It was a sort of test, to see if people could cope with the unexpected and deal with difficult people, or with strange or very technical questions, etc. They goaded you until… you almost begged …. The number of tantrums, people who stormed out and never came back… What's more, I was really doing it against my husband's wishes, because our children weren't that old at the time…. And whenever I went away on a course, it'd be for a whole week, so it was difficult, but I'm thrilled (*Laughter*)! It was a real success. I'd always passed my exams first time, and I'm so happy, because I think I give a lot, but I get a lot back, too.

Chantal was "happy" because she had done everything that was required of her—being a mother who was there for her children, and a wife who had put her husband's career first but had nevertheless managed to achieve self-fulfilment by finding a career that matched her interests and her schedule. At the time of the survey, Chantal was holding gym classes for adults three times (10 h) a week, which meant she still had time to entertain her husband's colleagues and enjoy a range of other activities, including playing tennis with her husband at the club where she was deputy president, and going to plays and concerts. Her work was clearly organized to fit around the family, and not the other way round, and the income she derived from it essentially concerned her own private sphere. For it was with her own wages, not the household income, that she paid for the upkeep of a holiday home on the island of Noirmoutier, where her children and grandchildren came to stay during the summer. This house, which she had inherited from her grandparents, had become the only fixed point in their lives, owing to the family's frequent moves.

Chantal's story is very different from that of Odile, who never trained to be a secretary or an accountant, and described what she did as merely "helping out". Odile never recovered her social status (even in her husband's eyes) after her *biographical bifurcation*, and continued to derive her identity from the members of her household, rather than from society or her family of origin.

6.3.2   A Bitter Compromise

Not all women had either the opportunity or the wherewithal to achieve this balance between family commitments and self-fulfilment as a "secondary" earner. Like Chantal, Agnès could only work on and off as a teacher because her husband's job as a senior manager meant that they often moved. She eventually turned her back on the teaching profession altogether, and devoted herself to furthering her husband's

"proper job", This is something she now regrets, saying that she "sacrificed" her career to that of her husband:

> I need to have something to do outside the home, but it's difficult to find anything. I eventually had to give up on this sort of on-off career that was constantly being interrupted by one thing or another. And of course my husband's job had to take priority, because he had a proper career. Not that teaching isn't a proper career, but his job meant we had a good standard of living and were quite well off – nothing grandiose, but quite well off all the same. So I followed my husband and made the sacrifices I had to make. So I really sacrificed my own career.

> And that was out of choice? You agreed to sacrifice your career?

> Yes, I agreed! Above all, because my husband had a good job. If he'd had a job where he earned less, perhaps I'd have kept working, but then my husband was posted to Germany, so I had to give it all up.

While they were living in Germany, Agnès found work giving French lessons, which she found both satisfying and gratifying. When they returned to France, however, she found it impossible to fit any kind of work around her family, for she now had to look after her ageing parents as well. Agnès chose to make the family (i.e., her husband, her daughter and her elderly parents) her priority, but at the time of the interview, she expressed deep dissatisfaction with her life as a housewife, as her daughter had moved away, her father had died and her mother was in a retirement home. No longer feeling useful, and frustrated by her lack of a proper role or function in life, she was attempting to recreate an identity that was no longer based on motherhood and the family:

> Well, you know, when it comes to housework, I don't really consider myself to be a housewife, but that's what I am. So I do what I can. I keep the flat clean, but I'm not a born housewife and I don't find it very fulfilling. I need to have contact with the outside world, a life on the outside. It's absolutely crucial. In fact, I think we're hardwired to be like that. Then again, perhaps not, because there are women who are happier staying at home, but for me, it's definitely not my cup of tea. It was OK when I still had my daughter and my family to look after, because it gave me a form of legitimacy. I'd say to myself, "I'm here because of them", but now, I don't know who I'm here for, why I'm here. My daughter's in Lyon, my parents, well my father's dead and mother's in a home. So everything's changed. There's a real feeling of emptiness.

What comes through in this portrait of a housewife in search of a role is a feeling of uselessness and a perceived lack of social recognition. We had already encountered this, albeit in a more muted form, in Odile, for whom the role of stay-at-home wife and mother was just not enough. According to Méda (2001), women "experience their identity, their anchor in life, as something plural, and they clamour for this plurality". When they are deprived of this *plural* identity, they encounter the stigmatization that has become the lot of housewives in recent years, for as *mere mothers*, they contravene the norm of autonomy and independence established by mass female employment. Women who do not work are regarded as *old-fashioned*, and may even be viewed with a degree of scorn:

> Here I am at home, with no career so no status. You don't feel very highly valued. You don't feel that you're completely nothing, but you don't feel very highly valued either. People

ask me, "Why don't you work?" And I say, "Well listen, there are things you can't possibly understand. I've got a family, and perhaps you don't realize, but I've got a family that's very…" and then people say, "Well, everyone's got a family". Yes, but not everyone's made the choices I've made. There are some people who sacrifice their families, but that's not something I was willing to do, and that's that. It was a very demanding family, so I had to make a choice that some people may see as a bit old-fashioned.

The lack of social recognition is not the only problem for these women, who feel that giving up work when their children were born was a form of abdication. British women, in particular, often mention the financial impact, too. Carol, aged 55 at the time of the survey, offers a particularly striking example. Throughout her first marriage, which lasted 18 years, she had worked nonstop as a social housing manager. Following her divorce, however, she moved in with David and her career began to take second place, especially after she had her son Jimmy at the age of 42, as her job involved a huge amount of travelling.

So I didn't go back to work because I had to drive about all over the country but I was quite glad not to…it was an excuse to leave it. I was quite happy not to.

The birth of her son gave her an excuse to leave a job that did not give her any satisfaction. "I was middle management but I did have an awful lot of responsibility and there was no support really. So there was kind of bad management above me". After staying at home for 5 years to look after Jimmy, she started working part time in a care home for young children, but not at the level she had previously enjoyed. She regretted the drop in income, as well as the loss of freedom that went with it.

Women's work-life balance can be upset by other events, besides childbirth and parental illness. For example, when a company relocates, the question of how far they are prepared to pursue their career becomes particularly acute, as Christiane discovered. Women faced with the prospect of having to move because of their work are less concerned with losing their job if they refuse than with losing their network of friends and relatives if they accept. Then there is the home—the fixed point in their families' lives—to consider, as its loss is "perceived of as threatening the family's equilibrium" (Vignal 2010). On top of this comes the problem of finding new schools and the children's probable reluctance to move. This is precisely what Christiane found. She had an interesting job in the marketing department of a large firm, but refused to move when it relocated, citing the importance of her daughters' education, her reticence about living in the provinces and her "unconscious desire" to stop working:

Our daughters had reached a critical age, when they would soon be leaving *lycée* and going on to university. This is a better place for higher education than A., so we refused to move… In any case, I'm not very provincial. So that's why… So it wasn't really redundancy. Rather, I allowed myself to be laid off, because I must have had enough of working, it was my subconscious at work…

Although it may simply be a way of convincing themselves that they have made the right decision, as well as citing their children as a reason for giving up their job, women also mention the uninteresting nature of their work, the general wear and tear—and the guilt. Like men, women can find the realization that their work no

longer brings them any satisfaction, and no longer fulfils their expectations or their ideal of self-fulfilment, a painful experience. Unlike men, however, they can use their children as a pretext for retreating into family life and do not have to own up to workplace suffering. In her narrative, Christiane explains that she took advantage of her redundancy to spend a few years at home and do some childminding. She later found a job in the town where they lived, but one that was less well paid. Today, she wishes she had not made this choice, as it means she cannot take early retirement, unlike most of her former colleagues who had refused to take voluntary redundancy.

Christiane's work was clearly "of secondary importance", subordinated not just to "family imperatives" but also to her husband's "career needs" (Battagliola 1987), for after a period of unemployment, her husband had finally found a post as an engineer in the public sector, and moving house would have compromised this new departure. As we have already seen, continuing to work at least part time is not simply about raising the family's living standards. It is also about the woman's need for some kind of social life and her reluctance to become financially dependent on her partner. In these cases, work becomes the "cornerstone of female identity" (Ferrand 2004, p. 13), even if it does not have quite the same importance as it does for men (de Singly 2004). For being a "good mother" is not about going out to work, but about being there for the children, always on hand to listen (Ferrand 2005). A woman's job is therefore seen not as "a complement to the man's salary, but as a complement to the woman's personal existence" (de Singly 2004, p. 209), which must not be allowed to interfere with her work as a mother. Conversely, work remains central to male identity, and thus to paternal identity (Orain 2007).

6.4   Women Who Focus on Their Careers

Career women include single women who are childless, and thus escape the double day, single parents who cannot fall back on a partner's income, and women who have children and live with a partner.

6.4.1   Women Living on Their Own

Fanny is a perfect illustration of the career women described by Hakim (2000). Not having the benefit of a university education, she learned secretarial and accounting skills in her husband's company, after which she moved into psychology and graphology. As she emphasises, she never had any formal training, simply "learning on the job". Unlike Odile, who regarded her work as less important than that of her husband, Fanny clearly took ownership of her functions… and of the company ("as I was married and had a company…"). At the age of 30, she left her husband, her job and her home, and continued to attend courses to complete her training as a psychologist:

> I started from nothing—no money, no job, no home… nothing—so I looked around, I went on a course on personal development and said to myself, "That's what I want to do!" But in the meantime, I had to earn a living and put food on the table. They called to tell me about a job in a doctor's surgery in Orleans, so I went and did that, and at the same time I went on courses whenever I could, and eventually started running courses of my own.

After devoting her holidays to learning about her future career, Fanny set up shop as a coach and consultant, all the while continuing to work for a company owned by one of her brothers. Today, whenever she is not off on a course on Buddhist psychotherapy or Ericksonian hypnosis, she helps out at gym and dance clubs and psychologists' associations, doing secretarial and accounting work. Solène followed a similar career path. A single woman, she also went on a great many training courses before eventually taking up a managerial position in the civil service. Like Fanny, she is an active member of leisure associations, singing in choirs, taking part in organized walks, and going on group holidays. Her entire daily schedule is organized around her job, her professional development, and her cultural and sports activities.

6.4.2 Women with Children

The lives of women who invest in their careers, but who also have children to look after, are very different indeed. In order to pursue their careers, they must organize their domestic duties with military precision, delegating wherever possible and maintaining a strong network of neighbours and/or family members. These women often find themselves having to meet all their families' material and emotional needs, as men rarely make much of an effort to support their partners in their chosen careers (de Singly 2004). Some of the women we interviewed had stay-at-home mothers, and therefore had to work out on their own how to organise their time, under the disapproving (or even envious) eyes of their mothers and mothers-in law. Others, like Olivia, were just the latest in a long line of economically active women, and having a career was therefore seen as something entirely "natural" and "matter of course". After all, they had seen their own mothers going out to work just like their fathers or, in some cases, had been brought up by mothers going it alone:

> My mother brought us up single-handed, and I can't remember a time when she wasn't working, so for me it was entirely natural. It would never even have entered my head not to work.

These working mothers sometimes went one step further, consciously and deliberately transmitting the work habit to their daughters so that they would never experience hardship (Battagliola 1987). Olivia certainly devoted herself to her work as a nursery-school teacher. She particularly enjoyed having the freedom to choose which activities and methods to use, which she would not have had at a primary school:

> I like doing things with my hands, anything that's artistic, so it suits me far better. I can still really enjoy myself. I think I'd soon have got bored in a primary school… But it's more difficult, as there are fewer readymade resources. You have to have a lot of personality and imagination, and manage all that on a daily basis, so you either like it or you don't.

What comes through here is her positive attitude to her job, which matched her value system and gave her the autonomy she was looking for. Unlike Olivia, who reproduced her mother's model, Léonie is one of those women who had to learn from scratch how to manage their careers while at the same time organizing their family life, sometimes from a distance. Born in Northern France in 1948, the oldest of eight children, she started studying for a degree in modern languages but stopped after 3 years. "May 1968 came along and everything was in such a mess that I gave up university and went into teaching". However, she soon tired of being a supply teacher and used her language skills to find a job in international trade. Regularly travelling abroad, she changed course again after she married, or rather after the birth of her children. On the advice of an uncle, she took the civil service examination in order to have a more stable post in the social security department. As her family was then living in the Paris region, she hoped that after a year's training in Saint-Etienne, she would be posted to Paris. However, she was actually given a provincial posting, meaning that she and her husband had to reorganize the way they lived:

> Then I was promoted and sent to Lyon. So it was my husband who looked after our two children during the week. He also had to travel for his work, but luckily we had good neighbours, so we got by. It was more of a problem when he had to go abroad sometimes, so there were days… he'd arrange it so that he took very late flights back, so that he'd be there. Only once did he have to ask my mother-in-law for help… The first Saturday, they rushed to meet me, then the second Saturday there was a birthday party… Because they knew I'd be back at the end of every week, they just got on with their own lives. I'd come back at weekends, stock up the fridge, just do as much as I could.

When she started to encounter problems at work, her husband urged her to put an end to all the coming and going and take the Education Ministry examination so that she would be "free for the children" on Wednesdays when there was no school. She ended her career as a teacher in a nursery school, where she enjoyed the same freedom of action as Olivia. Like Léonie, Sabine tried to fit her family life around her career and that of her husband—though not without difficulty. Born in Paris in 1946, she was obviously deeply attached to this city, where she felt she belonged, but was forced to leave it, first for family reasons, then because of work. After studying music and having a variety of jobs in the capital, Sabine found a post teaching the history of music in Orleans. A few years later, she become deputy director of the conservatoire in Agen. It soon becomes obvious that each of the family's moves was triggered by one of the spouses changing jobs, and reflected the ensuing compromise. When they settled in Orleans, for instance, it was on account of Sabine's husband's work, but when they later went to Agen, it was because of her work. This entailed a fresh reorganization of family life, as her husband was working in Toulouse at the time, so he was the one who had to shuttle back and forth. When he decided he had had enough of all the travelling, the family moved closer to Toulouse, and it became Sabine's turn to do the commute between Agen and Toulouse. In the end, their marriage broke down, although it is difficult to say how far these unsatisfactory compromises were to blame. Sabine, who had never stopped missing Paris, eventually fulfilled her dream of returning there, moving closer with each change of job:

> I was born in Paris, and in fact I lived there until I got married, at the age of 23. So then I went to live in Orleans, crying my eyes out because there wasn't a Metro and I was sure I'd be quite lost. And so we stayed in Orleans until 1975. After that, we moved to Poitiers, where we lived until 1982, which is when I went to Agen for my work. In fact, the whole family moved, so that time I was the one bringing the family with me. And so I lived in Agen until 1992. Between 1992 and 1995 we lived in Toulouse, but I still was still working in Agen, which meant a 110-km motorway drive each way. And then I came home, because we'd separated, then divorced. I said to myself, "I'm going home", which meant, "I'm going back to Paris".

It is impossible to know whether either Fanny's or Sabine's divorce was linked to their need for autonomy and their desire for a fulfilling career. It is safe to assume that the treks to work and back, and the resulting fatigue did nothing to ease conjugal and family life. Managing two careers, where the partners are forced to live apart or to travel long distances, is a tricky business, especially when the children are still young and need a lot of looking after, and our respondents tried a number of different solutions. Léonie, for example, switched to a different occupation in order to be closer to her family. Sabine, however, ended up leaving her husband and moving back to Paris with her children. Interestingly, research among senior managers in the banking sector who have opted for the solution of *living apart together* (LAT) in order to preserve their wives' careers shows that this lifestyle has the unintended consequence of reinforcing gender inequality through the specialization of conjugal roles in the private sphere (Bertaux-Wiaume 2006).

There is also the opposite situation, where both partners share the same workplace, as we find out from Carole. A provincial who moved to Paris looking for work, she chanced upon an advertisement for a job in a small construction company, where her future husband just happened to be employed. Being the only person in the firm with her particular set of skills, she enjoyed considerable freedom, and she also greatly appreciated being the only woman. Her narrative shows that negative stereotypes about female-majority gender imbalances can be pedalled not just by men but also by women, who thereby make themselves the authors of their own misfortune (Fortino 1999):

> Yes, I enjoyed it because I had a boss, but nobody I was answerable to, if you see what I mean, because he didn't understand the first thing about my work, so I did what I wanted when I wanted. If I wanted to type out estimates I typed out estimates, if I wanted to do invoices, I did invoices, if I wanted to do the accounts, I did the accounts. As long as people were paid on time, and all the work got done, there wasn't a problem. Also, I wasn't working with other women. That actually doesn't bother me – it's easier… working with men is easier… Men are easier to get on with, they say what they mean, there's no jealousy. There aren't any problems with men, but with women, it's always…

When her son was born, Carole carried on with her job, but found a childcare solution close to her work, and later obtained an exemption from the council so that he could attend a nearby school. Over the years, she and her husband developed a very deep bond. He played Pygmalion (de Singly 1996)[7], by encouraging her to invest

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[7] In *Pygmalion*, a play by George Bernard Shaw, a professor of phonetics sets himself the challenge of transforming a poor flower girl's accent so that she will pass as a duchess. He succeeds in

in her work, and helped her reconcile work and family. The upshot was that they shared their work, the domestic chores and the rearing of their son. As time went by, the company became their "second family" and it was there that Carole found solace and a network of solidarity when her husband died, "because I'd never stopped working, I'd only ever been off for a week. He died on a Thursday and I was back at work on the Monday. I needed it, I couldn't stay here, just staring at four walls… it was impossible". At the time of the interview, she was keen to keep on working for as long as she could, and hoped that her boss, then aged 69, would not sell his business, as she could not envisage being retired, perceiving it as a "form of death. You're cut off from people's lives, you live in the shadows, look after yourself, go on trips, but that's it. Clearly, Carole's entire personal life and identity revolved around her working life, and more specifically the company she worked for.

Providing it matches the woman's personal set of values, work can be a positive and fulfilling experience, and a source of social recognition. More prosaically, it can also make separation feasible. Although she stopped working for 3 years after the birth of her two children, Nadine had always committed herself to her career. Born into a family of eight children, she had never wanted to model herself on her stay-at-home mother, and was keen to get back to work in order to gain financial independence, a prerequisite for her autonomy:

> One thing was for sure: I didn't want a life like my mother's. Being a housewife was… I stopped for three years for my children, but it was high time I got back to work. I love my children and I loved everything I did with them during those three years, but I could never have been a stay-at-home mother or a housewife.

Even though we have established that work is a facet of female identity, a certain duality comes across in Nadine's discourse. She clearly had difficulty reconciling her different female statuses, and whether she stopped or kept on working, she felt she had to justify herself either way. For while mothers who do not work are seen as old-fashioned nowadays, motherhood continues to be regarded as a vital component of feminine identity. This is what prompted Nadine to stress that she "loves her children". It seems to be a double bind, where building a career is always detrimental to building a family, and vice versa (de Singly 2004). Working women are therefore only valued up to a certain point—the point where they start to stray beyond a socially agreed framework. Their work must not be allowed to impinge on their family, let alone on their maternal role. With the help of her family and her husband, Nadine managed to pursue a career that often took her away from home. Her younger sisters, still teenagers, lived in the same neighbourhood and often babysat. Indeed, the couple deliberately moved closer to her parents' home so that they could take advantage of this assistance. Nadine's young brother took on where his sisters had left off, for at the age of 17, he moved to the house in suburbs that she and her husband had purchased. Normally, it is the woman's workplace that is the deciding factor when moving house, as shortening the daily commute can help to restore the

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his challenge, but mistakenly assumes that the girl is now his creature. The play is based on the story of a sculptor in Greek mythology who fell in love with one of his statues and saw it come to life.

work-life balance. Here, however, it was quite the reverse, given that Nadine was constantly travelling for her job:

> We really wanted to buy a flat in the 15th *arrondissement*, but it was all far too expensive for us, even though we both earned good money. We both had executive-level jobs, but it was just too much…. I mean, it's incredibly hard to buy a place to live. So we found a house in V., and there you are.

> So that was so that you could buy something?

> Well yes, and first of all, my husband had found a job nearby, so that made things a bit easier. And because I was having to travel quite a lot, it affected him more than it did me… So I was often away on assignments in the provinces, and wasn't at home that often, or rather I'd get back late and leave very early in the morning. That's just how it was. My brother was living with us at the time, and he helped me.

The financial autonomy she derived from her work doubtless allowed her to contemplate separation, and 2 years after they had bought their house in the suburbs, she moved out. She remained on very good terms with her husband and everyone, including brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles, would converge on the family home in Brittany to celebrate important occasions such as Christmas. For Nadine, work had always been an important part of her life and her identity, and at the time of the interview it was more so than ever, partly because she was working as "a manager overseeing a workforce of 50, which makes a lot of work", and partly because she was living alone. Unsurprisingly, when asked to compare past and present generations, her discourse is all about women, female employment and the independence that wage earning brings. The *independence* of a career woman is not always an attractive proposition, however, and some of our female respondents chose to adopt the "housewife" model, even if they sometimes came to regret the lack of social and also financial recognition that Nadine says her younger, stay-at-home sister encountered. She criticizes the lack of recognition for the *work* that women do in the home, especially the lack of pension rights. These women are not even valued by their husbands, for it was after her husband had made a snide remark about spending money she had not earned that Nadine set about looking for work.

> So apart from women going out to work, are there any other differences from your parents' generation?

> Yes, I'd say there are. Because our mothers didn't work, they were heavily dependent on their husbands. Whereas we, I mean our generation, or part of my generation, because I think that there are still women my age who… I can see it in my own family and friends, and the parents I know from my daughter's school who haven't wanted this independence. I'm one of those who do. And for me, it's out of the question… Husbands make remarks… I actually went back to work because one day my husband said, "So it doesn't bother you spending money you haven't earned?" Three days later, I'd found a job. After all, I was already contributing to the household, because housework isn't free. Even if some people say it's not right that a housewife should be paid, I say it is.

> It's a job.

> Yes, it's a job, but there hasn't been much progress on that front. It doesn't get the recognition it should. And I actually find that quite depressing. Because unfortunately we live in a world where you can find yourself with absolutely nothing from one day to the next…

> You can spend 20 years in the home and end up with nothing, no pension… It's something I realized very early on.

For some women (and for some of their partners, too), being a wage earner is absolutely fundamental. It is synonymous with independence and autonomy, especially of the financial kind. It also gives them the power to say no and to leave the relationship whenever they want. Financial independence can not only smooth the path of separation, but also give women the confidence to go it alone. Susan, for instance, who lives in London, is one of the few women who never stopped working, even when her children were small. After her degree, she worked as a social worker. She later found a job in government, again in the social care sector, before becoming an administrator for a charity. The owner of a large house in a desirable district of London, she never married, and had two children by different fathers. She displayed considerable autonomy in both her career and her residential life choices, but was always mindful of the importance of her daughters' education (in particular the choice of schools) and their future security, which is why she was in such a hurry to own her own home:

> When I was 30–31 years old, so in 1981–1982, I told myself that I really ought to buy now. It was the height of the housing boom and I thought I really ought to make my daughter's future secure. I looked around for the best possible house for the money I could afford to pay, but the ratio wasn't quite right, so I saved all I could, and then bought a place for me and my daughter. We stayed there until my second daughter was born in 1985. No, I moved in 1986 and my daughter was born in 1985. I was living in a three-bedroom flat with my eldest daughter and my baby girl, and a few months later the baby's father and I decided to live together. So we moved in together and took out a mortgage in 1986.

> When you say "live together", you mean you bought another property or he moved in with you?

> No, he didn't move in with me. What we did was I sold my property and we clubbed together to buy a house in 1986. So he'd never lived with us up until then.

Susan's life revolved around her work and her daughters, and partners were kept at arm's length. She was relying on her real estate to secure her daughters' future and fund her retirement, although at the time of the interview, she had no intention of stopping work at 60.

6.5   Women Who Return to Full Time Work After a Divorce

Overturning the lives of women who had given their all to their husband and children, the surge in divorce rates was one of the most striking changes in the family that took place after the mid-1960s—on both sides of the Channel. It was the rise in women's employment that had made the dissolution of a marriage possible, and even *acceptable*, thus introducing a fracture into the linearity of family life. Women like Fanny or Nadine who already had jobs simply kept on working, sometimes

devoting even more time and energy to their career than before, perhaps in an attempt to compensate for their relational setback. For those like Susan in London and Nadia in Paris who had opted for an independent life from the very outset, and had always avoided the commitment of marriage, the ending of a relationship had no impact on their careers. It was a very different picture for women who had decided to turn their backs on their careers, as separation undermined this decision. Having chosen to construct their identity around the image of a wife and mother, rather than that of an independent woman, many of them felt the loss of that identity particularly keenly. Women therefore experienced divorce or separation differently, depending on their occupational trajectory. For women who had stayed at home or were only secondary earners, the conjugal couple and parental couple were one and the same thing, and they could only conceive of the family as an indivisible whole (Clément 2009).

6.5.1   Fault *Divorce*

Divorce is sometimes represented as a means for women to achieve their desire for autonomy, and sexual equality. From this perspective, it can be viewed as a form of independence. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that divorce can occur in many different situations, and that the *cost* can be especially heavy for women who had decided to stay at home or only had a secondary occupation, as they receive nothing in exchange for all the years they spent contributing to the household as homemakers (de Singly 2004). Worse still, as we have already seen, family and motherhood are their entire source of identity and self-fulfilment, so when the family falls apart, their role, their status and their very foundation collapse. Prior to her divorce, Suzanne was an example of the intermediate occupational model. "I belong to the category of women who stop working for a few years to look after their children". She later worked part time from home, in order to fit her work around her family life. The crisis in her married life was all the more brutal that it took place after 20 years of marriage. "The midlife crisis? Well, I can tell you it certainly exists." On her husband's initiative, the couple divorced and she found herself having to look for a full time job at the age of 54. She underscores the difficulty she had "accepting" this divorce, which she experienced as a "betrayal", given that marriage for her should be an indissoluble union and an irrevocable contract:

> Then again, I know I'd have found it difficult to forgive and forget. My parents were very close and I couldn't imagine it happening. In fact, I don't think I could have done it. For me, when someone leaves—because that's often what happens—for me quite honestly, it's a form of betrayal. It's someone who… It's someone who's given his word and who's gone back on it. Whether you like it or not. It's not like when both sides agree and say to each other, "we don't get on any more, so let's separate". It doesn't often happen like that. Even if I've know people who've separated without any ill feeling, and who continue to see each other. I know two like that. I find it a bit astonishing, but so much the better for them. They

see each other with the children, and one lot even live on the same floor. I don't know how they manage it, but I know people who do.

She describes other types of divorce she has witnessed, where both partners have "agreed to separate" without any apparent hostility, moving on and, in the process, denying the pain—the hallmarks of a *successful* divorce (Théry 1996). We will see later on just how far Suzanne is from this model, with its logic of continuity (Théry 1996) and its distinction between the conjugal couple and the parental couple, such that the break-up of the former does not necessarily entail the break-up of the latter. At the time of the interview, Suzanne no longer had any contact with her former husband, and her children seldom heard from him. This type of family can only exist as a whole, so if one of its members disappears (a partner, in this instance), the entire edifice crumbles. Suzanne's separation can be likened to the *fault* divorce, and continuity has no place in it. It is women's lack of employment, or status as a secondary earner, that holds the key to this particular brand of *fault* divorce—when it happens—because the "housewife, being more dependent, is condemned to happiness, or at least to the pretence of happiness" (de Singly 2004), and her role is to "maintain and preserve the family, and thence the couple" (Clément 2009). For these women, retirement is a particularly thorny issue, especially the question of how to fund it. Suzanne highlights the problems that people in their 50s have finding a job, and later goes on to describe the small size of her future pension:

> So my son stayed with me for quite a while because we were rather shaken by the whole divorce thing, and didn't know how things would turn out. At that time, I had a substantial part time job, but not a full time one. When you're 50, it's not easy finding full time work, even with the best will in the world. So I found myself in the thick of a divorce, with no full time job and a flat that had been put on the market, so there were plenty of reasons to feel upset. You can imagine. So my son stayed with me, yes, I think he stayed until he was 25.

> And was he working?

> Yes, he was working, but we really didn't know what was going to happen. And I think he didn't want to make matters worse. Anyhow, that's what I'm assuming. We didn't really talk about it, there were plenty of other things to get sorted.

6.5.2   Bankruptcy *Divorce*

Unlike Suzanne, Patricia harboured few illusions when she got married after becoming pregnant by her future husband. A few years later, she separated from her alcoholic spouse, who had started to behave violently towards their son. To prepare for this change in her circumstances, she decided to start looking for a secure job as she embarked on divorce proceedings. Up to then, she had turned her back on stable employment, preferring to work intermittently, but she now relinquished what had become a more uncertain lifestyle, owing to rising unemployment, and found a position in a social security office, which brought her stability and a number of other advantages:

> At that time, there were long periods when I didn't work. I didn't want to settle down, so it was only in 1976, when I saw that unemployment was starting to rise, and I was in the

> throes of a divorce, that I told myself that I must be sensible. I'd been temping in a social security office since May, and they just happened to be looking for someone for this new position in the claims transmission department, so in August they asked me if I wanted to stay on, and I said yes. I separated from my husband in 1970, in 1972 we filed for a legal separation, and the decree nisi came through in 1976. That's why I absolutely needed a stable job in order to have a flat for me and my son and social security cover.

From that time on, Patricia devoted herself to her work. Helped by one of her male friends who was "really good at maths", and a female friend who babysat for her son, she was able to go through night school and train as a programmer and analyst.

Patricia's example is very different from that of Suzanne, in that she was the one who instigated the divorce and set her *new* life in train. Here, the link between female employment and divorce went in an unexpected direction, as it was *because* she wanted to get divorced that Patricia looked for a stable job (Festy 1992). Employment has come to be presented as the means by which women can achieve autonomy and independence (especially financial), and be in a position to initiate and/or cope with a break-up. It is also a characteristic of families where the conjugal couple is dissociated from the parental one. The survival of the marriage is therefore contingent upon the quality of the relationship between the spouses, who no longer stay together purely for the sake of the children. This has led to a new conception of the couple, where separation is always a possibility, along with divorce. Nadine, for example, did not dwell on the topic of divorce, as she regarded it as the inevitable outcome of her couple. Even so, it is important to underline that although this model of divorce or break-up is now regarded as the norm, it was not always thus, and the change was slower coming for some than it was for others (Théry 1996). Female emancipation took place "in the order of class inequalities" (Blöss 2002), and "family democratization" was far from a reality in some social circles (Neyrand and Rossi 2007). Single-parent families therefore form a rather heterogeneous category and are not all equally vulnerable to financial insecurity. Rather, their situation reinforces existing social inequalities (Eydoux et al. 2007). Lastly, women's employment can serve as a negotiating tool within the couple for men as well as women (Bastard and Cardia-Vonèche 1984), as a closer look at unions where both partners are in employment reveals that working women are not the sole beneficiaries here: their hard-won independence also benefits spouses who wish to preserve their autonomy and do not want to be *burdened* by a financially dependent wife (Clément 2009).

6.6   A New Conflict: Mother versus Daughter

The women belonging to the baby boom generations are nearing the end of their careers. They have already had to contend with the conflict between woman and mother that continues to beset today's generations (Badinter 2010), but now they are facing a fresh dilemma of whether to go on working or look after their ageing parents. When asked about their new life projects, baby boomers who have just retired, are on the verge of retirement, have taken early retirement or been

made redundant, say that their priorities are finding "time for themselves" and doing voluntary work (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). Many of our French respondents talked about their involvement with charities such as the Petits Frères des Pauvres and the Restos du Coeur, or with sports clubs, cultural organizations or community barter schemes. Charity work is a major source of self-fulfilment for some women, whether they are wage earners, such as Martine, or homemakers, such as Corinne. Like paid employment, it takes them outside the private sphere and makes them feel valued. And yet the identity they acquire outside the family can sometimes prove very fragile, for as we have seen, family events such as childbirth or the illness of a spouse or parent can prompt women to question the validity of their paid or voluntary work. They often create tensions about which to commit to—work, family, charities or politics. "These tensions lead them to negotiate with others, as well as with themselves, as to which form their individual investment in these different membership groups should take" (Pennec 2004, p. 99). The demands placed on them by elderly parents can force women to cut down on their outside activities or even curtail them altogether. Although the tug of war between work and motherhood has been extensively examined in recent years, far less work has been done to find out if and how women combine looking after frail and elderly relatives with full time employment, at least in France[8]. For a long time, the existence of stay-at-home wives and mothers such as Juliette disguised the pressure that women are under when they try to reconcile work and family life after they have finished bringing their children up. While most women somehow manage to steer a path between the two—some may, in any case, already have retired or taken early retirement—others, like Carole, feel torn between the need to help their parent(s) and the need to keep on working for financial reasons:

> One of the reasons why I'd like to stop working is that I'd like to have more time… I mean I really don't have enough time and I feel guilty about spending time with other older people rather than my mother. I mean, I go to my mother's, and I feel really bad because I can sense that she needs me to spend more time with her now, much more time, because she really isn't well.

In Carole's case, this feeling of guilt is exacerbated by the fact that her job involves caring for elderly people. Some women faced with this dilemma choose to stop working. As with childrearing, it is difficult to disentangle how far it is a genuine choice and how far adherence to the norm of filial duty[9]. Two of our female respondents abandoned their careers to look after a sick parent. In France, for instance, Carine's father simply said to her "Listen, either you come and look after me or I go into an old people's home". Over in London, Barbara had no inkling that she would have to cut short her career at 51. After university, she had found work in a bank, where she trained as an actuary and made it her career. She was eventually put in charge of managing investment funds in a bank. As far as her private life

[8] See the studies by Simone Pennec (1999) and her team, and by Florence Weber (see in particular Weber et al. 2003).

[9] The Life-course, ageing and generations in Norway (NorLAG) study explored several such norms (Daatland and Slagsvold 2006).

was concerned, she lived with another woman, while bringing up the daughter of a former female partner, referring to herself as "the absent father". An only child, she had always been close to her parents, looking after them and buying them a flat when they had to leave their tied accommodation on retirement. She therefore took advantage of a plan to restructure the financial services and opted for redundancy.

> Well the major reason why I decided to take redundancy was my father was ill and he had been ill for quite some time. He was 84. My mum was 80–81. His elder sister, he was the only one in his family to marry so I was the only one in my generation. He was at this time nearly 90 and I was the only person visiting sorting him out doing anything for them. And my dad was ill had to go because he had got dementia and my mum couldn't handle him. So she had to put him into a home but you don't want to just leave him there in the home and my mum was in flats where by this point she and another 80 year old were the only people who were at home all day so I knew that it needed sorting out. I actually wanted to move my dad because I didn't particularly like the home. I had to put him into this home fairly rapidly because once you get told he can't go home you have got to make these decisions pretty quickly. So I just was going to spend a bit more time and you know sort that out…. my dad died March 2005, April but he was in hospital for a month. My mum had got cataracts although she didn't realise it until she fell over. First of all she fell over and broke her wrist and at another stage she fell over and broke her arm and at one stage my mum and my dad were in different parts of Lewisham hospital getting operated on. So all in all I was given the option of redundancy because we closed down the Asset Manager for Abbey we shut it. All the money was farmed out to other people. So I could have stayed and helped look after the money that was farmed out or go and I just thought no I'll do that".

Since the death of her father, Barbara had been looking after her mother, and was thinking about going back to work part time. As she had saved quite a lot of money over the previous few years, she no longer wanted to work such long hours as before. She clearly gave up work because she had to look after her parents, but the fact that she also needed to take time away from her career lessened the feelings of duty and sacrifice reported by other respondents. The family reasons that people cite when they give up their jobs can sometimes hide other reasons, such as stress, feeling worn down by the pressures of work and daily living, or general disillusionment with their job. They perceive the family as a haven where they can rebuild themselves and gain a more valued identity, and it is impossible to know how far it is solely a pretext and a means of convincing themselves that they have taken the right decision. Conversely, work can sometimes keep the family—especially elderly parents—at bay. In France, Simone Pennec (1999) has shown that the way ageing parents are looked after depends on their children's careers and social background. Wage earners and their partners who have upward occupational and residential trajectories "manage to keep their distance from family (filial, parental and grandparental) obligations" (Pennec 1999, p. 100). Continuing to work, or postponing retirement, can be a way for women to resist family commitments, a strategy for avoiding their *duty* to look after ageing parents. Family demands become less pressing when women have the contacts and the wherewithal to organize professional care, or can delegate to friends or siblings—in short, make other people do it rather than doing it themselves (Kaufmann 1996). For many women, this is not an option, and they simply have to step up to the mark, although

"rewarding them for unpaid family work might encourage women to take early retirement" (Pennec 1999).

6.7   Conclusion

Women belonging to the 1946–1954 generations enjoyed extremely heterogeneous trajectories, determined largely by the type of family they and their partners formed. This could be either a *fusional* family, where the woman generally worked only part time, if at all, and remained at a safe distance from the world of work, or an *associative* family, where the woman pursued that elusive work-life balance. There were also the *journeywomen*, who lived on their own and threw themselves into their career. By going it alone, they were spared the pain and turmoil inflicted on their sisters by separation and divorce.

Jean Kellerhals, Éric Widmer and René Lévy (2008) argue that "the couple is actually a trio", for it relies on its social power and is dependent upon support not just from family members, but also from public actors. In short, far from being a private affair between two people, it is governed by a whole series of norms and social constraints, which differ depending on which side of the Channel you are on. Couples must therefore adhere to a socially agreed model (de Singly 2004), and that model forces women to perform a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, they are expected to earn a living, but must not become too absorbed in their careers. On the other hand, they are no longer encouraged to stay at home, but must still make family life—especially children—their priority. As Renée Dandurand (1994) puts it, "they are required to distance themselves from the models of both superwoman and housewife, while at the same time finding a way of balancing the two worlds". This sometimes leads women to retreat into the family, especially if their work has become meaningless and ceased to match their value system. Holding down a job that involves lengthy commutes and unsociable working hours, leaving little time for family life can be a profound source of dissatisfaction, especially in a society where work has become one of the main paths to self-fulfilment and part of people's identity. This is true for men and even more so for women who, "all other things being equal, look to work especially to give them an identity" (Garner et al. 2009). In these conditions, parenthood and children clearly exacerbate the inequality between the sexes (de Singly 2004; Kaufmann 1992). Having already been caught between the Scylla of the working woman and the Charybdis of the nurturing mother figure, some women find themselves faced with a fresh dilemma in their later years, torn between work and filial duties. Increasing life expectancy and longer working lives mean that this dilemma will affect growing numbers of women, although to differing extents according to their social status, as women in managerial positions will find it easier to delegate than, say, clerical workers, and will be able to escape filial norms at least in part, just as they did their parental duties.

Most women's trajectories veer between these two extremes of family and employment, swerving between the models of stay-at-home mother and working woman.

The generations of women born after the war witnessed the emergence of the latter and, with that, the virtual demise of the former, as the ideology that had marked their mothers' and grandmothers' lives was replaced by another, equally normative and stigmatizing one that placed them in a highly stressful position. Although they had won the freedom to work, they had also inherited the guilt of never being in the right place at the right time (at home, when they were at work, and at work, when they were at home). Unlike men, they now had a *choice*, or rather they were given the impression that they had a choice, and all the responsibility that went with it. This doubtless explains the ambivalence of their decisions, driven by the need to protect themselves from the world of work by returning to the private sphere, and to distance themselves from family chores by (re)entering the workplace.

Chapter 7
The Family Wins Through

As recently as a few decades ago, marriages could confidently be expected to have four ingredients: a ceremony celebrating a contract between the future spouses, moving in together, the beginning of a shared sex life and, 9 months later, the arrival of the first child. Now, however, these four ingredients have become totally dissociated. Shared sex usually precedes shared living space, and the partners may never actually go on to form a couple, let alone move in together. When wedding ceremonies do take place, they are usually the culmination of several years' conjugal life, while the temporal relationship between union formation and the birth of a child has, to all intents and purposes, disappeared (Trost 1991). Accordingly, marriage no longer symbolises the transition to adulthood and is no longer the cornerstone of family life, as families are now formed around children (Chalvon-Demersay 1983). The gradual unravelling of marriage took place across several generations, transforming every aspect of family life along the way, as well as the very meaning of marriage itself. According to David Coleman and John Salt (1992), the three traditional images of marriage, namely that this institution affords women security and social status, lasts *until death us do part*, and provides a framework for procreation and sexuality, became obsolete back in the 1960s and 1970s. For whereas the generations born between 1925 and 1935 followed a linear lifecycle featuring the early formation of a stable union, followed by the arrival of numerous offspring, those born between 1944 and 1955 experimented with more complex trajectories, in which these events did not necessarily arrive in the same order as they had done for their parents. They might, for instance, live together before getting married and have children out of wedlock. Moreover, the couple might end not because of the death of one of the spouses but because the relationship had broken down. In the space of just a few years, there was a move away from the single-family model that had seemed so stable and so permanent to a plurality of families, such that today, married couples with children rub shoulders with cohabiting couples (sometimes in a civil partnership), single people with or without children, recomposed families and couples living apart together (LATs). As the social historians will tell us (Laslett and Wall 1972), family diversity is nothing new, and the nuclear family that seemed so natural to the baby boomers' parents and grandparents was really just a

blip on the screen (Segalen 2010). What is surprising is the fact that the move from one *family regime* to another occurred in the space of just two generations. The demographic figures set out in Chap. 4 suggest that couples had a dramatic change of lifestyle, suddenly deciding they wanted fewer children, spurning marriage and embracing divorce, and this change is generally (and rather hastily) attributed to the baby boomers. We therefore need to analyse the different stages in the lifecycle to find out how these different lifestyles emerged, how they spread through the generations, and who exactly introduced them in the first place.

7.1   From a Single Lifecycle to Multiple Life Trajectories

As we saw in the previous chapters, women's access first to education, then to salaried work, completely overturned the well ordered family life described by demographers, based on the concept of the *family lifecycle*.[1] Back in 1947, Paul Glick had identified four stages in the family cycle. The initial stage spanned the period between marriage and the arrival of the first child. An intermediate stage lasted from the birth of the last child to when the children began to leave home. The stage where the parents saw their children settle down was followed by a postparental stage, where they found themselves on their own. The final stage was widowhood. Drawing on developmentalist theory, the family cycle concept perfectly matched the linear unfolding of family life in the 1950s that the vast majority of the baby boomers' parents experienced. However, it would soon be called into question by demographers and sociologists, for when the generations born after the war started to experiment with new conjugal lifestyles, they gradually modified the nature of the lifecycle stages and the order in which they were supposed to occur, thereby upsetting the supposedly linear transition to adulthood (see Galland 1997; Van de Velde 2008). These stages not only took place later, but also became more complex, as well as more fragile (e.g., first unions), as alternative forms, such as living alone, nonmarital cohabitation, and recomposed or single-parent families, put in a (re)appearance. Writing in 1991, Jan Trost claimed that the concept of a family lifecycle had henceforth lost all scientific validity and should be replaced by the notion of a *life trajectory* structured by age and extending from birth to death. With this life trajectory, the emphasis is no longer on the family but on the individual, who moves from one stage to another, spending a variable amount of time in each one. Some of these stages, such as marriage or parenthood, may be bypassed altogether, while others, such as forming a union or starting a family, can be looped back to. This approach makes it easier to understand the *new* stages experienced by the baby boomers, identify novel models as they emerge and develop across the generations (Toulemon 1994), and analyse changes in the way that adolescents enter adulthood.

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[1] One of the pioneers of the family lifecycle concept was B. Seebohm Rowntree, who described the various stages in the lifecycle in his *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, published in 1901.

7.1.1 Leaving Home to Live Alone

The normalization of living single for a while after leaving home brought about a major change in the family cycle. This experience of living alone has proved absolutely key, as it coincides with the period when young people encounter the social and economic realities of the world they are living in, form ideas and forge potentially lifelong friendships in the workplace (Penhale 1991). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was the case on both sides of the Channel that most young people left home either to become servants or to be married (Coleman and Salt 1992). While some men did gradually gain residential autonomy, and national service also smoothed the path to independence by bringing about an initial residential separation, most women only left home as brides-to-be. For the generations of women born after the war, it was therefore the first stage in the family lifecycle that changed the most, for whereas the proportion of men who lived alone after leaving home remained relatively stable, apart from a slight delay for the 1946–1950 cohort linked to the raising of the school-leaving age, the picture was very different for women. Of those born in 1951–1955, 42 % left home to live alone[2], compared with 29 % of the 1946–1950 generations and 30 % of the 1941–1945 generations.

Of the 32 women we interviewed in France, only four went straight from the parental to the conjugal home. They clearly corresponded to the profile of women born between 1946 and 1950 described by Laurent Toulemon (1994), whose "union formation prior to paid employment reflected a choice centred on family and children". The remainder experienced an intermediate stage between living with their parents and living in a couple, and belonged to the slightly later generations that innovated by leaving home to live alone, just as women belonging to previous generations had innovated by working before they left home to be married. The transition from leaving home to get married to leaving home to live alone was a slow process that took place over several generations. The issue of residential autonomy first came to the fore when women started to go into higher education. Little by little, society came to accept that young girls could leave home not to be with their husbands, as their mothers had done, but to move to a university town or look for work. As to precisely why parents relaxed their attitudes towards their daughters' autonomy, it may well be that some mothers, frustrated with the role they themselves had been allotted, encouraged their daughters to continue their studies in order to avoid ending up as housewives. Even those who *did* want their daughters to follow in their footsteps may have been keen for them to acquire a good education, given that domestic skills had lost much of their aura (Knibiehler 1997). We should not forget that the 1950s and 1960s saw a gradual shift in mentalities and the emergence of a women's protest movement, as attested to by the seminal works by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Margaret Mead (1950) and Betty Friedan (1963). This

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[2] INED's 1985–1986 *Family situations* survey. In his article, Laurent Toulemon (1996) uses the term *living alone* to refer to every situation that does not involve living with one's parents or in a couple. It therefore covers not only people occupying accommodation on their own, but also those sharing a flat, or living in a hostel or with a family member.

first stage amounted to nothing less than a minor revolution, a "sort of quiet revolution", although many of the baby boomers' parents only agreed to their daughters' leaving home on condition that they remained under close supervision, as in the case of Chantal. Following her mother's untimely death, she had been raised by her grandparents, who allowed her to move to the nearby university town to study law providing she spent the first year in a young girls' hostel run by nuns. Thereafter, she rented a room from none other than the archbishop's secretary, who "mothered me and kept a close eye on me".

This exile (which is how parents saw it) seemed less fraught with peril if it took place within a known and recognized framework. However, going to university or to one of the *grandes écoles* often required students to move to Paris, a city widely assumed by parents to be inhabited by "the dangerous classes". It was thus important to protect one's daughter from these dangers, as well as from herself, by shielding her from all temptations and unsuitable friendships. This, at least, was Hélène's experience. Born in 1947, she was sent by her father to a hostel for young girls to "prevent me from going out". It should be remembered that even then, the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy was always at the back of parents' minds, as Claire confirms. "She [my mother] was terrified I'd get pregnant too young". Although the strictly run hostels reassured the parents, they irked their daughters who were eager for more freedom. Élisabeth, for one, certainly did not enjoy her first year of student life, as it was spent in a hostel operated by nuns, which she described as strict and not at all "liberal". When we take a closer look at her story, we see that her transition to adulthood was typical of her generation of well educated women: moving out of the parental home in order to go into higher education, 2 years spent in a religious hostel, the encounter with her future husband, then marriage. Here, the hostel served as a staging post between parents and husband, a sort of breathing space between her family of origin and the family of procreation. While it was primarily in these religious institutions that good Catholic girls belonging to the middle and upper classes primarily found accommodation (and a modicum of personal emancipation), their wage-earning peers from more modest backgrounds usually ended up in working women's hostels, especially when these were run by their employer, as in Isabelle's case (Post Office hostel). Sometimes, young girls were placed under the supervision of a family member—a centuries-old practice, as migrants arriving in the big cities traditionally resorted to this form of living arrangement (Pourcher 1964; Bonvalet et al. 1988; Gotman 1999), and it was still very much alive among the middle and working classes. Accordingly, several of our respondents started their adult lives living with a brother, an elder sister, an aunt or an uncle. Carole, for instance, who moved to Paris in search of work, was taken in by her brother, and shared a flat with him for 2 years, during which time she met her future husband at the place where she worked. Similarly, Véronique was put up by her aunt in Malakoff when she left her native Brittany. For other young people, this first step involved moving abroad, usually to England (Carine) or to Germany (Nadia and Solange). Nonmigrants, meanwhile, often chose to remain in the same district, street or even apartment building as their parents, as neighbours or relatives often knew of a suitable place to live, making the whole process easier. This is how Annabelle, Christiane, Martine

and Nadine took their first tentative steps towards adulthood. This proximity meant that they could gradually free themselves from family supervision, all the while allowing their parents to continue providing *close protection*. At the end of the day, very few women lived entirely on their own after leaving home, for many of them shared a student bedsit (Odile) or a small flat (Mireille). It would therefore be more accurate to refer to this period as *life without the family*, rather than living alone, and it was a period that might only last for 2 or 3 years—the time it took to meet their future husband. For most young women, living in an institution, a hostel or a relative's home was thus a staging post on the road to adulthood, and one that was gradually dispensed of by subsequent generations.

In Britain, the number of young people living on their own also started to rise in the late 1960s. For example, only 3 % of men aged 25–29 years lived alone in 1971, compared with 11 % in 1991, the figures being 2 and 6.5 % for women (Kiernan 1986). However, their entry into adulthood took place in a totally different cultural context, where young people were encouraged to become autonomous as quickly as possible—as indeed they are today (Van de Velde 2008). The road to independence also took a different route, as the hostels and religious institutions that played such an important transitional role in France simply did not exist in Britain, while living with a family member was also less common. Instead, young people were more likely to live in shared accommodation, as we see from the interviews with our British respondents, who talk about flatshares—sometimes with a sister, as Maureen recalls—and even squats. The attraction of this particular lifestyle to young people can partly be explained by the dearth of affordable rented accommodation (Kierman 1986). As for women who went on to university (generally one that was at the other end of the country), a place in a hall of residence represented the first step in the adult world. For example, London-born Irene chose to go to Exeter University, while Sheffield girl Maureen went to London to study. The difference between the two countries in terms of autonomy and family supervision is quite remarkable, but it is important to remember that young Britons born between 1946 and 1950 grew up in a context of protests and breaks with the past, and in a country that had had a vibrant youth culture since the mid-1950s[3]. In France, on the other hand, these same generations spent their adolescence in a climate of respect for authority and the institutions. Those born in the early 1950s, however, would embark on their adult lives in the aftermath of the events of May 1968.

7.1.2   Living Together Before Marrying

In the decade before 1970, the year when the first baby boom generations started getting married, weddings tended to take place at an early age, and couples rarely lived together beforehand. In 1973, marriage numbers began to decline, and divorce

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[3] According to François Bédarida (1990), "an extremely deep rift opened up between the generations in the 1950s".

figures escalated. At the same time, in one of the most striking—or at least most visible—developments in the family, nonmarital cohabitation started to become more popular. In France, the frequency of first unions formed before marriage rose from less than 20 % in 1968 to 65 % in 1982. "The norm was completely stood on its head: nonmarital cohabitation had remained a very minority behaviour until the late 1960s, but around 1978 it became a majority one" (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994).

Over this period, there was a reversal in values, albeit a gradual one, such that cohabitation "became not just tolerable, but even enviable" (Chalvon-Demersay 1983). Among 22 to 24-year-olds, for instance, the proportion of nonmarital unions was 18 % for the generations born between 1946 and 1950, but had risen to nearly 40 % for the 1951–1955 generations, and went on to top the 59 % mark in the following generation (Leridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994). Our respondents therefore followed different schemas, depending on which generation they belonged to. The change was particularly spectacular for women, for they went from working but continuing to live under the family roof until they married, without any prior cohabitation, to living on their own, then with their future husband—the most frequent route to first-union formation for the generations born after 1954. Yet again, the 1951–1955 generations can be seen as playing a pivotal role, *sandwiched* between the 1946–1950 generations that set the whole process in motion and the baby boomers born after 1955 who continued and amplified this process, such that 42 % of women who lived in a couple after leaving home cohabited, compared with 27 % for the 1951–1955 generations, 11 % for the 1946–1950 generations and 8 % for the 1941–1945 generations, showing how behaviours spread down the generations. In France, the cohorts born immediately after the war arrived on the marriage market before this institution had really been called into question, except by isolated pockets of university students. Some of our female respondents born in 1946, for instance, such as Chantal, Claire and Olivia, married at a very early age (before they were 20), and without any sort of transition (they would later express regret at having had so little time to choose their mate—and indeed to *choose themselves*; Clément 2009). Others belonging to their generation tied the knot when they were slightly older, and despite the revolution of May '68, as it took a while for its ideas to seep through to every stratum of society. By contrast, the baby boomers who were born after 1950 and became adolescents in the late 1960s proved more receptive to the major changes that were afoot. They entered their adult lives at a time when the institution of the family (and authority in general) had been shaken to its foundations, and they started to experiment with a practice that had been common among workers in the nineteenth century, namely *concubinage* (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994), but only gained social recognition when it was adopted by the middle and upper classes (Chalvon-Demersay 1983). Rarely told what was going on, and preferring to "feign ignorance" (Chalvon-Demersay 1983) as long as they could, the baby boomers' parents were often presented with a *fait accompli* and forced to accept that their children were living outside the bonds of marriage. They acquiesced all the more readily that the dread of an illegitimate birth faded with the introduction of contraception, and soon came to regard it as a sort of "trial marriage" and a "reasonable preparation for married life" (Roussel 1978), in that it

did not appear to pose a threat to that institution. 84% of the pioneers who cohabited in 1971–1973 did indeed wed within 2 years, although this figure fell to 69% for the 1974–1976 cohort (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1994). Genuine free unions, which stand in a different relationship to time, featuring a period of latency and maturation that translates as a refusal to commit to the long term and to take on predefined roles (Chalvon-Demersay 1983), were therefore fairly infrequent among our respondents. However, even if marriage remained the norm, it was undergoing profound change, becoming a free, egalitarian and dissolvable contract.

Much the same thing was happening across the Channel. Whereas nonmarital cohabitation remained a rarity in the 1950s, with only one woman in 20 stating that she lived in a couple before getting married (Dunnell 1976), it was a very different picture less than 30 years on. According to the 2002 UK General Household Survey, nearly one in four couples that wed in the late 1970s had cohabited beforehand (Summerfield and Gill 2005). As in France, however, the early instances of cohabitation were extremely transitory periods lasting a mere matter of months (approximately 9 months for the 1970s marriage cohorts, versus 15 months for the following decade), although it is always difficult to gain an accurate idea of the numbers of nonmarital partners who eventually marry, go their separate ways, or remain together for the rest of their lives (Dunnell 1976). Seven of our 30 London respondents were living (or had lived) in a couple without ever marrying. Several of them, including Susan, Judith and Helen, had gone through two unions and were living on their own with their children at the time of the interview. Other respondents, like Carol and Maureen, had married young and divorced a few years later, going on to live with a new partner and have a child. Family trajectories were therefore extremely heterogeneous, although our corpus is too small to generalize our findings or compare them with French results. Even so, it is worth pointing out that the research conducted by Éva Lelièvre (1994) shows that the extent and meaning of nonmarital cohabitation in France varied according to social class.

7.1.3   Staying Married

Having experimented with living alone and nonmarital cohabitation at the start of the family cycle, the baby boom generations went on to explore alternative forms of family life in other stages of the cycle, too. Not content with putting off marriage, they also started to question its defining principle, namely lifelong commitment. Henceforth, "divorce and separation formed part of the union's probably outcome" (de Singly 2009). Couples no longer stayed together for the sake of the children and through a sense of moral obligation, but because they still felt a strong attachment for each other. Divorce numbers that had so far been rising only slowly therefore increased dramatically in the 1960s in Britain, and between 1965 and 1975 in France. So profound were these changes that, regardless of whether or not they had already embarked on married life, all the cohorts underwent an increase in break-ups at the same time, leading Patrick Festy to conclude by 1982 that this "simultaneous reaction across all the age groups can be likened to an epidemic".

Thus, even the generations born in France between 1946 and 1950, which had gone straight into marriage without any youthful cohabitation, now starting filing for divorce, as revealed by the number of separations in France among the 1970–1972 marriage cohorts. New employment opportunities, the availability of contraception, easier divorce in the wake of the 1969 Divorce Reform Act in Britain and similar legislation passed in France in 1975 gave women unrivalled freedom and autonomy to choose the lifestyle they wanted. Marriage itself was modified as a result, for it become the product not of a commitment given on a specific date, but of a desire to keep on living together, as each partner could now choose to leave at any time (Giddens 1996). The couple was henceforth a *duo* (Théry 2001), and marriage started to resemble something out of *Groundhog Day*—an eternal replay, where the two partners were perpetually choosing one another (Cavell 1993), with the risk of separation if conditions changed.

The upshot was a diversity of family models that several contemporary researchers attempted to classify. Louis Roussel (1989), for instance, made a distinction between the *modern* family, the *fusional* family, the *club* family and the *history* family[4], while Georges Menahem (1988b) defined six types of family on the basis of their socioeconomic characteristics, by crossing three modes of domestic organization (patrimonial, conjugal and associative[5]) with two family norms (traditional and modernist). Lastly, by crossing indicators of conjugal life (cohesion, regulation, and openness to the outside world), Jean Kellerhals and his team came up with five types of couples, ranging from the most traditional (*parallel*) to the most liberal (*companionship* and *association*), via *bastion* and *cocoon*[6]. All these typologies are useful insofar as they show how different modes of living in a couple coexisted (Kellerhals et al. 1982, 2008), but one of the virtues of Roussel's (1980) family typology in particular is that it analyses marriage and divorce together. In the first, *institutional*-type model[7], the objective is to save the house: the family as a group prevails over individual wellbeing and divorce is out of the question. The second type corresponds to the *modern* (or *alliance*) marriage, and is characterized by the pursuit of happiness, although the loss of that happiness does not necessarily result in the marriage contract being dissolved, unless a fault is committed against the

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[4] The *modern* family is based on fusion but with respect for institutions, the *fusional* family relies on the continuing bond of love, and the *club* family depends on the autonomy of each member of the couple. As for the *history* couple, it sees its solidarity develop over time, as the imagined partner turns into the tried and tested spouse.

[5] The *patrimonial* type is associated with the need to safeguard the family wealth, the *conjugal* with the reconstruction of the family workforce, and the *associative* with the ability of each spouse to pursue an autonomous strategy of social insertion.

[6] The *bastion* style is a combination of highly fusional cohesion, a traditional, gendered division of tasks, and retreat from the world. The *cocoon* style also relies on fusion and retreat, but the gender roles are more egalitarian. The *companionship* style combines fusion with an egalitarian division of tasks, plus an openness to the outside world through shared activities. The *association* and *parallel* styles both place little emphasis on fusion, preferring spousal autonomy, but the former is open to the outside world, unlike the latter.

[7] This model was left out of a subsequent typology (Roussel 1989).

institution, in which case a *fault divorce* ensues. In the third, *fusion*-type marriage, the union is based entirely on love, so if that love fades, the couple breaks up. The fourth and final type—the *club* (*association*) marriage—is different from the foregoing one because there is less solidarity between the spouses, meaning that separation or divorce does not entail any drama or trauma. Here, divorce—like union formation—is just another stage in the partners' individual trajectories.

Even though the model of the stay-at-home mother, which corresponds to Kellerhals' *parallel*, Menaham's *patrimonial* and *conjugal*, and Roussel's *institutional* and *alliance* types, had fallen out of favour by the early 1970s (Arbonville and Bonvalet 2006), several of our respondents nonetheless choice to adopt it. These were women who were born immediately after the war, married at the age of 19 or 20, and either reproduced their mother's model of economic inactivity, or else were secondary wage earners. From Catholic families, more often than not, they were regular churchgoers, and some even taught catechism, as well as doing charity work. Corinne's and Élisabeth's trajectories provide striking examples of the *conjugal* type of family organization, or *alliance* marriage. When we look more closely at Corinne's, we see that she perpetuated a long line of musicians (her grandfather was a composer) by marrying a music teacher and producing a daughter who went on to become an artiste. As we have seen, from the very outset she chose not to go out to work, but to make charity work her *career*, so that she could devote all her energies to helping her husband. When asked to describe her husband, she emphasised that he had a "good job" as teacher and conductor, all the while describing him as someone who was constantly anxious, stressed out and eternally dissatisfied. A couple of opposites, she saw their roles as complementary but profoundly unequal, with very traditional domestic arrangements where the man occupied the dominant position and held the purse strings, even if she did not quite see it that way:

> Have you ever felt that there was something that actually belonged to you?
>
> Yes, and to both of us. You see… there are things you build together and that are good. But of course, that involves money, and it's my husband who looks after that side of things. He's the one who earns the money, so he's the one who… So from that point of view, I'm lucky he's careful with money and all that. So I've always trusted him and it's always worked out.
>
> So he's the one who does all the budgeting?
>
> Exactly. I mean, he's the breadwinner, so it's only right that he should be the one doing the budgeting. Yes, he's the one who sees to all that, and each day he gives me… That way, you know what you're spending and he's the one who decides. Yes, he's the one who sees to that side of things. One hundred percent. Yes, because, I've never earned a penny. So it's absolutely right that he should be the one who decides.

It turns out that her husband was not particularly pleased to find himself the sole breadwinner, and would have liked her to have gone out to work and earned some money. On several occasions, we came across men who keenly felt the burden of providing for their family, even if it meant that their wives had a constant reminder of their dependent status. For it is important to stress that paid employment can be a weapon in a woman's hands, and a source of emancipation. It allows female partners to assert their position within the couple and to renegotiate their role by *relativizing* their male partner's breadwinning role. Indeed, in a context where

independence and autonomy are the new ideals, financial dependence can be both negatively perceived and negatively experienced (Bachmann 2007). This is certainly how Agnès felt. She suffered from what she felt to be an inferior and dependent position—a feeling reinforced by her lack of economic autonomy, as well as by her husband's behaviour, and above all the way their accounts were organised. Unlike Corinne, whose couple was perceived of as a single unit (ideal of the *indivisible* couple), and its accounts likewise (see Weber et al. 2003; Roy 2005), Agnès had a "small pension" coming to her, but relied on her husband for money to cover household expenditure. Forced to ask for more money if she had to cope with unexpected outgoings, such as medical expenses, she felt infantilized:

> I juggle several roles: I'm the housewife who looks for the cheapest products at Monoprix, I keep house, entertain friends, visit relatives, go to see my daughter. So I try to maintain a form of legitimacy, because I'm sorry to have to say this, but I do actually exist. (*Laughter.*) Even so, it's not easy. Especially when it comes to money. In terms of liquid assets, I've got a small pension coming and a husband who's not particularly mean with his money, but who's not… either. My standard of living, my purchasing power has fallen. You'll say I'm in a special situation. I don't work, but I'll get a small pension when I'm sixty, and meanwhile I get pre-retirement benefits, then there's my husband who works and so he has his wages, but I haven't got much in the way of cash. Unless I keep on nagging my husband for "a bit more money". So I'm very careful about everything. And when I see that my money just won't stretch any further, I say to my husband, "Well, this shopping was for everyone, I've paid my share, so can you give me a bit of cash? That's how we go about things. I've recently had a lot of medical expenses because I've had lots of tests on my leg. I said, "Listen, I'm out of my financial depth here (*Laughter*), so can you…? I'll pay you back, but I can't straightaway, so can you give me an advance? So it's a bit laborious. Each time, I have to negotiate.

As Agnès acknowledges, the modus vivendi that operated in the day of the stay-at-home mother no longer works in a society where women are economically active and financially autonomous ("That's why, ladies, you need to gain as much autonomy and independence as possible"). Other female respondents who *did* work, but only part time, can be said to have had the same sort of marriage. Their modest incomes, and the way they devoted their energies to furthering their husbands' careers, to the detriment of their own, are proof of their secondary role. Even so, some of them did find a degree of equilibrium in this traditional type of domestic arrangement, not least Chantal, who helped her husband rise to the position of senior civil servant, and derived satisfaction from her role in his success, as well as from her job as a part time teacher and later as a gym instructor.

Martine, meanwhile, belonged to Menahem's *patrimonial*-type family. A midwife by training, she gave up her work, which was rapidly becoming both physically and psychologically draining, to devote herself to her children. At the suggestion of her husband ("it would be great if you could try your hand at that"), who was running his own business at that time and was tired of doing all the paperwork, she took on the company's secretarial work, after 20 years away from the job market. Although she did not find the work particularly galvanizing, she claimed to derive satisfaction from helping her husband, especially as her eldest son had by then joined the company and was being trained up by his father. In this instance, family and business were closely intertwined, and Martine's life very much revolved around her family.

Other women were able to move towards a more egalitarian relationship over the years, with both partners preserving their autonomy. Léonie's husband, for instance, played an active role in bringing up their two children, especially during the week, as Léonie had a high-flying job in the provinces, returning at weekends to resume her role as a mother. Living apart together has become quite common, but what made this particular situation unusual was that it was the woman who was absent from the family home. However, this configuration eventually changed, for as we saw in the previous chapter, Léonie subsequently decided to go into teaching. At the time of the interview, her conjugal arrangements had changed yet again, the roles this time being completely reversed, as her husband had taken up a post in Belgium and she—Léonie—was the one staying at home (retired):

> So that's where he lives during the week?

> Well, he did have a flat there in Brussels. But, you know, it's good for marriages! People say we look as though we'd just met, so when we tell them we've been married for 30 years… It's true that we didn't seen each other for a week at a time… So what's good now is that he can work from here. At least in theory, because in practice, if there's a problem with the parts, he has to go and sort it out. At least he doesn't have to go abroad any more. So he stays in a hotel. It's 4 days at the most, whereas before it would be for the whole week. […] This week, I got back from Italy at two in the morning, and he'll be coming back on Wednesday. The problem is when you want to get tickets for the theatre, because you never know. But anyway, he'll be back on Wednesday.

Léonie saw many advantages to this lifestyle, not least the fact that it put the spark back in their marriage, making each reunion seem like their first date together, but other respondents were impatient for their spouse to retire so that they could enjoy more time together and share activities. Jacques, for instance, retired early, but his wife was still working and often went away on business trips during the week. This lack of synchronization can sometimes prompt women to assert their autonomy, especially if they are still working but their husband has already entered the retirement phase. Martine's example is particularly striking in this respect. A bank employee, her career trajectory was not exactly linear. Six months before the birth of her twins, for example, she stopped work "to draw breath", and after her maternity leave worked a 4-day week for 6 years. After the birth of her third child, she took a 3-year break, started back part time, then worked a 4-day week again for 10 years. At the time of the interview, she was into her fourteenth year of full time work, whereas her husband had been retired for 6 years. Present throughout the session, he described a typical weekday:

> Well, I just don't know where all the time goes. For a start, I take care of the flat here, doing the housework, the cooking, making the beds, walking the dog. I also look after the apartment block a bit, I do some cleaning, put the dustbins out, and all that, because there isn't a caretaker. And then one of my sons has a drink vending machine business— you know, the machines you see in motorway service stations that sell coffee, Coca-Cola, cakes and biscuits, and all that, so as he's got machines in quite a few places, if he's running late, I help out by restocking them. They're all over the place, in the suburbs, so time just flies by.

The traditional roles were obviously reversed here, as it was the husband who kept house, doing all the cleaning and cooking, and who was on hand to help his son

out. Martine, meanwhile, appeared to be very much in the driving seat, for not only was she the only economically active person in the household, but she was also the vice-president of the local drama society (we saw earlier how passionate she was about the theatre), and dragged her husband along. Couples clearly have to rene-gotiate and reconfigure their relationship each time they reach a fresh milestone in their lives, be it the emptying of the nest, unemployment or retirement. However, while some men accept these changes, others find them harder to take on board. This was certainly true for Olivia's husband, who had taken early retirement after being made redundant at 55 and hated seeing Olivia go out to work each day. Olivia, who had followed her mother's example by always having a full time job, had tried to reason with him, but in vain ("I say to him, 'You know, it's exactly the same for women who don't go out to work, so deal with it. I'm the one with the job and we just have to get on with things'"). He simply could not bear the thought of having to depend on his wife, as it ran counter to social norms, even though women's jobs can serve as an *insurance policy* against unemployment, and even retirement. The fact remains that retirement frequently upsets married life, as Vincent Caradec (1996a) has shown, with both partners having to redefine their place and their role. While it may give the partners a welcome opportunity to reconstruct their identity—as well as their relationship—it may also bring uncertainty in its wake and lead one of them to seek a new departure, resulting in marital breakdown.

7.1.4   *Separating*

"The conditions in which marital breakdown occurs depend on the type of mar-riage", according to Louis Roussel (1980), and it is certainly true that the divorcees among our respondents seldom seem to have adopted the traditional model of the family. When a marriage is viewed as an indissoluble union from the very outset, divorce is experienced as a punishment. Suzanne's family, for instance, was orga-nized around an *alliance*, or *conjugal* type marriage, and when her husband fell prey to the midlife crisis and left her, she felt particularly bereft, as she had made family life her priority by opting to work part time from home in order to be with their two children as much as possible. Seeing her whole world collapse around her, and close to collapse herself, Suzanne also had to cope with particularly challenging material circumstances, as her two children were still at university, her flat had been put up for sale, and she had to look for full time work at the age of 50. To her, the separa-tion meant that her husband had reneged on their initial pact, in a way that was tan-tamount to treachery, and she therefore severed all ties with him. She remained on good terms with her mother-in-law, however ("it's not exactly commonplace to have the support of your husband's mother"), showing that the paternal family was still very much *in the frame*, and the paternal grandmother was able to continue fulfill-ing her role via the mother/daughter-in-law (Cadolle 2003; Clément and Bonvalet 2006). Suzanne was astonished to discover that several of her friends had retained close ties with their ex-husbands. This was something she could not contemplate, for the conjugal couple and the parental couple were one and the same thing, as far as she was concerned. Magali's example shows that separation can indeed be

experienced in different ways, although this does not mean there are no feelings of anger or even betrayal—after all, the entire family referred to her ex-husband's new partner as "the tart". Unlike Suzanne, Magali made a clear distinction between the parental and conjugal couples, with an obvious emphasis on the former, using the term "father of my children" rather than "my ex".

Born in 1952, Magali had been living in "concubinage" (her expression) with her Colombian partner for 15 years, and they had two children. After they separated in 2001, they reluctantly sold the family home. Her former partner was particularly dismayed by this, not least because he had been made bankrupt and could therefore not give them any financial assistance. His promise to find them a "castle" thoroughly exasperated Magali, though not enough for her to cut all ties:

> The father of my children said, "Listen, you've been really great! As soon as I get back on my feet, I'll buy you a castle! And that's a promise, I'll buy you a castle." Men! They'll say anything! I mean, honestly. He said that to my children, who were in floods of tears, "But I'll buy you a castle!" He left us without a bean. (*Laughter.*)

Despite being separated, Magali saw her ex-partner on a daily basis, as she continued to work for the company they had set up in 1989. As she explained, "You can work together without living together. Which is just as well." This would, of course, have been out of the question for Suzanne, for the two women had very different relationships with their ex-partners, even though extramarital affairs had been the root cause of the separation in both cases. Suzanne's had been a *bastion*-type marriage, and her husband's betrayal too great for her to have anything further to do with him. For Magali, on the other hand, the separation did not prevent her from working for the same company as her ex-partner. In one case, the type of organization the couple had adopted did not allow for an eventual split, but in the other it was always one of the possible outcomes of the union, especially as that union was never made official.

In *associative*- or *companionship*-type marriages, divorce is no longer stigmatized, and is the logical endpoint when the flame is extinguished and the partners see no point in remaining together. It may occur only a few years into the marriage, especially if the couple wed because of an unintended pregnancy. Claire's conjugal trajectory is a prime example of these new family life stories. She was born in 1945 into the provincial bourgeoisie, and as we saw earlier, her mother was terrified her daughter would become a teenage mother. Her fears proved to be well founded, as Claire became pregnant while in her first year at university in 1964. She rather unenthusiastically married the young student who had fathered her child, in what can be classified as a *reparation* marriage[8]. Her first husband was an engineer, so constituted a highly suitable match in her family's eyes, confirming Alain Girard (1981)'s research:

> When you say you were *had*?

> Yes, I was had… Well, I could tell you… He was very keen on the idea, he found me attractive, but I didn't really find *him* attractive… That's the first thing… I don't know whether it's appropriate to go into all that… It would take us quite a long way… So, as I was saying, I'd only slept with him five times and there I was, up the spout…. There wasn't the pill back

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[8] It is worth remembering that in 1970, one in four brides was pregnant (Daguet 1996).

then… It came in about a year later… At least for the general public… In fact it was about the time we got married… that's early 1965… So, as I was saying, in 1965 I got my degree and my first son was born, and my first husband was an engineer, and they really liked that, and in fact it's their fault if I let it happen, in inverted commas. I knew the family would get off my case if the bloke was an engineer rather than on the dole or repeating his philosophy class… (*Laughter*.) It was so much better… Much better seen… Yes, because he was an engineer…. Yes, they thought engineers were the bees' knees…

Claire's example shows just how difficult it was to go against the wishes of one's parents and one's family, especially when it came to getting married and choosing a husband. However, it also illustrates just how swiftly mentalities then changed, for Claire soon cast convention to the winds, divorcing after 6 years and later refusing to marry the father of her second son. By 1978, unofficial unions and births outside marriage had started to become commonplace, so the family and social pressure Claire had experienced 13 years earlier was far less intense. She also brought this second relationship to an end when she saw that her feelings were starting to wane and boredom was setting in. "We got on well together, but it was all a bit lukewarm and boredom eventually set in…" After that, relationships came and went ("as soon as one partner left I went out and got myself another"), but she never again lived in a couple for any amount of time.

Suzanne's *abandoned wife* and Claire's *liberated woman* lie at two ends of a spectrum. At one end, divorce is seen a last resort, when problems such as violence and alcoholism start to become really serious. At the other end, divorce is a lifestyle choice when both partners decide they no longer wish to live together. Claire's conjugal trajectory included several periods of living in a couple, interspersed with periods of living alone. Although she was very much the exception among our Parisian respondents—most of the women only had one union, although all the men but one formed a second family,—a number of our respondents in London had had serial relationships. Maureen, for instance, divorced her first husband and had two children with a partner from whom she subsequently separated, while Susan never married and her two children were fathered by different men. Steve remarried, while Tom had no fewer than three unions. His first marriage, in 1974, ended in divorce 4 years later. He immediately embarked on a second relationship, but the couple separated in 1981. At the time of the interview, he was living with a third partner, who had borne him two children.

7.2   New Family Configurations

7.2.1   Solo Parenting

The high rates of divorce and separation mean that conjugal trajectories may now feature a series of families. They also mean that there are many more single-parent families around than there used to be. In 1971, parents bringing up children on their own represented just 3 % of households in Britain, but by 2001, this proportion had risen to 7 %, and by 2003, single-parent families made up slightly more than 27 %

of all families with children in Britain (Trifiletti 2007). There has been a similar in-
crease in France, albeit less dramatic, as one-parent families represented 19.8% of
families in 2005, versus 9.4% in 1968. We should emphasise here that these fami-
lies have always existed, but they started to become more visible in Britain in the
1960s and in France a decade later. According to Anne Eydoux, Marie-Thérèse Let-
ablier and Nathalie Georges (2007), the issue first came to the attention of French
scientists and statisticians, as well as politicians, for three reasons: the extension of
orphan allowance to the children of separated couples in 1975 and the creation of
a lone-parent allowance in 1976; the inclusion of organizations representing one-
parent families in the National Union of Family Associations (UNAF); and research
by feminist sociologists, particularly Andrée Michel (1978) and Nadine Lefaucheur
(1985, 1991). These events, showing that the plurality of family forms was now ac-
knowledged not just in academic circles, but in social and political spheres, too, re-
flected a desire to recognize these families (often headed by women) as a valid and
legitimate form—one that was sometimes the result of choice rather than circum-
stance. On the one hand, mothers who had been widowed were included in the same
category as their divorced or unmarried counterparts, in order to underline the fact
that they all faced similar problems—no easy feat (Lefaucheur 1987). On the other
hand, one-parent families were presented as a brave new family form that called
into question the traditional gendered division of roles. Women now started to see
motherhood—freely entered into and strictly on their terms—as a new symbol of
women's emancipation and liberation (Eydoux et al. 2007). Although the one-parent
family has now achieved statistical and political legitimacy, its definition remains
controversial, as it covers many different realities and the circumstances leading to
single parenthood have changed dramatically over the years. For example, when
the term first came into use, a mere 16.8% of lone-parent families resulted from a
divorce, and more than half (54.2%) from the death of a spouse. The existence of
this phalanx of lone-parent widows and widowers was barely acknowledged at the
time, as "untimely bereavement and widowhood are common situations that tend
to be ignored in the collective unconscious" (Delaunay-Berdaï 2001), and much of
the discussion therefore centred on the semantics of whether the descriptor *one-
parent* could (or should) be attached to the term *family* or *household*[9]. In 1975,
the year when no-fault divorce was introduced, the proportions were still 24.2 and
43.4%. Only in the 1982 census were they finally reversed, and today separations
and divorces are responsible for three quarters of one-parent situations. It has been
a similar story in Britain, for between 1971 and 1986, the proportion of widows
dropped and that of divorced and separated women increased, such that they rep-
resented 66% of all one-parent households (Coleman and Salt 1992). This change
has led to the feminization of families (Eydoux et al. 2007), owing to the fact that
mothers are more often awarded custody of the children—or rather they more often

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[9] Several researchers, with a number of fathers' groups following suit, criticized the term *one-
parent family*, arguing that only a residence can be described as *one-parent* in the event of divorce
or separation.

apply for, and therefore obtain, custody—and less often form fresh unions, unlike men (Cassan et al. 2001).

As we have seen, the one-parent family category is extremely heterogeneous, with deeply contrasting experiences. Eydoux et al. (2007) make a distinction between unmarried mothers who have no ex-partner to rely on, men and women widowed at an early age (before 55 years) whose children are therefore orphaned of one of their parents, and divorced or separated parents who are bringing their children up on their own, sometimes with the help of an ex-partner. Because of this diversity, some one-parent families are more exposed to precarity than others, and this phase can reinforce existing social inequalities (Blöss 2002; Eydoux et al. 2007; Neyrand and Rossi 2007).

Our interviews confirmed this wide variety of situations, for while some lone-parent families were the result of a partner deciding to leave the relationship, as in Suzanne's case, others represented a lifestyle choice, as Helen explains. Brought up in London, she decided at an early age not to follow the *conventional* route mapped out for young girls, but to take up the feminist ideas that were then floating around:

> I came from a feminist perspective on life. I grew up at a time when politics of feminism were kind of part of the social group so it was kind of matrimony being a bit of a patriarchal institution—not particularly wanting to buy into that really.

> So do you think the fact that you were a teenager in the sixties had quite a big influence on your outlook?

> Yes, yes I do. Actually I mean the whole thing about women being able to take responsibility for contraception I think that had a huge impact.

> Would you see that as being one of the most significant sort of features or it is difficult to choose?

> I don't know really. I think it became very important for me but I am not really sure why it became important for me because a lot of my friends got married very young and had children very young but I knew that wasn't what I wanted to do and why that was I don't know. I just sort of looked around and thought I want to do something different. And when you start to think differently from your peers you kind of end up in a different space and place.

After living with her first partner for 11 years, Helen went without a "stable relationship" for 5 years, describing herself as a "very independent person". She then met the future father of her two children, and lived with him for 16 years. At the time of the interview, Helen was 54 and on her own with her 14-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter. She was still on good terms with her former partner, who helped her out financially, even though they had very different ideas about child-rearing (which is probably why they separated in the first place). Her comment that "one thing that's really nice when you're not in a relationship is that you don't have to defer to anyone when you're making decisions", underscores her desire for independence and autonomy.

These feminist conceptions also influenced Patricia's conjugal trajectory. Like Claire, when she became pregnant in 1965 she was very lukewarm about the idea of marriage. However, it was still a solid institution at that time and she therefore tied the knot, like most young girls back then, when *reparation* weddings were still common. However, the union only lasted 4 years, and Patricia had already prepared for her divorce by retraining so that she would be able to provide for her only child.

She had lived alone ever since, only allowing herself to have *brief encounters* during the holidays when her son was not around. Describing herself as a "diehard feminist *soixante-huitarde*", she was also an active campaigner involved in numerous organizations, including Groupe Divorce, a movement for free contraception and abortion (MLAC), SOS Battered Wives, AIDES and ACT UP.

7.2.2   Recomposed Families

7.2.2.1   A Socially Valued Model

The lone-parent family has come and gone as the *alternative family* model (Eydoux et al. 2007), and it is now the recomposed family that is the *best thing since sliced bread*. For although the expression *one-parent family* was imported from Britain and the States and popularized by feminists in order to blur the boundaries between widows, divorcees and unmarried mothers, and avoid value judgments being made, mothers going it alone are still made to feel guilty, and society now favours the recomposed family, with its two opposite-sex parental figures[10]. In a book tracing the history of the step-parent, Sylvie Cadolle (2000) describes how collective representations in children's literature and the media have changed over time. According to her, because one-parent families were initially portrayed as a deviant form of the family, they led to a change in perceptions, such that the recomposed family ceased to be regarded as a *destructured* unit terrorized by a cruel and jealous stepmother, and morphed into a happy tribe where it was the children's duty to accept (or rather *choose*) the new member(s).This led to the emergence of a fresh set of family norms espoused by journalists and popular authors, where relationship breakdown was no longer a source of guilt providing it was followed by the formation of a recomposed family, the mark of a successful divorce—and a successful recovery from divorce. Seen from this angle, one-parent families, especially single mothers, once again became the *aberrant family* form, while recomposed families were attributed with safeguarding social cohesion. A number of celebrity experts promoted these representations by suggesting that children stand a better chance of reaching their full potential in recomposed families. These experts included Françoise Dolto and, more recently, the paediatrician Aldo Nouri, who professed himself to be alarmed by the monstrous regiments of single mothers stalking the land and sang the virtues of recomposed families. Should he ever separate or divorce, he wrote, he very much hoped that the mother of his children would remarry[11]. Social historians tell us that recomposed families are nothing new (Baluant 1972; Burguière 1993; Flandrin 1984). However, the way they are formed has totally changed in the space of

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[10] This discourse is generally directed at women, as they are supposed to be responsible for family life and are therefore held *guilty* for any failings. In the past, they were made to feel guilty about going out to work, with people not just suggesting but actually asserting that this was bad for young children, but now they are blamed for their lone parenthood, an essentially female status.

[11] "That's why, if I were a man divorcing his wife, my greatest concern would be for her to find another man who satisfied her as soon as possible, for the happiness of my children" (Naouri 1995).

just a few years, as they now come in the wake of divorce, rather than widowhood, meaning that children have an opportunity to maintain links with both parents. In a recomposed family formed after the death of a spouse, the step-parent was traditionally supposed to *restore the natural order of things* by substituting him- or herself for the deceased parent. Nowadays, however, in the event of divorce or separation, the step-parent becomes an extra player, a third parent, as the absent father or mother can no longer be written out of the script. The advent of this new type of recomposed family has raised a great many questions, not least about the novel roles that fathers, mothers, step-fathers and step-mothers all have to play (Théry 1987, Blöss 1996; Cadolle 2000; Martial 2003). Then there is the issue of how they keep their relationship with their children going and how the latter should divide their time between the two households (Théry 1987; Blöss 1996; Cadolle 2000; Martial 2003; Pottevin 2006).

7.2.3   Different Logics within Recomposed Families

In the early days, divorce was tantamount to *social widowhood*, and a new family would be formed to erase all memory of the previous one (*substitution model*), but the advent of new representations of the family has brought about a clear dissociation within the family unit between the parental and conjugal couples. The break-up of the latter no longer automatically entails the break-up of the former, as this would not be "in the children's best interests" (Théry 1996). These representations suggest that our society prefers *continuity* to substitution. As such, the parental couple has a duty to outlast the conjugal one, in order to comply with the norm of the indissoluble filial relation. Viewed as a means of healing the conflict and negative consequences of divorce, this new model of the recomposed family has even been given a legislative stamp of approval (Théry 1996). This has been a gradual change, and until the 1970s, the substitution model remained the dominant one, as we can see from some of our respondents' accounts. In France, prior to 1975, when no-fault divorce was introduced and the children's best interests became the sole criterion for awarding custody of minors, sole custody was common, as a result of the doctrine of spousal fault, thus shutting one of the parents out. In these cases, the new spouse often took over the absent parent's role in an attempt to reproduce a *normal* family (i.e., a nuclear family; Cadolle 2007). Among the generations we studied, the practice of alternating custody was extremely uncommon, and although what is now called *alternating residence* later became far more widespread, it came too late for most of our respondents.

7.2.4   Father-Child Relationships after Divorce or Separation

In the case of our respondents, sole custody was generally granted to mothers. On paper, this was what both parents wanted, but in reality they did not have much

choice in the matter, for social representations of the day meant that it was "self-evident" (Clément and Bonvalet 2006). Even so, some of the fathers we interviewed were keen to express the suffering they had endured as a result. Hervé, for one, would have liked to have looked after his daughter, but at that time, the custody of young children was rarely granted to men:

> And did you have custody of your daughter?

> No. She did, unfortunately. I say *unfortunately* because it was absolutely not what I wanted at the time, but they didn't let single men have custody of young children. I won't go into it now, but it was a very deep hurt.

Martin also describes the pain of divorcing "from his daughter":

> Because moving out of the capital totally turned my life upside down. My job had been going really well, I had promotion prospects and everything. I was the administrative accountant of a department store and was set to become a store manager etc., but I let it all go and moved out of the city after the divorce. My daughter was two years old, and I just couldn't accept the situation. At the end of the day, I always say that it's your child you divorce, not your wife. Because the big problem was being apart from my daughter. Even though I lived nearby, I hardly ever saw her. I went through some really tough times. So moving away was therapeutic, although it didn't change the root of the problem. But it's like they say, time's a great healer.

Judges only went against the grain and granted custody to fathers in *atypical* circumstances, or where the wife had committed a *fault*. During our interview with him, Jacques did not dwell either on the grounds for his divorce or the reasons why he was awarded custody. He only acknowledged his ex-wife's alcoholism—one of the reasons why he divorced and sought custody of his children—when we broached the subject of her possible role as a grandmother. The relationship between his children and their mother was still highly conflictual. They were still very distant and scarcely ever saw her. Even though this divorce can be classified as a *fault divorce*, and there was no semblance of continuity, Jacques' second wife did not feel she was entitled to take on the role of grandmother. In a new twist to the child circulation we touched on in Chap. 3, some children ended up living with their grandparents after their parents divorced. This was the solution adopted by Édouard and his ex-wife, who divorced in 1975. Both led hectic careers, and decided to send their daughter to her paternal grandparents, where she ended up staying for 7 years. His ex-wife, who was of German origin, then obtained custody and took their daughter to Germany. Infrequent contacts between father and daughter—not least because the latter married and started a family at an early age, and lived abroad—prevented Édouard from enjoying his new role as a grandfather.

It is sometimes quite difficult to winkle out men's family histories, as they are often rather laconic about this aspect of their lives[12]. Some do not immediately

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[12] When men are asked to fill out questionnaires, they tend to skate over the section about their offspring, especially when it comes to births outside marriage and children from marriages that have been dissolved. These omissions primarily concern children with whom they have very few contacts. This has been observed in Canada, the United States, Britain (Festy 2002) and, to a lesser extent, France (Mazuy 2008).

admit to having a child from a previous marriage, preferring to talk about their current family. Only when we go through their residential histories step by step, asking about the people they lived with at different times, do we get to hear about a first marriage and the existence of a child or children with whom they still keep in touch. Hervé, for example, who was then living alone after two divorces, talked mainly about the relationship he now enjoyed with a daughter from his first marriage and with whom he shared many moments of closeness, especially since he had become a grandfather. He had a far less easy relationship with his younger daughter, the result of his second marriage, and only referred to her at quite a late juncture in the interview, even if he went on to list her as one of his close friends and relatives, including both his daughters "on the basis of descent and closeness". We often had to prompt Édouard to talk about his eldest daughter's childhood, brought up partly by her paternal grandparents, and his relationship with his ex-wife, about which he was particularly reticent. He was far more forthcoming about his current family, composed of his homemaker wife, son and daughter, and about who would inherit what.

Very few of our male respondents had completely lost contact with their children following divorce or separation. Even so, although there were residual links, some contacts were only sporadic, as communication became less frequent. The practices we identified bore little resemblance to alternating residence, and did not always correspond to shared parenting either, as relations between ex-partners were often tense and sometimes nonexistent, apart from discussions about education or custody schedules (Clément and Bonvalet 2006). When we asked Hervé whether his ex-wives were part of his social network, he exclaimed:

> Certainly not! It's by no means a reaction on my part, but no.

> But you were in contact with your first wife via your daughter?

> Let's say we stayed… We had slightly more contact when my granddaughter was born. But apart from when I'd go to fetch my daughter or bring her back, nothing else happened.

This account shows how family events such as children's weddings, or grandchildren's births or christenings, can provide opportunities for courteous, if not exactly effusive, encounters (Clément and Bonvalet 2006).

7.2.5 Towards New Relations between Former Spouses?

The substitution model did not come through as the dominant one in our interviews, given that children did not entirely lose contact with the noncustodial parent. Instead, we can talk about an *intermediate* model, where children and noncustodial parents manage to keep some sort of relationship going, as in the continuity model. Some of the baby boomers we interviewed not only maintained a parental bond with their offspring, but also enjoyed relations based on friendship and sometimes support, even once the children had reached adulthood, thus contradicting the claims made by Didier Le Gall and Claude Martin (1991).

Contacts therefore continued after the children had become adults, sometimes owing to the manner in which the parents had divorced or separated. For while respondents like Nadine viewed their divorce as "a betrayal, because he gave his

word then took it back". We also have senior manager Dominique, a divorcee who was still on excellent relations with his ex-wife, not least because she lived in the same street as him and even turned out to be his GP. In most cases, the children acted as go-betweens, giving each parent news about the other, but here it was quite the opposite, as Dominique had a stormy relationship with his daughter, not even attending her wedding:

> My ex-wife is still my GP. She lives at the end of the street. She's Polish, very expansive. We get on really well, and she even acts as an intermediary, telling me, "Oh, the children have done this, the children have done that…" Oh yes, she talks a lot. An awful lot.

Clément, meanwhile, organized not just his children's holidays, but his wife's, too. And although she had subsequently gone through a second divorce, he continued to see her ex-husband. For others, like Nadine or Sabine, Christmas was an opportunity for everyone to get together, ex-husbands included:

> We're great friends. But, well, he's in a different country, so he… we don't communicate much. Perhaps twice a year, and then he'll suddenly call out of the blue and say, "It'd be great to spend a week in Paris at Christmas. Will you be around?" So I say, "Yes". And then this year… he came after Christmas. So we celebrated Christmas at the end of January, because we've always done it later. We never manage to get together at Christmas. Never. So we often have Christmas in February or January. (*Laughter*.)

> That's original!

> Yes, well, it's not that we want to be original, it's just that that's the way it is. We never get to see each other, so when we do meet up all four of us, we say, "It must be Christmas!" So, we have a bit of party later with the children. This year, my daughter turned up and my son was still here, and his father came to spend a week here, so … No, we recreated the family unit, it was a bit of squeeze, but everyone managed to find a bed upstairs or in here, so it was a bit like a dormitory, and we celebrated Christmas in January. (*Laughter*.)

Lastly, as we saw, Magali had set up a company with her husband and continued to run it with him after their separation, claiming that they could work together without living together. Then there is Aileen in London, who despite being separated from her husband for 18 years, still went round to do all the housework with her daughter when he was too ill to do it himself. Even so, relations between ex-spouses are generally conflictual rather than amicable, and exceptions to the rule only seem to occur within the upper strata of society. For while the shared-parenting norm embodies the view that the *modern* family should be about equality, negotiation and flexibility (Bastard 2002), it does not correspond to the reality of all families, especially those where the women have very low levels of educational attainment (Théry 1996; Blöss 2002; Eydoux et al. 2007; Neyrand and Rossi 2007). These new models may make divorce more acceptable, in that they ensure the continuity of the family, but they inflict collateral damage on those who play by different family rules, and accentuate inequalities (Théry 1996; Blöss 2002).

7.2.6   *Living Alone or in a Couple*

Up to the 1980s, there seemed to be a clear dividing line between those who lived alone and those who lived in a couple. However, according to Pierre-Alain Audirac

and Sabine Chalvon-Demersay (1988), the boundary then started to blur, with the emergence of *couples with no fixed abode*, where apparently single people opted for a "form of couple that divides its time between living together and living apart". The authors were careful to underline the difficulty of putting any numbers on these couples, as they did not appear in the statistics ("two separate homes, two separation tax returns"). Moreover, "the same person can say in the course of the same interview that he or she lives in a couple and does not live with his or her partner all the time… that they have both kept their own homes" (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997).

Targeted surveys in France confirmed that living in a couple was no longer necessarily synonymous with sharing a home together. In 1986, this concerned 2 % of married couples and 7 % of unmarried ones, and was mainly the result of external circumstances, often job-related, as we saw in our interviews with Léonie and Sabine (Chapter 6), as well as with Jacques. The fact remains that, for a minority of couples, residential separation seemed to be a choice. The question then is whether these *older* noncohabiting couples were inventing a new mode of conjugal life outside the confines of marriage—and the walls of the home. To find an answer, we first need to distinguish between those who opted for this lifestyle in order to respect each other's autonomy, and those who were simply going through a more or less lengthy transitional period—a "decision-making space" (Clément and Bonvalet 2006) or "initiatory journey" to (non-)marital union formation when they would finally live together. When Vincent Caradec (1996b) investigated couples that had formed after the age of 50, he found that the lifestyle choice could be further broken down into *intermittent cohabitation*, where the two partners only lived together some of the time, spending the remainder apart in their own separate homes, and *alternating cohabitation*, where they lived together all of the time, but moved between two homes. In the latter case, it was not the partners who lived together part time, but the two houses that were lived in part time. Once again, these choices were driven by external circumstances, such as the "presence of grown-up children and grandchildren with whom they wished to maintain good relationships, property ownership, particularly a house to which some people were particularly attached, or a conjugal past that had to be remembered and cherished" (Caradec 1996b).

Although the baby boomers did not invent non-cohabiting or semi-cohabiting relationships, which we generally associate with young couples starting out life together, they nonetheless added to their number by opting for the intermittent cohabitation mode after a relationship had broken up or when they formed a recomposed family, which we can interpret as "being together but keeping a safe distance" (Clément and Bonvalet 2006). In the recomposed family configuration, the new partners initially shuttle between their respective homes, sometimes for a considerable period of time, thus forming couples with no fixed abode (Clément and Bonvalet 2006). This choice rarely reflects a refusal to commit, and although it can be interpreted as a *trial period* or a *preamble*, it is generally more to do with the partners' children, though the precise reasons are often complex and even ambiguous (Le Gall and Martin 1991). This lifestyle allows people to have it all: their children, their partner, their couple and themselves, not least by allowing them to make time for their relationship away from the children (Clément and Bonvalet 2006). In the course of several

interviews, we realized that men or women who had declared themselves to be single actually belonged (or had previously belonged) to a semi-cohabiting couple. Hélène, for example, corrected us when we asked if she lived alone, clarifying that she lived "alone during the week and in a couple at weekends". Her conjugal history showed that she had moved from alternating to intermittent cohabitation, for since her husband's retirement, they no longer saw each other on a daily basis and had revised their residential projects. In their previous, alternating period, they had rarely been apart, mostly living in his more spacious flat, but at the time of the interview, they were only seeing each other at weekends, as he could no longer stand Paris and had moved to the country. The location of their *tête-à-têtes* therefore depended on the season: Paris in winter and the country in summer. This latest mode did not appear to give Hélène the feeling that she formed a couple, for when she was asked "Are you in a couple?" she retorted "I'm not in anything at all!" Although intermittent cohabitation can constitute a form of conjugality, Hélène was clearly dissatisfied with this most recent arrangement, distinguishing between the lifestyle she had had to content herself with for the past 11 years ("in a relationship") and the one she used to have ("in a couple") back in the 1980s, "when we were together". By contrast, Annabelle would have liked to have kept up the lifestyle she had when she was 30. Like Hélène, Annabelle had never married. Born in 1948, she left home at the age of 21 in order to live alone and escape parental (essentially paternal) supervision, although she paradoxically remained in the same street as them. By saving up some of the money she earned, she was eventually able to buy a bedsit, which she was still living in, although she later extended it by buying an adjacent flat. Broaching the subject of couples with Annabelle proved quite tricky, as she never spontaneously spoke about it, such had been the power of the nuclear model and the attendant stigma attached to childless women living alone:

> I was 21, I was young, I was in no hurry. At that time, parents didn't go out of an evening as they do now, and Father didn't like us going out. So when I found myself in this bedsit with this tremendous freedom, It felt so great I wasn't in any hurry to change. Getting married was all that some of my girlfriends could think about, but not me, no, not at all. And so I think that it came out of that. And you eventually get used to being free and independent etc., and having a certain way of life, and you don't really feel like changing. I think it also comes from that.

Even if Annabelle did have plans to marry one day, time stole the march on her, and her habits were just too deeply ingrained. To overcome Annabelle's silence and encourage her to talk about union formation, we resorted to asking her to compare her lifestyle with that of her homemaker mother. Only then did we find out that at the age of 30, she had embarked on an 8-year period of part time cohabitation, where each partner retained his/her own flat. They would be together for just "three quarters of the week", thus allowing her to snatch a few brief moments of independence. Even so, she admitted that changing to the conjugal *we* was simply a bridge too far. Here, we can see that freedom and independence were contingent upon having her own place to live. Not sharing one's living space ensures that one still has time and space for oneself. By this means, a partner can be kept at arm's length, and prevented from developing a sense of ownership. However, a house or flat can also be

regarded as a factor for the successful construction of a relationship. As Annabelle never allowed her partner to set foot in her flat, he could not invest that particular space. There was never any *we* about the use of her bedsit, and this was something her ex-partner resented:

> Ah yes. And now more than ever, I think. But even back then he resented me slightly for it. Because, for example, when I had some furniture put in, not here but on the other side, whenever I talked about it, it was always "I've done this", "I'm going to do that". Never "We". It was my flat, my property, and I was going to do this, I was going to do that. So he didn't like that for a start. But I'd also got into the habit, because I'd already been living here on my own for 10 years, I'd got into the habit of… well, I was independent, and could do what I wanted, buy the furniture I wanted, and so on, and that made it difficult.

She wished she had been able to continue this lifestyle, especially when she compared her generation of women, who married early, with today's generation, who are more independent when it comes to relationships. Dominique, a university lecturer in Paris, also appreciated the independence his family home in Vincennes gave him. Unlike Hélène and Annabelle, it was only after his divorce that he decided to form a semi-cohabiting couple with a young woman he had met at his place of work. He experimented with both modes of cohabitation described by Vincent Caradec, alternating between Paris and Vincennes first of all, then switching to intermittent cohabitation when his partner retired, mainly because of building work in her Paris flat. The couple were intending to continue in the intermittent mode after Dominique retired, as his partner wished to remain in Paris some of the time, whereas Dominique was keen to move to Normandy, where his family had been holidaying for several generations. "She wants *her* Paris, she's quite adamant. An address in Paris, all her favourite shops. For me, it would be full time [living in Normandy] but for her it would be part time…" Some of our respondents regarded semi-cohabitation as the ideal lifestyle, as it allows each partner to retain a degree of freedom, while enjoying all the benefits of a stable relationship and protecting that relationship. This was certainly the view expressed by Magali, who underlined the difficulty of living together day in day out, with all the routine, being in the same four walls, and having to be accountable to—and take account of—another person:

> I've got used to being very independent, I realize that now. Because with the father of my children, I was expected to bring him breakfast in bed, to… and, well, now I do exactly as I please! I realize that now. I've got some very independent women friends, too. I mean, I'd like to, but… I'd really have to find the perfect man. I used to be quite shocked by couples who lived apart, but now I say to myself, "It's not such a bad idea, actually". Of course, that's on paper, because well, for me, having a man around is good, but there's a good side and a bad side. His socks, his food, "what's for dinner?" all that. Sometimes, if I don't feel like it, I just dig something out of the freezer for the kids, and that's that.

Even so, part time relationships and living alone are not always attractive options, and can sometimes prove to be painful experiences. After two divorces, Hervé went through a third separation after 8 years of "semi-living together", something he deeply regrets, even though he does not regard it as the most satisfactory sort of lifestyle:

> Have you been living on your own for long?

> Well, yes, it's been quite a long time now. And then I was with that person for 8 years. We didn't live together, but we did spend most of our time together, and that's why I was talking

about skiing holidays, and so on. And then you say to yourself, OK, you divide your time, you're with each other some of the time, but what do you do the rest of the time? And I think that this last experience hit me the hardest.

Since this "last experience", Hervé had felt extremely lonely, and this was compounded by unemployment and all the attendant financial worries, meaning that there was simply "no light at the end of the tunnel". When asked about his plans, he said he would like to live in a couple again. This would put an end to his solitude, and enable him to start thinking about the future again and regain his self-confidence. His story crystallizes the difficulty that men have living alone when they no longer enjoy a close relationship with their children, owing to divorce.

7.3 The Baby Boomers and Their Children

As Irène Théry (1996 [first published 1993]) has demonstrated, changes in the meaning of marriage have spawned a plurality of union forms. Taking on from where Stanley Cavell left off (Théry 2001), she views contemporary marriage as an extension of the *conversational* marriage that first appeared in the 1930s and became increasingly widespread as women started to be recognized as interlocutors and individuals in their own right—an equality reinforced by mass female employment. As marriage no longer requires parental consent, it has become a matter of *personal conscience*, and as it is no longer an appendage of the family but of the couple, it has become an increasingly autonomous and private affair. The availability of divorce has turned marriage into a dissolvable contract, showing that it is vulnerable to breakdown and thus giving commitment a more profound meaning. The emphasis on *genuine* feelings and the "law that requires an accomplishment and truth of feeling, and fulfilment of the self in the self and the other" (Beck 2001) make the bond riskier and more precarious than ever before, as it now demands unreserved commitment to a relationship but does not offer any guarantees in return (Giddens 1992). This "conjugal nomadism" (Déchaux 2007) and multiplicity of "individual life histories" (Beck 2008) have led some researchers to conclude that we now live in a world of *unbinding*, where frail and ephemeral relations float in a "liquid world" (Bauman 2004) defined by freedom and flexibility, such that the prospect of life *à deux* generates feelings of insecurity, pointlessness and anxiety. Even so, despite the proliferation of *new* conjugal and family configurations, the nuclear family continues to be the dominant model, and given that 80% of couples in France are married and 70% in Britain, we can conclude that marriage is still very much the norm. Nor does it mean that partners are any less committed than they used to be. Far from being in danger, the couple is still socially valued, and may even be desired and idealized to a greater degree now than it used to be (Beck 2008), by those who wish it to be *forever*. Nevertheless, if all *genuine* feeling fades, then the future of the couple is compromised, as it can be revised at any time.

The desire for (or at least acceptance of) children is still framed by the couple and by marriage. However, just as conjugal ties have taken on a different meaning so, too, has the filial relation, though it has moved in the opposite direction and become the archetype of the traditional and indissoluble bond (Théry 1996). For the

deep-seated changes that have taken place within the family, with the virtual disappearance of the *classic* model, starting in the 1970s, and the emergence of conjugal nomadism (Déchaux 2007), have led to couples have fewer children. Furthermore, those children now occupy a different place within the family. The first contraceptive revolution in the late nineteenth century was the first indication of changing attitudes towards children who, "less numerous, better looked after and better educated, became the subject of intense emotional investment, for it was through them that the family could climb the social ladder" (Segalen 1986). The second contraceptive revolution began in the mid-1960s, with the introduction of modern birth control methods. Although the baby boom generations broke ranks with their parents, they strongly resemble their grandparents in terms of fertility behaviour, such that children have become a "rarity" (Segalen 2010).

Before the first baby boom generations had even reached adulthood, there was a sharp decline in the total fertility rate on both sides of the Channel, from 1965 onwards. Analysis of completed cohort fertility figures shows that the generations born after 1935 were the first to limit the number of children they had. France and Britain initially followed a similar trend, with the 1940–1945 generations showing the steepest drop, down from 2.57 children (2.35 in England and Wales) for the 1940 cohort to 2.16 (2.22) for the 1945 cohort. The two countries then parted company, for in France, the following generations (1950–1960) had a relatively stable lifetime fertility (around 2.12 children per woman), whereas figures continued to fall across the Channel, descending to 1.96 children per woman for the 1960 generation. As far as fertility is concerned, therefore, the baby boomers formed a pivotal generation between those born during World War II, who set the trend in motion, and those born after 1960, who kept the fertility level at around two children per woman.

Owing to the complexity of conjugal trajectories exhibited by the postwar generations, it is difficult to determine whether the new forms of matrimonial behaviour had a positive or a negative influence on completed cohort fertility. In her doctoral thesis, Éva Beaujouan (2009) showed that the fertility of individuals born between 1945 and 1954, and who remained in a married couple up to the age of 45, was higher than that of individuals who had split up with their partners before then. However, among the latter, there were clear differences depending on their trajectories following the break-up and according to their sex. In the absence of a new union, their fertility remained lower than that of their married counterparts. Subsequent union formation therefore had a positive effect on the lifetime fertility of both men and women. For the former, it more than compensated for the impact of their previous breakdown, in that men who formed another couple had a higher number of children (2.29) than those who had stayed married (2.27), whereas for the latter, their lifetime fertility in the event of a second union was lower than that of their sisters who remained married. This is exactly what we found in our corpus of 60 Parisian respondents, with higher fertility among men who remarried (Table 7.1).[13]

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[13] The lower lifetime fertility observed among our French respondents, compared with the 1945–1954 generations, can be explained by the fact that we conducted our survey in Paris, where the figures are always lower than they are for France as a whole.

Table 7.1 Lifetime fertility of men and women born in France between 1945 and 1954, according to their conjugal trajectory. (Source: INSEE-INED 1999 *Family history* survey)

Couple status	Men	Women
First and lasting union	2.17	2.20
First union interrupted	2.09	2.05
…- no further union	1.78	1.98
…- new union	2.29	2.13
Total	2.15	2.16

The fall in fertility between the generations born before 1930 and those born after World War II went hand in hand with far smaller family sizes (Prioux 2001). In France, the proportion of women with only two children rose spectacularly, from 24 % (27 % in England and Wales) to 38 % (43–44 %). Just as remarkable was the fall in the proportion of large families (i.e., four or more children), especially in France, where the figure was 25 % for the 1930–1935 generations, but just 11 % for the 1950–1954 generations, with an attendant rise in two-child families. Although families with two or more children underwent similar trends on both sides of the Channel, it was very different story for infertility. In England and Wales, 21 % of women belonging to the 1920s generations remained childless, but the figure was just 15 % in France. Even if this gap subsequently narrowed, with comparable levels for the postwar generations (10 % in France for the 1945–1949 generations and 9 % in England and Wales), childlessness by choice became more popular again in Britain among the generations born after 1950 (14–15 %).

7.4   Conclusion

It takes several generations for a new conjugal and family model to be adopted. Picking up where the previous generation left off, each new generation puts its own mark on the model before handing it on to the next one, and may even initiate new ones. The generations born between 1945 and 1954 cannot be said to have formed a homogeneous group. We can distinguish between those who were born immediately after the war and who benefited from the advances made by the generations born during the war, all the while adhering to the traditional model in several respects, and those who were born after 1950. As contraception became more readily available, these baby boomers were able to go further along the road to women's liberation and make more changes to the traditional male and female roles within the couple. Employment for married women, contraception, living alone before marriage, nonmarital cohabitation and divorce (along with single-parent and recomposed families) gradually became more widespread, resulting in the family or, more accurately, families, of today. These changes have been accompanied by the rise of individualism in Western societies. The *we* of the family has gradually been replaced by a *me*, and although the family group still matters, its role is now to allow each of its members to achieve self-fulfilment. The baby boomers have

contributed to this revolution by introducing a different conception of the family from that of their parents, and the large and stable family has been replaced by a less stable, two-child family. Théry (1996) believes that an anthropological shift has taken place, with conjugal ties and the filial relation moving in opposite directions. "In this age of demarriage, the ideal of the indissolubility of marriage has gradually been replaced by the indissolubility of the filial relation, a symbolic anchor in the face of the futility of existence and the fleetingness of time" (Théry 1996). For Ulrich Beck, "the child is the one remaining primary bond, irrevocable and absolutely not interchangeable. Partners come and go, but children are forever," making them *absolutely irreplaceable*. This trend towards families with just two children and the sharp decline in large families above all reflects how the child's place has changed. Henceforth desired and planned, it is the child that *makes the family*, for as more and more births occur out of wedlock, they embody the partners' long-term commitment to each other. Since the 1970s, children's status has therefore changed considerably as a result of growing individualism. In the space of just a few years, instead of being creatures that had to be brought up according to strict norms, they have become autonomous individuals whose parents have the "role of bringing out their full potential" (Segalen 2010). In order to do so, parents, whether they are married, recomposed or going solo, have had to invent new ways of interacting with their offspring.

Part IV
Baby Boomers with the Family

Chapter 8
Caught Between Parents and Children

The baby boomers were genuine children of the 'sixties, but has their aspiration for greater freedom—especially sexual freedom—affected their relationship with their family? Have they, as some experts would have us believe, helped to throw out time-honoured norms and ensure that groups such as the family have lost their status as institutions? Most sociological studies have focused on the rise of individualism that has had such a profound impact over the past 50 years, with the new emphasis on the individual and the decline of social groups (Lahire). This has totally over-turned the family's raison d'être, as "individuals are no longer at the service of the family, and instead the family is at the service of its individual members" (Segalen 2010). These changes have fuelled two contrasting discourses. Some talk about how family members have been emancipated, in that the family no longer has a role of transmission, but a "self-revelatory function" (de Singly 1996) in a society where "self-invention" is king (Kaufmann 2004). Others see individualism in a more nega-tive light, arguing that people living in today's "fluid world" (Bauman 2004) shun social ties and cut themselves off from other people. In his book *Bowling Alone*, for instance, Robert Putnam (2000) cites the sport of bowling, which is no longer practised in clubs. Both these discourses hint at a connection between the advent of individualism and the weakening of the family, begging the question of whether the baby boom generations do indeed exhibit looser social ties. Have their relationships with family members changed? How is their network constructed and how does it function? It is important to remember that the baby boomers are the first to have experienced the coexistence of three, four and even five generations (Cassan et al. 2001), and this raises many issues about how their role as a *pivotal* generation may have influenced new relational forms (Attias-Donfut 1995a, b). They are currently having to cope with an entirely novel situation, for their parents belong to the first cohorts to have benefited en masse from the increase in life expectancy across the past half century, especially among the very old, while their children have been hit hard by an economic crisis that has made stable employment and affordable hous-ing a rarity. The question is therefore how generations that had always insisted on their autonomy and independence, and assumed they would be able to duck their duties and obligations, have reconciled their desire for freedom with the needs of their families over the years, and how they will deal with their children's continuing

employment and housing difficulties and the increasing frailty of their elderly parents in the future.

8.1   Children First

It soon becomes evident from our respondents' narratives just how important their children are to them, and just how much room they take up in their lives. This can mainly be explained by the fact that relationships between parents and their children are closer today than they were in the past. Furthermore, the baby boomers are having to contend with offspring who are on the verge of independence, with all the employment problems that entails and some may even be discovering the joys of being grandparents.

8.1.1   *A New Relationship with Their Children…*

As we have seen, most baby boomers received a strict upbringing, where authority and respect for moral norms were the rule. This upbringing was based on the notions of obedience, religious belief and the parent-child asymmetry. Many resented their lack of freedom and autonomy, and regretted the gulf that lay between them and their parents, for even if some postwar mothers raised their children in a climate of greater freedom and trust, fathers remained distant figures on the whole[1]. These childrearing principles were profoundly challenged in the late 1960s, leading the baby boomers in France to be conflated with the *soixante-huitards*. As we have seen, this gives a rather misleading picture, as most baby boomers actually remained on the sidelines of the protest movement, many being simply too young to take part. Even so, there was definitely a *before-* and *after-1968* in France, as far as schools and families are concerned. The baby boomers therefore found themselves transported from a world dominated by "the outmoded authoritarianism of old men" (Attias-Donfut et al. 2002), to one of tolerance, and the childrearing strategies they later adopted often reflected a reaction against the upbringing they had received and, at times, suffered from, owing to the excessive rigidity of family and moral norms (Baudelot and Establet 2000). Although Britain experienced a far *softer* revolution, which continued right the way through the 1960s (Marwick 2003), it still left its mark on British baby boomers, who would also to bring their children up very differently from the way they themselves had been. For even though many strongly disagreed with A. S. Neill's educational theories based on autonomy, democracy and self-government, set out in his book *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child*

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[1] Several surveys show that fathers, who used to remain in the background, have gradually taken on a far more positive role. For the baby boom generations, fathers were still "distant, though rarely absent" figures (Clément 2009).

Rearing[2] (1960), they could not help but absorb new ideas about the need to respect their offspring's autonomy. They therefore attempted—to varying degrees—to redress the balance between the child's freedom, parental constraints, and rules within the family and at school. Children were therefore given a looser rein, parent-child dialogue was henceforth the rule not the exception, and the relationship between the two was based not on authority, as it had been up to then, but on trust. This was not without its fair share of difficulties and ambiguities, leading Louis Roussel and Odile Bourguignon to comment on the "disarray of the younger generations, their hesitation about what they are supposed to say to their own children. The complete confidence of previous generations, who imperturbably handed out advice and prohibitions, is well and truly over" (Roussel and Bourguignon 1976). In short, a new style of education emerged in 1970, where the parent-child relationship was no longer informed by obligations towards society, but was geared towards creating the ideal conditions for self-construction and personal fulfilment, and was thus built on trust, symmetry and equality. Even so, just as some couples wished to have nothing to do with conjugal modernity based on moral individualism, so many families remained deaf or resistant to new childrearing norms (Déchaux 2009).

Moreover, the advent of these new principles did nothing to erase differences between families[3]. The narratives of our respondents, who overwhelmingly belonged to the middle classes, revealed two contrasting attitudes, with some deliberately setting out to bring their children up differently from the way that they themselves had been brought up, and others reproducing the style of upbringing they had experienced, albeit relaxing the rules slightly. There were various reasons behind these choices, beginning with how the baby boomers had experienced their childhood, and also whether their couple was constructed along the lines of the *bastion* family or the *negotiation* family. There was also a close correlation with social background, with the upper classes favouring autonomy and openness to the outside world, and the working classes obedience and respect[4]. Patricia, for example, whose conjugal trajectory is described in Chap. 7, explained how she acted as an "old feminist *soixante-huitarde*" when it came to bringing up her son:

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[2] This book possibly had an even greater impact in France than it did in Britain, perhaps because the French translation was published immediately after the events of 1968 and lent weight to ideas about nonauthoritarian teaching. It prompted considerable debate, as illustrated by a collective work edited by Bruno Bettelheim (1970b).

[3] Jean Kellerhals et al. have identified three styles of parenting: authoritarian, based on obedience and discipline, with strictly differentiated roles for the father and mother; negotiatory, directly inspired by the new childrearing norms, with an emphasis on discussion and children's autonomy, rather than on authority (in these families, parents have relatively ungendered roles and there is considerable openness to the outside world); and a combination of the two, where discipline remains primordial and the mother continues to play the key role, but the generations are extremely close and there is intense verbal communication (Kellerhalset al. 2008).

[4] For a less black-and-white vision, see Richard Hoggart (1957), who demonstrates that childhood was sacred for the working classes.

> A woman isn't a slave. Sharing household chores isn't just about putting the dustbin out, it's doing everything. He did sport, he did loads of stuff, and now he goes home at lunchtimes so he can eat with the children, and he helps his wife out a lot.

Not everyone who had espoused the revolutionary ideas of the 1960s opted for this new model. Nadia, for instance, a 53-year-old single mother who, as we saw earlier, had spent her entire youth rebelling against her stiflingly bourgeois upbringing, was attempting to teach her daughter some of the rules her parents had passed on to her, even if she admitted that they were "not necessarily very good". Similarly, Charles, who had played an active part in the student protest movement, and who, faithful to his convictions, had chosen to work as a hospital teacher, brought his children up in a more classic manner and set clear boundaries, possibly under the influence of his wife, who was more of a stickler for rules, especially where sexual freedom was concerned. Indeed, she was careful to point out that her children were "not the children of *soixante-huitards*", as though that were quite beyond the pale. Many respondents who had kept their distance from the protest movements certainly went on to raise their children along more traditional lines. Chantal, for instance, a practising Catholic, replicated the education she had received by sending her two sons to catechism and, with the help of her husband, inculcating them with the sense of effort and the values of work. Then there is Pierre, who explained how he had brought his children up just as previous generations in the family had been, all the while adapting to the new context of the 1970s. As a result, although he claimed to be more liberal than his parents, he still set out to be a figure of authority and to pass on moral values and a spirit of solidarity to his two children. We find the same behaviour in Martine who, as we will see later, belonged to a local family circle. Her behaviour as a family member also reproduced what she had encountered when she was growing up, even if she described herself as "more permissive" and more ready to listen.

The fact remains that "from one generation to the next, the dominant tendency is always towards a more flexible style of childrearing" (Attias-Donfut et al. 2002), and there is a consensus among experts that the parent-child relationship has been transformed in recent times. The majority of our respondents agreed with this assessment, indicating that they had given their children a more open education, making dialogue and negotiation a priority. Agnès highlighted the freedom of expression that children enjoy today:

> Children used to be seen but not heard! They weren't allowed—we weren't allowed—to express an opinion. So we just followed, we just obeyed. But now young people speak out. They express themselves, they have a lot to say, and that's maybe the positive side.

As for Nadine, she recalled the distance that used to exist between parents and children, and voiced her satisfaction with the relationship she enjoyed with her own children:

> …I think that if I compare the relationship I and my parents had with the one my children have with me, I'm fairly satisfied about my relationship with them and about what they feel about it. I sometimes talk about it with one of my sisters, who's four or five years younger than me. We realize that we never had with our parents what our children have with us. Even as adults, I think we've got quite a nice relationship.

So the parent-child relationship has become more relaxed, and most of our respondents found that there was more communication, even if some of them opined that things had become *too* laxist and children were given too much freedom, with the result that the generational roles were sometimes reversed and it was the parents who tried to please their children, as Claude emphasised:

> My parents certainly had quite a harsh upbringing, and mine was equally harsh. My father was in the military and quite rigid in some respects, and what really made me sit up and think was when somebody said not long ago—I can't remember who—, a psychologist, who said that in our generation, the baby boom one, etc., and in my parents' generation, it was the children who had to please the parents, but in the following generation, it was the parents who had to please the children. And that's something I reproach my daughters for.

Much the same idea was expressed by Louis Roussel, when he asked "how can parents who lavish attention on their child in exchange for love and a justification for their existence possibly be strict with it? Parents who are chiefly looking for their children's affection are easily won over by permissive styles of childrearing" (Roussel 1975). He deduced that these "spoilt" children needed to be taught to obey again, and above all to regain their rightful place as children (Roussel 2001). Other researchers have concluded that children are now "objects of emotional consumption" (Bauman 2004). Interestingly, some of these comments were written in the mid-1970s, showing that this is a recurring theme. Moreover, a survey conducted in 1973 showed that parents frequently resorted to conflict avoidance techniques, as they did not want to risk alienating their children's affections (Roussel and Bourguignon 1976).

8.1.1.1   A More Intense Relationship with Their Children

Despite their sometimes critical discourse, our respondents obviously enjoyed an intense relationship with their children, who constituted the *bedrock* of family life and sometimes even conjugal life, too, as we saw with Corinne. This notion was expressed particularly clearly by Nicole ("Family is children"), who described becoming a parent "as the best thing I ever did in my life"[5]. For this reason, children often come at the top of lists of close friends and relatives[6]. Residential projects often provide useful insight into the importance of the filial relation. Jean-François, for instance, had planned to retire to "a place the sun", but his fondness for his children and grandchildren, plus the experiences of some of his friends, led to a change of heart. Similarly, Suzanne, a divorcee living alone, was keen not to leave Paris when she retired. She cited several reasons, including the quality of the hospitals

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[5] We should point out that this was due to the family morphology and not to the rejection of other family members—Nicole was an only child, her parents had died, she did not have any aunts or uncles, and had divorced from her husband, although she remained on good terms with her former in-laws.

[6] The Next of kin, close friends, and relatives survey (INED 1990) failed to reveal any difference between parents and children in this respect, with almost the same probability of citing one's parents or one's children as being close (Bonvalet and Maison 1999).

and the extensive network of friends she had met though her voluntary work, but also the proximity of her children—her eldest son in the same *arrondissement*, and her daughter in a neighbouring one. She eventually decided to stay put, unless she "started a new life":

> Yes, I'll stay in Paris. Absolutely. Unless I start a new life, in which case I admit I don't know what I'd do. You can't swear to anything, but yes, I'll stay in Paris. For a start, this is where my children are. So I can't see myself leaving. Because all the people I know who move out of the city end up rather lonely. Their children don't visit them as regularly as they thought they would, because it means leaving Paris, and they've got their own social life. So I know quite a few who've ended up feeling pretty lonely. And it's always the same thing. There aren't the same sorts of activities in the provinces. It just doesn't tempt me. So yes, to answer your question, I intend to stay in Paris… All my friends are here, as well as my family, but it's my children who come first. My network of relations is here, yes.

Édouard and Martin had a similar discourse, as they were both extremely fond of their respective offspring. When Martin was asked about his residential plans and the *ideal place to live*, he answered "Brittany", but even if it were feasible, it would still depend on his children, for like Jean-François and Suzanne, he could not see himself moving away from them. When baby boomers reach retirement, they find that their children exert a powerful attraction. Whether they intend to leave, to stay, or to alternate between two homes, their final decision is therefore contingent upon their children's needs and demands, especially with regard to any grandchildren.

8.1.2   …Through Their Status as Grandparents

Children had therefore played an important role in our respondents' lives, and continued to do so, especially if there were grandchildren. The advent of new parent-child relationships had an impact on all intergenerational links, and several respondents who had become grandparents revealed that they approached their new role differently, seeing themselves as "more present" and "more open". This ideal form of intense affective proximity, characterized by a genuine desire for dialogue and a personalized relationship, can be traced back to the notion of indulgent grandparents that started to emerge in the eighteen century and came to the fore in the nineteen century (Gourdon 2001). Their narratives were no longer about conflict and misunderstandings, but about the delight and joy of taking on the role of grandparent and its symbolic nature. Nicole, for one, described herself as a "happy grandmother" and said she "adored" playing the "grandmother-sitter". Her only complaint was that she did not see enough of her granddaughter, as she lived abroad and they therefore only met up for short, albeit very intense, periods. Similarly, Jacques, the grandfather of two small boys, then aged 4 years and 15 months, and soon ("what a relief!") to become the grandfather of a little girl, frequently looked after his elder grandson during the school holidays when his parents "needed" him. This was also the case for Philippe, who took his "stand-in" role very seriously. He had never interfered in his partner's relationship with her children, but was determined to do his bit in bringing up what he regarded as his grandchildren:

> Well, you know, it's even better with the grandchildren than it is with the parents. I often say
> to my wife, "I'm stealing them all from you!" because once they've seen me, they won't let
> me go. They don't have a grandfather on the other side, so […] I stand in for him. It's not
> at all bad. In fact, it works really well.

A *supporting* role, rather than a *secondary* one (Le Borgne-Uguen 2003), looking after the grandchildren can become an integral part of the family's informal support system, whether it is done regularly or on a more occasional basis. It was Jean-François' job, for instance, to fetch his grandson from his ex-daughter-in-law when his son was busy working, as the couple was separated. Similarly, it was Claude, who was very close to his grandchildren, who attended events held at his grandson's day nursery, his eldest daughter living virtually next door. Regrets did surface occasionally about not being able to play a sufficiently active role. Édouard, for example, was the grandfather of two small boys, one aged five at the time of the interview, the other still an infant, but he had very little contact with them, as his daughter had been living abroad for eight years on account of her husband's job. Even Claire, who acknowledged giving priority to her network of friends, rather than to her family, was dismayed by the fact that her grandson was so *virtual*. Some respondents who had been looking forward to playing this role felt disappointed when geographical distance prevented them from doing so. Rosie, for instance, had relatively low expectations about her potential grandparenthood, as her children lived far away, and the prospect of being a *remote* grandmother saddened her. Interestingly, for some male respondents, becoming a grandfather offered them an opportunity to rewrite history and fill a void. They felt they had missed out on the experience of fatherhood. "Many men were just too wrapped up in their lives, with all the constraints and changes taking place, and were not always the fathers they wanted to be" (Attias-Donfut et al. 1998). Grandfatherhood allowed them to become more involved, like Hervé, who doted on his 21-year-old granddaughter and hoped to "repair" his family history, having suffered the death of his own father when he was just five and gone through two divorces:

> It's done me a power of good, because I didn't experience any sort of continuity myself due
> to a series of deaths in my family. I lost my father when I was five… There's always been
> something missing. And seeing another family recreated was…. I was delighted to become
> a grandfather. She was the first.

Although grandfatherhood gives men a chance to make up for their lack of emotional investment first time round, and also constitutes a source of identity, it is not all positives, as Vincent Caradec observes (1996). There can also be some negatives, in the form of regrets about past failings:

> Some men invest themselves in their identity as a grandfather because it helps to compensate for their neglect of their parental identity—a neglect they only become aware of when they are confronted with new representations of father-child relations, such as those between their sons or sons-in-law and their grandchildren.

Édouard's disappointment may therefore have been compounded by his inability to *make amends* for his relationship with daughter, who was brought up first by her paternal grandparents, then by her mother, via his grandchildren.

8.1.3   Parents Powerless to Influence Their Children's Future

Some of our respondents barely mentioned their relationship with their own parents and instead spent nearly their entire time talking about their children, probably because they were so concerned about the latter's seemingly uncertain future. Baby boomers are currently having to contend not only with profound changes within society, but also with their children's problems finding a job and somewhere to live. What with unemployment, and global warming, they view their children's (and grandchildren's) future as pretty bleak. As Cécile Van de Velde's book (2008) makes clear, this anxiety about the future is a peculiarly French phenomenon. Comparing the paths to independence followed by young people in Denmark, Britain, France and Spain, she showed that young Danes experience a long and leisurely period of maturation ("finding oneself"), young Britons go through a brief, but positively connoted transition ("taking charge of oneself"), and Spaniards "settle down". In France, on the other hand, young people have to "find a place for themselves". This generates considerable tension throughout their time at school and university, as self-definition is achieved mainly through social status, which is closely linked to academic qualifications.

Academic success and finding a stable job are therefore the main concerns of young French people, and with the rise in youth joblessness and the increasing precariousness of employment, these concerns have taken on a new urgency, generating anxiety about the future. This anxiety is shared by their baby boomer parents, who tend to "overinvest" (Baudelot and Establet 2000) in their offspring's education, not least because of their fear of slipping down the social ladder—"a silent fear nagging rising numbers of French people" (Maurin 2009). Camille Peugny's (2009) approach whereby "social demotion is also an intergenerational concept" seems particularly relevant here, in that the baby boomers do indeed feel concerned by their children's fall in status, especially when they compare their situation with the one they themselves experienced in the early 1970s. These worried parents, especially those in senior managerial positions, are therefore prone to intervene in their offspring's career choices, and are quick to resort to private education if, say, their son or daughter fails the baccalaureate first (or second time) round, as Chantal describes:

> Well, it took him 3 years to get his baccalauréat… [laughs]. By the third year, when we had seen that he had failed twice, we put him in a private fast-track school [laughs]. We tightened our belts…and finally he passed the baccalauréat with flying colours…

Some, however, feel powerless, like Édouard, a senior manager who admitted he could do nothing to help his son make the right choices at school and beyond, as the latter was aiming for a career in the arts, which he knew nothing about. Normally, one would expect someone in Édouard's position (Déchaux 2009) to have a network of friends capable of filling in any gaps in his or her expertise or knowledge in a particular field, but in this case they were of no avail. Our French respondents were not alone in being worried. For while there are clear differences between the two countries in the paths that young people follow to independence, and the cultural and economic contexts are very different, the British parents were very concerned

about changes to the educational system and rising tuition fees. Judith, for instance, a single mother living in London, was already worrying about the future of her daughter, then aged just nine, especially her higher education, while Brenda, the married mother of a 20-year-old daughter at university, an 18-year-old son who was about to become a student, and a 16-year-old son, was regularly having to send her daughter money, even though it was a strain on her finances, and she admitted that she would not be able to subsidize two students at the same time. Thus, whichever side of the Channel they are on, baby boomers are finding that they have to support their children as best they can along the often long and bumpy road to residential, occupational and affective autonomy.

8.1.3.1   Helping Their Children Find Their Feet

The vast majority of our respondents had found (or were finding) their children's personal emancipation quite a challenge. Most research (Gokalp 1981; Blöss and Godard 1990; Galland 1997) has shown that this challenge can be more or less extreme. Adulthood has become a shifting, reversible and unstable state, and one that young people enter increasingly late (Van de Velde 2008), mainly because of economic constraints linked to the length of time they now spend in full time education and the difficulty they then have finding a job. Their parents also cite the high cost of rented accommodation and the absence of networks. However, as Van de Velde (2008) explains, such delays cannot simply be laid at the door of the economic crisis. They also reflect the new social norms of autonomy and individual responsibility, and the contemporary imperatives to be oneself and invent one's life. Whatever the truth of the matter, children are remaining dependent for longer. This does not mean they necessarily move out when they are older, as recent analyses have shown that despite the housing crisis and dearth of stable employment, the age at which children leave home (19–21 years) has remained constant across the generations (Galland 2000; Sébille 2009). This paradoxical situation can be explained by increased family support (Galland 2000; Sébille 2009) in the form of heavy parental investment. In other words, the baby boomers have been materially helping their children enter the adult world. This assistance must have been particularly welcome to the children of our respondents living in London or Paris—cities with a tight housing market and where property prices and rents are extremely high. Family support can take a variety of forms, ranging from intergenerational cohabitation for parents who cannot afford any additional outlay, to renting accommodation—what Van de Velde (2008) calls "negotiated cohabitation"—or even, in the case of the upper classes, buying a small flat as "an extension to the nest".

8.1.3.2   Intergenerational Cohabitation: Choice or Necessity?

Our respondents underscored the tortuous nature of the route to residential separation. They were only too aware that high unemployment was making it difficult for their offspring to achieve their independence—generally leading to this stage being

postponed—and they were also familiar with the obstacles to finding somewhere affordable to live. Remembering how different it had been when they themselves had left home, several respondents alluded to some of the abusive practices encountered today, such as excessively high rents and demands for multiple deposits and guarantors. Some, like Édouard, whose children had yet to move out had already internalized the notion of deferred emancipation:

> What worries me most is how they'll… what conditions they'll leave in, where they'll go, how they'll live. That's what worries me most […]. I'm in no hurry to see them leave. After all, if they go, they won't necessarily be 10,000 miles away. OK, I'll be knocking around in an empty flat, but what worries me most is what conditions they'll leave in and whether they'll be able to lead the same kind of existence they do here.

A number of parents have to put up with prolonged cohabitation, if their adult children cannot find affordable accommodation and a stable job (or indeed a job of any sort), or if they want to continue their education in the best possible conditions. Fully aware of the problems young people face finding work and somewhere to live, Linda compared their situation with what it was like when she left home. Living with one's parents was a very different proposition thirty years ago, and even though there are a few residual ambiguities and constraints, the more relaxed relationship between parents and children generally allows for a "degree of individualism within a shared existence" (de Singly 2001). We were particularly surprised to come across reports of cohabitation from our London respondents, for as Henri Mendras (1997) reminds us, kinship bonds have always been very weak in Britain, and young people still feel they are "duty-bound to become independent", meaning that cohabitation beyond the age of 21–22 years is a "real source of stigma" (Van de Velde 2008). These reports illustrate how rising tuition fees, the high cost of housing and the unfavourable economic climate have modified how and when young Britons enter adulthood. This is supported by Eurostat figures showing that in 2008, 20 % of men aged 25–34 were still living at home in Britain, compared with 13 % in France[7]. It is also important to underline that cohabitation in Britain is made easier by the fact that housing units are larger and often take the form of detached houses. As living standards have considerably improved since 1945, the baby boomers are in a position to offer their children a separate bedroom and possibly even a separate bathroom, constituting an autonomous space away from the parental gaze—"the defence of a small world" (de Singly and Ramos 2001). Parents understand this need for autonomy only too well, and know how hard it is to find a place of one's own to live. They therefore do all they can to make it easier for their adult children to live with them. Paul in London for instance, purchased a large four-storey house that was laid out in such a way as to allow his son and girlfriend to live in an independent flat until they had found a place of their own.

In France, the norm of independence may not be quite so oppressive, but there is still a threshold that must not be crossed, and that threshold is around the age of 25. Yann therefore felt he had to justify his son's lengthy cohabitation by saying that he

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[7] In the 25–34 year age group, one man in three and one woman in five were living in the same dwelling as their parent(s) (Choroszewicz and Wolff 2010).

needed to save up enough money for a down payment on a flat. Beyond a certain age, cohabitation continues to be frowned upon, not just by the young people themselves, but also by their parents, who have internalized these stigmatizing norms and sometimes find it difficult to accept this *living together*. This is why some baby boomers, even though they acknowledge the problems faced by young people, nonetheless express the hope that their children will quickly leave the nest. Bernard, for example, who had recently retired, was still having to accommodate his 26-year-old son, even though the latter had been holding down a job for the past two years, and expressed the opinion that "he shouldn't still be here". Although Van de Velde (2008) dismisses *Tanguy* (a French film about a well-paid university lecturer still living with his exasperated parents) as what she calls an "optical illusion", it was striking to find that several respondents still alluded to it, in order to make the point that their own children were not Tanguys in the making or had already left home. Olivia, for example, was so impatient for her son to go that she had been actively pushing him in that direction:

> He left when he was 27, a year after completing his studies. He'd been working for a year when I said, "My darling boy, you've been putting some money aside, so now you're going to find yourself a little flat". Not quite *Tanguy*, but almost! But I did it in the nicest possible way.

Although the baby boomers could cite plenty of reasons why their children were still at home, such as high rents and low wages, given that they themselves had sought to escape from their parents (and escape family norms) as quickly as possible, they were still somewhat baffled, and some of our Parisian respondents definitely breathed a sigh of relief when their children left home.

8.1.3.3 Buying or Renting a Bedsit to Foster Their Children's Independence

In view of the housing shortage, our respondents had been helping their sons and daughters in a number of different ways. Some acted as guarantors, so that their children could find something to rent in the private sector (a common, and indeed almost obligatory, practice in France), while others, especially those in the upper middle classes, had directly bought or rented a flat for their student offspring.

Since the 1950s, French bourgeois families have adopted a more relaxed approach to bringing up children, based on the idea that they need to be respected and helped to realize their potential. The logical last step is to enable one's student offspring to achieve residential independence by providing them with a place of their own to live. This is not about distancing the generations or creating a break between them, but rather stage-managing their children's gradual departure. Public-sector worker Martine is a typical example of how parents step in to help their children. Parisian born and bred, she and her husband purchased their first 35-m^2 flat in the city shortly after their wedding, followed by a second one of the same size for their adolescent twins. They also managed to help their eldest son buy a two-room flat in the same apartment block. In the interview, she described her relationship with one of the twins who was then living in the second apartment. "He also lives in our

apartment. He sleeps downstairs, but he's always round at our place, he lives with us. He gets his board and lodgings, plus his laundry. All the same, he does work." This surely amounts to semi-cohabitation or, to borrow Van de Velde's expression, an "extension to the nest". Middle-class Charles and his wife also adopted Martine's solution:

> We bought this bedsit here and rented it out for a while. Our eldest son moved in as soon as he found a job. When our second son was born, because we believed we should treat them both the same, we thought, "We'll have to buy another bedsit for the second one". And that's exactly what we did.

As well as making the children's departure materially easier—and less final, in that they regularly return home—, purchasing a bedsit near the parental home also increases the family's property portfolio. This strategy can therefore be seen to have a twofold objective: solving an offspring's housing problems and investing in real estate in order to supplement the household income. The flat can also be used for different purposes later on (e.g., as a pied-à-terre in Paris), when the parents retire, depending on what their plans for the future are and whether their children are ready to stand on their own two feet. Some of our respondents, like Mireille and Jean-Paul, also purchased a flat for a child, but—either out of choice or necessity—made that child pay rent, albeit at a lower rate than that charged by private landlords. Many parents also end up paying the rent on a bedsit for their student son or daughter, especially if he or she is studying away from home. With the development of more specialist courses and the opening of new colleges in large university towns and cities, parents are almost obliged to fund their children's education, and this can take up a sizeable chunk of the family income. French parents often complain about the length of some of these courses and wish their children would take financial responsibility for themselves, as suggested by the "many financial ultimatums" they give them (Van de Velde 2008).

We therefore found that a large proportion of our Parisian respondents had put fully-fledged residential strategies in place, whether these involved purchasing an apartment, renting a bedsit or making a family property available. Their children's housing problems, and uncertainty—or even anxiety—about their future, often caused parents to rethink their real-estate strategies over the longer term, and undermined any existing plans they might have for their retirement (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). Some respondents were also torn between two behaviours modelled by economists: giving their children a flat (altruism) or holding onto it for a rainy day (selfishness) (Masson 2009).

8.1.4 "Boomerang Kids"

With the disappearance of jobs for life—and indeed marriages for life—residential histories have become decidedly more chaotic, with some adults who were previously homeowners having to go back into rented accommodation (Bonvalet 2007), and young people spending periods living with friends or family

members—generally their parents (Grafmeyer 1999). Children may sometimes move out only to move back in a few months or years later, following redundancy, separation or a health problem. The only solution in the face of adversity seems to be to return to the nest. This *recohabitation*, which is observed throughout the industrialized world, has been particularly skilfully analysed by the Canadian sociologist Barbara Mitchell 2006), who talks about "boomerang kids". Rather surprisingly, given how much young people's autonomy is socially valued there, this trend began in Britain, with students returning to the parental home after they had finished their degrees—a reflection of the huge difficulty of finding somewhere affordable to rent or to buy, as 59-year-old maths teacher Richard explained:

> Our children, and all the children who were at school with them, seem to find themselves in the same boat. At 30, practically none of them own their own home, and they're all living with their parents. Or rather they left, but are now back at home. And that's something new, I think. Most of the people in our generation wanted to leave home and didn't want to keep on living with their parents. And that's typical of everywhere in Britain, I think. It's maybe not typical elsewhere, but I think it was really representative of our generation.

Parents have always taken their children back in if they have a problem, but what is striking today is the extent of this phenomenon. Forty percent of children were believed to be boomerang kids in the United States in 1985 (Goldscheider, et al. 1999). For 2002, this proportion was put at 30 % in Canada (Mitchell 2006) and 27 % for Britain (BTopenworld 2002). Meanwhile, in France (Villeneuve-Gokalp 2000), this situation concerned more than 20 % of young people back in 1997, with men being over-represented. Although this recohabitation is often linked to employment problems among men, relational breakdowns appear to be the main reason why women go back to their parents. The precariousness of the job market and soaring rents mean that it no longer has the same sort of stigma attached that it once did, and the young people themselves generally take to the notion of intergenerational cohabitation. Furthermore, while the baby boomers treasured their own autonomy, they have tended to overprotect their offspring. "As a result, some suggest that there is more of a tendency to 'hyper-invest' in children and one manifestation of this is the reluctance of some parents to want to empty the nest during midlife" (Mitchell 2006). Several of our respondents in Paris or London had had to take in children who had lost their job, their partner or even both. Their return required a number of adjustments to everyday life, as well as a period of readaptation, in that both generations had had a (brief) taste of greater autonomy. Mothers are supposed to lapse into deep depression when their children leave home (Rubin 1992) but although we certainly came across the empty nest syndrome in the course of our interviews, some mothers took a guilty pleasure in the departure of their offspring, finding it a positive and liberating experience that gave them more time to devote to their careers or leisure activities. A Canadian study found that parents with boomerang kids felt less satisfied than parents with children the same age who had never left home (Turcotte 2006), and several narratives alluded to the heightened difficulty of *living together*, especially when they had to accommodate not only their own child but also his or her partner and even a smattering of grandchildren. While Patricia found it entirely normal to welcome her son and his wife into her home so that they

had somewhere to fall back on, she nonetheless admitted to tensions owing to generational lifestyle differences:

> My son and daughter-in-law lived with me for a year. At times, it was dreadful. We just live differently. Young people don't get up until midday, or else stay in bed all day. That's difficult to put up with if you've been out at work all day, come home, have a shower, and say, "I'm off out to work again" and hear somebody who's been in bed all day say, "Oh I'm tired", with an empty cereal bowl next to the bed.

This burden often falls on the baby boomer mother or grandmother, as Chantal discovered. Her son was in the military, but was made redundant "after 10 years in the army" when the government ended national service, and was forced to retrain. "That meant we had to accommodate him for two years". It was at this point that he met his future wife.

> They got married a year later, but my son hadn't finished his diploma. So they lived here and the following year a baby was born. They were still here, my son hadn't finished his training. She worked part time. So I had to do everything. It was a very difficult time. Then, when the baby was six months old, my son found a job. That meant they could rent a flat and I could take a breather.

Over in London, Aileen, born in 1945, had been separated from her husband for 18 years, though as we have seen, this did not stop her from doing all the shopping and cleaning for him while he was suffering from depression, with the help of one of her daughters. A mother of three and grandmother of seven, she found herself in the same situation that Chantal had experienced several years earlier. For 31 years, she had been living in South London in a house belonging to a charitable housing association, and was keen to stay there, as it allowed her to accommodate her younger son, a divorced father of three:

> I know it was very hard for Grant to move back because he had a lovely house and he's always been a real homemaker. But if you talk to him about leaving or even about finding somewhere to live, he just doesn't want to listen. Personally, I don't think it's a good thing. Once you've left home… perhaps that's just the way I was brought up. Once you've left, that's it. I know I'd never have gone back to Mum and Dad.

So great was the perceived burden of cohabitation that some of our respondents (mainly women, because of the additional housework involved), actually went out and started looking for somewhere for their offspring to live. This is what Patricia did, after she had reached the end of her tether. However, even if living together is not always easy, and cohabitation needs to be *negotiated*, parents still accept it and do the best they can for their children by taking them in and allowing them to regroup.

The presence of a boomerang kid at home following redundancy is especially galling for parents if they are fearful of their children losing social status. Just as they did when he or she initially moved out, they will therefore devote all their energy to finding alternative accommodation (possibly providing financial assistance in paying the rent or a mortgage), and looking out for job opportunities, often roping in their friends and acquaintances. The ability of a family to help a boomerang kid is therefore contingent upon the resources of its kin group and its network of friends.

This means that it is closely correlated with social background, as demonstrated by Déchaux and Herpin (2006). Pierre, for example, who formerly occupied a senior position in a bank, had no hesitation in reviving his professional network when his son needed to find a place to live:

> He had rather a hard time of it. He got married, and then a year and half later, his wife decided that life wasn't exciting enough, and left. So he got divorced and six months later found himself out of a job. His mother and I therefore had to support him—in the noble sense of the word. It's also true that I was lucky enough to have stayed in very close contact with the bank and above all with the real estate division. So I phoned my friend in real estate and explained to her what had happened. She said, "Give me a week", and a week later she'd found me a nice two-room flat. My son really liked it and it helped him find his feet again.

Daniel had already found one job for his daughter—in the company he worked for—, but when this firm later went bankrupt, she was laid off. He made several attempts to find his daughter employment. A few months before the interview, he had yet again gone looking for a stable job for her, leaving no stone unturned. He had previously envisaged starting up a company where his daughter would be the director and he the employee, in order to put the problem of employment behind them once and for all:

> I thought about setting up a company with my daughter because she found herself out of a job. She didn't have any qualifications so I wanted to set up this company for her, where I would produce designs for her.

Several Parisian respondents had tried, often unsuccessfully, to set up their own business, taking advantage of government incentives for entrepreneurs. One of them was Pierre, who was also motivated by his son's lack of a job following the break—up of his relationship:

> So we started up a business. When he found himself on the dole, we set up an advertising firm. But recently, unfortunately, we were bought out. So for the time being he's back on the dole. But he's hopeful of finding something, given his skills and everything he's done so far.

Parents, especially fathers, invest heavily in their children's employment, and not just emotionally. Baby boomers therefore contribute extremely actively to the emancipation of young people in terms of higher education, housing *and* employment. Although high earners can easily afford to provide this financial assistance, lower down the ladder, it can make a considerable dent in the household budget. Parents therefore *tighten their belts* and pray that their offspring will rapidly become independent. Nonetheless, it is important not to focus exclusively on financial assistance, otherwise we are likely to underestimate the family's role in lower socio-occupational categories, and reach the rather hasty conclusion that help with housing is the preserve of the well—to—do. This would be a distorted vision of reality, for it is not that family solidarity is reserved to one particular class, but rather that it comes in different forms, depending on the family's resources. Lower income families tend to provide more practical assistance, helping their children move house or doing DIY jobs, like Jacques or Daniel, or even Élisabeth's husband who, at the

time of the interview, was helping their daughter by doing the rewiring in her new flat and putting up furniture.

   The fact remains that family solidarity tends to exacerbate existing social inequalities (Déchaux 2007b), and whereas young people from upperclass backgrounds can rely on their parents' resources and networks to find a place of their own, others are *condemned* to intergenerational cohabitation. Whatever their social origins, however, their children's future is always a worry for parents, as we saw from our respondents in London and Paris, with some even postponing their retirement plans until their offspring had found jobs. And when their children are finally settled, the parents' relief is palpable.

8.2   Where Do the Parents Stand?

Baby boomers therefore set up entire support systems for their offspring, and our respondents' narratives dealt almost exclusively with their children, partly because of the problems they were encountering in the housing and job markets, but partly, too, because they *crystallized* family sentiment by producing grandchildren. Even when we broached the subject of old age, respondents seldom elaborated on their relationship with their own parents, and did not appear to devote much thought to their future. In these conditions, references to retirement homes were understandably few and far between. The explanation for this may simply be that the respondents' parents were either already deceased or remained in good health. It would appear, however, that relationships became less intense with age. François Héran (1987) claimed that contacts with friends lessen with age, and networks are refocused on family members. This observation was confirmed by Nathalie Blanpain and Jean-Louis Pan Khé Shon (1999), although they argued that is not because old people are unwilling to make new friends (quite the contrary), but because their existing friends and acquaintances keep on dying. However, the frequency of their contacts and the identity of their interlocutors tell us nothing about the content of these relationships. Catherine Bonvalet and Dominique Maison (1999) found that parental age was correlated with the depth of their affinity with their children, with the bond becoming less intense beyond the age of 75. Moreover, they noted a paradox whereby some of the respondents in their survey appeared to become more geographically but less emotionally close to their parents beyond a given age. We can interpret this as an unwillingness to think about one's parents growing old, as old age is often associated with disability, loneliness and dependence. Furthermore, it is a problem that previous generations did not have to deal with, as Édouard's interview illustrates. After discussing his children, he talked about how increases in life expectancy in a number of countries had triggered what he called "demographic scaremongering", alluding to the financial issues, the sometimes deplorable conditions that prevail in care homes, and the psychological problems linked to growing old. What was rather startling was to hear Édouard say that he was relieved his parents had died while they were still in good health. His discourse conveyed a very

real anxiety about growing old in "poor health", be it physical or mental, not just for old people in general, but also for himself, even though recent research has shown that disability rates are falling in most countries, and life expectancy without incapacity is rising slightly faster than overall life expectancy (Clément et al. 2007). The terms he used ("catastrophe", "terrifying", "a place where you go to die", "dreadful") are nonetheless very powerful and reflect considerable anxiety about old age, disease, decline, death and dying alone, for as Édouard points out, "in the olden days, you would die in your own bed, with all your family around you".

8.2.1   The Desire for Autonomy…

The dearth of references to retirement homes can be explained by the fact that our respondents' parents were not quite old enough at that point to be admitted to one, as people move into homes like these after the age of 75, 85 or even 90 years (Bonvalet et al. 2007). Above all, however, it reflects the wish to grow old in one's own home, in line with the norm of autonomy, and it is a wish that emanates not just from the baby boomers but also from their parents, safe in the knowledge that the state is keen to enable older people to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible, and they can also count on informal help from the family (spouse or children). The desire to keep one's independence—and keep well away from retirement homes—came through very clearly, and intergenerational cohabitation was clearly not a tempting prospect either, as virtually none of our respondents expressed the wish to live with either their parents or their children. Only Carine in Paris and Linda in London had lived with one or both of their elderly parents[8].

Retirement homes were therefore a taboo subject for our respondents, and those who did mention them only did so to stress that it would be better for their ageing parents to live in their own home, health permitting. This was certainly the view expressed by Annabelle, who had set up a whole support system so that her childless maternal aunt could continue living at home. Despite visits from the district nurse, from a home help, and from Annabelle herself every Saturday after her week of work, this system eventually proved insufficient. Annabelle's brother then found a care home for their aunt in the town where he lived. Moreover, when asked about plans for her mother, Annabelle immediately replied that she wished to have her near her for as long as possible and would not think of moving away while she was still alive:

> For Mum, I'll do everything I can for her to stay at home for as long as possible, for as long as she can walk, etc., can get around, it's not a problem, she'll stay at home with the home help. And in any case, I live nearby, I pop in and see her every day, and when I'm not there my brother comes and looks after her, or my nephew. So we'll do everything we can to ensure she stays at home for as long as possible… Because for as long as Mum's alive, I'll be near her. She's now very elderly, so I do her shopping and other bits and bobs. So

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[8] Family cohabitation appears to be more frequent in Britain (15 %) than in France (11 %) (Renaut and Ogg 2003).

I've no intention of moving away. It would be the death of her, and she means a lot to me. So it's out of the question.

As well as the strongly internalized norm of autonomy, we can also discern feelings of guilt about the way they manage their relationship with their parents—feelings reinforced by society (e.g., the debate that took place in France in 2003 about family solidarity in the wake of the great heatwave) and expressed with great clarity by Édouard:

No, but I think you've got to be realistic. That's all well and good, but I think the problem of elderly people is going to be very, very difficult to resolve in years to come for most people. Because it's not just about statistics, it's a matter of life and death. My partner is having huge problems finding a place. So there are huge psychological, financial and emotional problems, and then you also have a bad conscience if you put your parents away, because however well run it may be, it's still where people go to die, but then again, you need to have a holiday from time to time, you've got your own life to live, it's not as simple as…. Putting your parents away, and going away on…. It's not easy.

Retirement homes are the final solution, both for the elderly people themselves, who would prefer to retain their independence, and for their children, who feel guilty about putting them in an institution. This solution is therefore emotionally and financially costly for both generations.

8.2.2   …But with Filial Strings Attached

As Janet Finch (1989) has commented, "we expect adult children to help their ageing parents. It's the concept of filial duty." This is a view shared by other British, as well as Norwegian (Daatland and Slagsvold 2006) researchers. The tension described by Jean Kellerhals and Éric Widmer (2005) between individual needs (autonomy) and support system norms (solidarity) is one of the threads running through contemporary family life. Relations between baby boomers and their parents are therefore far from straightforward. Like Solène, they describe themselves as being torn between the feeling of being *duty-bound* to do things, all the while having the impression that they never do quite enough, with all the feelings of guilt that that entails:

My mother has a lift but doesn't go out much. I don't leave her on her own, I call her every evening, she calls me every evening. Just to make sure everything's OK. I help her. I help her a little bit, but she'd like me to do much more, she'd like me to be around far more, but I just can't, I've not gone down to a four-day week, I'm still working full time.

Although the aged parent-child relationship can be harmonious, it more often comes across as ambivalent and even conflictual, according to how the filial relation has changed over the years.[9] The socio-affective dimension of the support that is provided therefore depends on the type of relationship they enjoy, and what some may

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[9] By studying the accounts of women aged 55 and over whose parents required material and moral support, Marie-Marthe T Brault (2003) was able to identify three types of filial relation: harmonious, conflictual and ambivalent.

perceive as a burden, others may view as an intergenerational exchange. Helping parents does not have to have a purely instrumental aspect, but can also be a source of satisfaction, as Jean-Pierre Lavoie (2000) makes clear, and as we see from Anna-belle's narrative. However, when parents become dependent, other accounts show that outside help can have its limitations, and carers can find themselves shouldering a considerable burden. Agnès, for instance, had to cope with her father's refusal to go into a home, despite his own health problems and those of his disabled wife. She described herself as being "sacrificed on the family altar", a powerful expression of that burden. The immensity of her task meant that her feelings of *freedom* when her mother finally went into a home were all the greater. Indeed, she suddenly found herself with so much free time on her hands that she did not know what to do with it:

> So my family, well, my family was a huge weight on my shoulders. It's maybe what prevented me from stretching my wings and just doing what I wanted. They say that Italians are sacrificed on the altar of the family, but that's a bit what happened to me. (*Laughter*.) The word's maybe a bit extreme, but it's not that much of an exaggeration. Because I had a very problematic family that sucked up huge amounts of my energy. I had to look after my parents in their old age, my father refused to go into a home and he wanted to keep my invalid mother at his side. He was fiercely determined, and there was no arguing with him, and they placed a lot of demands on me. […] My father recently died in conditions that I won't go into it now, but were absolutely appalling. So I had to deal with all that, and that meant looking after him full time. Luckily, I was available. Anyway, he passed away quite recently, and so I was able to put my mother in a home, and so all of a sudden, I've far fewer demands on my time, and so now I have a feeling of, well, now, I must find something for myself. But, well, it was a really demanding family. And there you are.

In these conditions, therefore, parents can become a burden. Their care can be perceived of as a *constraint* or a *deterioration*, threatening their children's equilibrium (Caradec 2009). Some parents are described as being unreasonable, placing heavy demands on their children and forcing them to sacrifice themselves, like Carine:

> My father suffered such a lot. He became such a misogynist because of everything he'd suffered from my mother. He was adorable, but a real despot towards me. Even though I was doing all the shopping and all the cooking, always dashing all over the place, because he wanted freshly made soup every day, whereas I wanted fish or meat, everything had to be fresh, so even though I did everything I could, he said some really nasty things…. I put his nitro patches on, looked after him, at midnight sometimes, he'd tell me he'd run out of his heart medicine.

Even if most situations are less extreme than this, helping one's parents can be experienced as a duty or a moral imperative. "You just have to get on with it", said Juliette when she talked about her elderly parents. She is a typical example of the *pivotal generation*, trapped between parents and children, and unable to carry through her residential projects, at least for the time being. Although she dreamed of purchasing an apartment in Marseilles where her in-laws lived, her intentions remained vague, and varied across the interview, sometimes depending on her children, sometimes on her parents or even her husband, who might have to move out of Paris for his work. To justify her preference for Paris, she ended up declaring that her children (especially their son, then at school) still needed her and her husband. Bill, then 56 years old, married and a homeowner living in the southern suburbs of

London found himself in the same situation on account of his ailing father-in-law, as did James, who had bought a flat to be near his mother in London. Like Annabelle, he was unwilling to move away while his mother was still alive, and had deliberately abstained from making plans:

> I'd really like to move to New Zealand when I retire, but my wife doesn't want to go. Perhaps she'll change her mind. Her parents are about 75. If they pass away in seven or eight years' time…. And they're the only family she has. The only person who keeps me here is my mother. She used to be a very lively and energetic woman, but she unfortunately got Alzheimer's disease three years ago and she's now in a care home, so I won't be going anywhere while she's alive, and as she was the youngest of four girls and her sisters are still going strong at 93, 94 and 91 years old, she may have a few years ahead of her yet. So I won't be going anywhere while my mother's still alive. I'll stay here for as long as she's…

The family clearly continues to be viewed as a central value on both sides of the Channel, and for parents and children alike. The baby boomers belong to what can be called a *sandwich*, or *relay* (Ortalda 2001) generation—a reference to Corinne, who described herself as "passing on the baton". Nevertheless, the way our respondents talked about their parents was very different from the way they talked about their children, let alone their grandchildren, as they obviously had a positive view of grandparenthood. Although family solidarity is first and foremost driven by feelings and by norms of obligation, our respondents' narratives highlighted the priority given to children in terms of services rendered, in particular looking after their grandchildren. While this does not mean that they did not help their parents, the nature of that assistance varied from one member of the kin group to another, and did not always carry the same meaning. Even though some of our respondents had a very strong feeling of filial attachment, the care they gave their parents generally corresponded to the expression of a social norm, and was often experienced as a burden, on account of their loss of autonomy, and an emotional investment.

8.3   Ageing Parents: A Typology of Respondents' Responses

Analysis of the respondents' narratives[10] revealed several different attitudes towards elderly parents. There were the *impassible* children, who kept their distance from them and refused to think about their long-term future, the *passive helpers*, who delegated to a brother or, more generally, a sister, and the *active helpers*, who were at the centre of a comprehensive support system.

8.3.1   *Impassible Children*

Typically, these were respondents who never spontaneously mentioned their parents' advancing years, often because the latter were still in good health and the issue

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[10] It should be stressed that we only had the baby boomers' version of things, not their parents'.

had therefore never arisen. However, even when they were specifically questioned on the subject, they still had very little to say and even fewer ideas. As we have seen, not talking about their ageing parents may have been a way of protecting themselves, reflecting not just their refusal to think about their parents growing old and becoming dependent, thereby reversing the filial relation, but also an unwillingness to contemplate their own dotage, as extreme age is associated with disability. It may also be that they had never enjoyed a particularly close relationship with their parents, either because they had been fostered out, their parents divorced when they were young (as with Patricia), or they ended up moving in different circles, having climbed the social ladder (Luc) or adopted an alternative lifestyle (Joël). They may also take the view that a brother or sister (generally the latter) was in a better position to take charge of their parents.

Claire was one of our impassible respondents, refusing to think about the long-term future of her ageing parents. An only child, who had already retired at the time of the interview, she was still in contact with her elderly parents, then aged more than 85 years. Although her mother had been paralyzed for 12 years following a ruptured aneurysm, Claire only visited her every two months, preferring to spend her time with her children (especially her second son) and her lovers. She seldom alluded to her parents during the interview, simply describing her "very depressive" father and "anxious and aggravating" mother as "a burden". This situation was the logical outcome of her troubled relationship with her parents, the description of her mother revealing a gulf that had existed between them since Claire was a teenager:

> She didn't have a very interesting job… even though she passed her baccalaureate with flying colours… But she decided she had to stay at home to keep an eye on me…

Claire's family was very Catholic and belonged to the provincial bourgeoisie, and she had always found the family atmosphere stifling. At a very young age, she rejected its rigid moral codes and went to live in Paris with the father of her child, whom she later married. Her entire life was predicated on the need to break with her background, and she refused to think about her parents, deeming that her father could still look after her mother perfectly well—with appropriate support from care workers—as he was still in good health. Thus, while a *refusal* to think about one's parents growing old can stem from a more or less conscious desire to preserve or protect oneself for as long as possible (a form of denial), it may be also the result of difficult and conflictual relations in the past. Impassible children can therefore be divided further into *refusers* and *rejecters*.

8.3.2 Active Helpers

Some respondents played a central role in their elderly parents' support system, often having to adapt their daily or weekly schedule accordingly. While some, like Juliette, found themselves in a *care-as-deterioration* situation, others did not mind looking after an ageing parent for whom they had very deep feelings (*care as commitment*) (Caradec 2009). As we have seen, Annabelle acted in an exemplary fashion.

Living just "two numbers" down from her mother, she went in to see her each day, and organized an informal support system for her ageing mother that consisted of herself, a home help and members of her extended family. Whenever she went away on holiday, for instance, she would be replaced by her nephew, who lived in the same district. As we have seen, this type of solidarity can only work if the right residential strategy has been put in place, bringing the generations physically closer together. Yann had also spent a great deal of time looking after his mother, with whom he was very close (she had passed away by the time of the interview). Following the death of his brother at the age of 50, struck down by a very aggressive cancer in 1986, and that of his father two years later, he decided to move his mother closer to him so he could ensure that she wanted for nothing:

> I wanted her to be nearer me because she was 83. I said, "Well, you're coming to live next to me in M." We got her to buy a small two-room flat and we arranged for her to have meals on wheels, as I wasn't sure she was eating properly.

Unfortunately, moving house proved extremely traumatic to Yann's mother, who felt she had been uprooted. Her experience underlines the importance of growing old in familiar surroundings, especially if the person in question has been living in the same house for many years and knows the local area well (Clément et al. 2007). Yann's feelings of guilt were compounded by the need to put her in a care home. "It was a catastrophe, because she had to go into a home." Although he was always at her side, he was not alone, as he received help from his circle of friends and, above all, from his wife and son:

> For two and a half years, my wife sacrificed herself. If we went away on holiday, it was my son, and if he was on holiday, too, my friends went to see her. We never let her down. My wife understood that very well, and of course she was very fond of her. She looked after her really well, I can't praise her too highly for that. She got her dressed, we washed her things, and we gave her her meals every day.

The interviews confirmed the role played by wives alongside their active helper husbands, looking after their mothers-in-law just as Yann's wife did. For instance, despite holding down a demanding job and volunteering in her parish (three evenings a week, plus activities on Sundays), Martine and her husband would make the 400 km round trip to her mother-in-law's every Saturday, in order to do her housework and shopping. Clearly, then, although men can be active helpers, they are frequently aided and abetted by their wives. When the active helpers are women, however, they usually find themselves on their own. This was what happened to Juliette who, as we saw, wanted to stay in the Paris region until her son had completed his education. She had always been very close to her parents, who had helped her out on several occasions, offering her the use of a bedsit after her marriage, and lending or giving her money in 1987 when she was buying her flat south of Paris—a choice of location that had nothing to do with chance, as she had lived there when she was young and wanted to move closer to her parents. At the time of the interview, her 85-year-old father was in a dependent state, following a heart attack, and her mother, who was seven years younger, was reluctant to go into a retirement home. A homemaker, having stopped working when her first daughter was born, Juliette

gave up all her other activities to look after her parents. She would go to see them every day and had organized a rota of care assistants, entirely without the help and support of her husband or brothers, who had all moved out to the provinces. Comments like "It's hard", "it's awful", "it's a really heavy burden" show just how hard she was finding it to cope single-handed, and just how alone she felt. She could not count on her two brothers, as it was they who relied entirely on her, and because of constantly having to rush and do her parents' shopping on top of her own, go and see them each day, and look after her children, she was, by her own account, "absolutely knackered". We can also cite the example of Carol, born in 1951. She was living in Dulwich at the time, with her partner and their 13-year-old son. Her elderly mother, who was in poor health, lived in nearby Peckham. Although she had four brothers, none of them were around to help her with her mother, mainly because she was on bad terms with them following the sale of the family home. Even though Carol saw her mother two or three times a week, she did not feel she was giving enough of her time:

> Well, it's a difficult situation because I've got four brothers, but I'm the only one who bothers to take care of our mother. And one of my brothers made money out of her because she sold him a property cheap and lent him money. If he doesn't call her it's because he feels guilty… I mean… I go down to see Mum and feel incredibly bad because I can sense that she needs us to spend more time with her because she's really not well.

As for only children, something of a rarity among the baby boomers, they have no siblings to fall back on, and are therefore morally obliged to become active helpers, as Steve in London explained:

> I'm also responsible for my elderly mother, whom I've been looking after since my father died five years ago. And for the two years before that, I looked after him while he was in and out of hospital. So in addition to my teaching job, I had the job of looking after my parents. My mother's now 89 and suffers from dementia. I wouldn't say it's like having two jobs, but I'm constantly moving between a world filled with 8-year-olds and a world of people who've reached the end of their lives. Going to see to her two or three times a day is also very tiring.

8.3.3   Passive Helpers

The potential role played by siblings is something that sets the baby boomers apart from other generations. Because they often belong to large families, they are likely to have plenty of brothers and sisters around still when they reach 50 or 60. Having siblings was sometimes felt to be a disadvantage when they were growing up and had to share bedrooms, toys and clothes, but at this stage in their lives, they can help to *spread the load*. Having a brother or sister around to help look after ageing parents means that essential tasks can be shared, and there is less need to live close by. They may even be able to offload all their responsibilities onto the shoulders of their siblings. Élisabeth belongs to the category of passive helpers. Born in Niort, into an upper middle-class family, she went to Paris to study medicine and met her future husband there. Her barrister father died when he was 50, and her mother was

then living alone in the middle of Niort in a large "bourgeois townhouse". Safe in the knowledge that her mother would not be alone, with her locally living sister and two brothers, plus an assortment of nieces and nephews, to keep her company, Élisabeth could *get away* with visiting just once a year.

This passive helper role can often be put down to geographical distance, as it is impossible to look after elderly parents unless one lives nearby. While some children may choose to move away, in order to elude family responsibilities, others (e.g., Claire) are forced to do so. Having to live far away proved to be a frustrating experience for our respondents, who were unable to care for their parents as they would have liked. This was certainly the experience of Philippe, who hailed from southeast France:

> My mother has always been a really hard worker and I'm very proud of her. Especially since she's now getting on in years. That's why I said that as you get older, you get closer to whatever family you've got left. So she's very well looked after. If my brother Richard phones and he says, "Jean-Pierre, Mother's asking when you'll be coming", I'm able to take the train, go down and stay… My brother looks after her a lot, but if he needs to take a break, someone has to, so… it takes a bit of organization, but I've got two or three brothers—no, four brothers—living in or around Le Creusot with their sisters-in-law and, of course, their wives, who can look after her more easily than I can. But if they needed me to come down, I'd go down straightaway. The station's right on the doorstep.

According to Vincent Caradec's typology, Philippe belonged to the *help-as-satisfaction* category, as he mainly talked about the positive aspects of his mother's advancing years—possibly something to do with the fact that he did not have to devote huge amounts of time to her. He can be seen as playing understudy to his more heavily invested brothers and, of course, his sisters-in-law, for as we have seen, women often help their husbands care for their parents. The same is true of Martin, who was extremely fond of his mother, and thus reassured to know that his sister, a trained nurse, lived nearby:

> My mother's lucky enough to live in the same apartment block as my sister. So as my sister's a nurse, she looks after my mother really well. For example, when Mum broke her wrist, at her age it was quite…, but my sister was able to look after her and moved her in with her, so you see… All that means that I know my mother's safe with my sister just next door… It's a great help, I can tell you. A relief. It's really reassuring.

Where Martin's story differs from that of Élisabeth and Philippe, however, is that his parents had taken the decision to follow their newly married daughter when she moved away from Paris, leaving him "all alone" and "abandoned", as he puts it. Without going so far as to accuse him of selfishness, he may have felt that his sister was repaying the debt she owed to him.

Nonetheless, brothers usually fall under the heading of passive helpers, even if they live nearby. Born in 1950, Bill lives near London. At the time of the interview, he was into his second marriage and had two children from his first marriage. His father had died when Bill was very young and his 83-year-old mother lived nearby in a former council flat she had purchased under the government's right-to-buy scheme. When her health started to deteriorate, Bill had not seen fit to increase his involvement. Instead, one of his sisters had moved into the flat, along with her

husband and son, so that she could help their mother on a daily basis. Bill therefore played the role of passive helper and his sister that of active helper. This function appears to be strongly internalized in wives and sisters. Judith, for instance, a single mother with a 9-year-old daughter, had no choice but to remain a passive helper because she lived so far away from her 81-year-old mother. Although they talked over the phone at least once a week, Judith would have liked her mother to move closer. To her great regret, however, this never happened, for a variety of reasons.

These interviews show that looking after dependent parents is generally viewed as the business of daughters, thereby underscoring the central position of women in support systems and the key role they play in kin groups (Déchaux 2009). *Matrilineal bias* is not the sole explanation, however. Although couples more often have connections with the wife's relatives, mechanically generating a more active role for her within this system, we have also seen that wives and sisters-in-law frequently become involved—and indeed are expected to do so. This is confirmed by Philippe's comment that "I've two or three brothers—no, four brothers—living in or around Le Creusot with their sisters-in-law and, of course, their wives". The *centrality of women* can therefore be traced back to the *gynocentred* nature of the kin group, whose female members appear to be relatively interchangeable (Déchaux 2009).

8.4   Conclusion

The baby boomers we met in London and Paris had clearly brought their children up in a more relaxed and flexible atmosphere than the one they themselves had experienced when they were growing up. They had striven to keep the channels of communication with their offspring open, while at the same time inculcating them with a set of rules and passing on their values. Despite what some people have claimed (Yonnet 2006; Bawin-Legros 2008), they did not come through as *laxist*, but rather as people who, in the main, were ready and willing to shoulder their parental responsibilities, especially when it came to helping their children find their place in the adult world. To this end, some had rented flats and even purchased property to enable their children to have their own home, while others had agreed to keep on providing them with board and lodging. A growing number had also had to cope with so-called *boomerang kids*. The main worry now for baby boomers is that their children will slip down the social ladder (Maurin 2009), which explains why they invest so heavily in their children's education and later do their very utmost to find them a traineeship or a job—however precarious—with some even going to the length of starting up a business. Nonetheless, even though they realize just how difficult it is for their children to become fully-fledged adults, they still find it hard to comprehend why they behave as they do, especially when this behaviour restricts their own freedom. By the time they were 20, the baby boomers had left home to explore a world free of constraints, if not *free of family*, but 30 years on, they find themselves trapped in the family web, having to deal not only with their

adult offspring but also with their ageing parents—the first generations of *seniors* to find themselves in this position. Having to cope with their parents' loss of autonomy and encroaching disability, and/or psychological disorders, as well as their gradual disengagement (Clément and Mantovani 1999), sometimes requires them to reorganize their own lives. Squeezed between the ascendant and descendant generations, these pivotal generations have chosen to give priority to the latter, chiefly by helping to care for their grandchildren. This is not necessarily a sign of greater individualism on the part of baby boomers with regard to their elderly parents, for as we saw from the residential strategies adopted by some of our respondents, they do make efforts to support them. Perhaps it would be more accurate to talk about an inability to project themselves into the future, given that they often have difficulty preparing for retirement. What also came through in the interviews was a strong desire for independence, not just among the baby boomers, but also among their parents and children. For their parents, this was reflected in their determination to keep on living in their own home for as long as possible and their refusal to live with their children. In these conditions, moving into a retirement home is very much a last resort, because of its financial and psychological cost, and a number of our respondents clearly felt guilty about the way they had handled this last stage in their parents' lives and the attendant loneliness.

It is important to emphasise that although very few baby boomers shirk their family responsibilities, these responsibilities are particularly arduous where elderly people are concerned, and can push private solidarity to the limit. Our respondents displayed varying degrees of commitment. Some of them remained *impassive* to the siren calls of solidarity, either because their parents were still in good health, and so the question simply did not arise, or because they were on distant terms with their parents, and/or a sibling (generally a sister) was in a better position to look after them. Others took advantage of brothers or sisters to remain *passive helpers*, either because they lived too far away to help out on a daily basis or because they deemed that this burden should fall to a preferred sibling or to one who was more available. Others found themselves at the core of the support system, either on their own or as part of a family team: male *active helpers* especially often relied on a female relative (sister, sister-in-law or spouse), thus confirming women's central role both in the support system and in the kin group. As caring for dependent relatives continues to be viewed as *women's work*, parents' increasing life expectancy is tending to reinforce existing inequalities between men and women. In most cases, the latter are expected to "man all the fronts—family, personal and professional" (Le Bihan-Youinou and Martin 2006). In these conditions, it is easy to understand why some of our female respondents found it necessary to keep their family obligations at arm's length, in order to preserve their multiple identities as women, mothers, spouses, daughters, volunteers and wage earners.

Last but not least, it is important to underline the considerable similarities between France and Britain, in terms of the residential proximity of the different generations, the frequency of contacts, and the type of help that is given. This is particularly surprising, given that the British model allows for greater individual freedom in the face of family obligations, which are actually enshrined in law in France. The

absence of fundamental differences between the two countries demonstrates the strength of social norms—a sort of collective obligation towards family members (Renaut and Ogg 2003). The more individualistic behaviour of modern society is therefore countered by the family norms that continue to prevail in Europe (Daatland and Herlofson 2003). Norms have certainly not disappeared (Déchaux 2010), as a comprehensive set of rules, principles and practices has emerged to frame our individual freedom, all the while emphasising "the desire of each and every one of us to feel unique and fulfilled". It is this contradiction that the generations born after the war have had to handle. On the one hand, defeated by sheer force of circumstance, they feel socially and morally compelled to shoulder their responsibilities towards their ageing parents, as well as towards their children on the brink of adulthood. On the other hand, they want to have some time for themselves, in order to embark on new residential projects, for instance, or even look for new relationships. Thus, the baby boomers who pioneered a more individualistic lifestyle find themselves forced to engage in family solidarity in order to cope with the dependence of their immediate family members.

Chapter 9
Baby Boomers and Their Family Entourage

Transformations to the family have raised many questions from both politicians and researchers. Characteristically, the family has repeatedly been described as being under threat. It was feared in the nineteenth century that industrialisation and urbanisation would disrupt the family (Le Play 1879) and in the 1950s that the couple would supplant kinship (Parsons 1955). While it was at first argued that the development of nuclear families would weaken kinship bonds, new concerns have appeared with the baby boomers. These concerns include the rise in single-parent families and recomposed families, and hence the future of filial relationships. As a result, since the beginning of the 1990s, we have seen a steady stream of studies on relationships and exchanges within the family entourage, particularly in Great Britain[1] and France.[2] Yet, even if intergenerational ties are better understood and recognised today, the role of the family is often presented as being instrumental, with family and kinship seen as providing services and social capital. Yet the fact that the post-war generations assume—like their elders—the role of pivotal generation by helping older people and the integration of youth into the housing and job markets, this observation does not tell us much about the various kinds of relationships among the different family members. "Indeed, everything cannot be reduced to the parents' role as suppliers of assistance and the children as symbols of attachment" (Roussel 1996). These are but the visible manifestations of the exchanges between generations that play out over the course of a life and several generations, according to the concept of indirect reciprocity in Maussian anthropology. Individuals pay off their debt to their own parents through their own children and do not anticipate any return. They do, however, expect their children to do likewise with their own children. One must therefore go beyond an instrumental vision of the family and try to better understand the diversity of extended families, as encouraged by Peter Willmott (1986). The question of intergenerational bonds and modes of family

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[1] See the contributions of these authors in the collective work by Susan McRae, *Changing Britain. Families and Households in the 1990s,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

[2] See the research of Claudine Attias-Donfut, 1993; 1995, *op. cit.* and Martine Segalen, 2010, *op. cit*; *Jeux de familles* (ed. Martine Segalen), 1991, *op. cit.* as well as the INSEE publications, *Insee première*, no. 600 (1998) and 631 (1999).

organisation is all the more important because baby boomers have contributed to the emergence of new family bonds characterised by less conventional and more elective relationships.

The diversity of the very forms of family that baby boomers have introduced, together with women's massive entry into the job market, led some researchers to ask questions about the impact of these changes on kinship relationships (McClone et al. 1999) and to suggest abandoning the concept of family in favour of "primary relationships" (Scanzoni 1979). While the term is debatable, (Cheal 2004) it nonetheless has the merit of viewing the family through the prism of relationships and choices about them within the kinship group. Indeed, the modern family has become, above all, relational (de Singly 2009) and can even be only one of several networks centred on the individual. Yet, at the same time, freely choosing one's family relationships collides with the moral obligations that bind relatives to one another. Despite the rise in individualism—"I" taking precedence over "we"—the weight of family duties towards ageing parents and the responsibility for the children's future still weigh heavily in our societies. Certain questions should therefore be asked. Do baby boomers form a united group or have they adopted more individualistic behaviour while maintaining strong relationships with their non-cohabiting parents and children? How do they manage to reconcile their need for independence and freedom, the hallmarks of their youth, with heightened family pressure? It should be said that baby boomers are currently in an unprecedented situation. Between 50 and 60 years of age, they are faced with the old age of their parents and must deal with their children's integration difficulties. Will they be altruistic or selfish, ask economists (Masson 2009). As we saw in the preceding chapter, the baby boomers are deeply involved in family solidarity. Yet, as Martine Segalen concedes, "to then say that we are looking at a kinship system, as it is understood by ethnologists, is to go too far too fast" (Segalen 2001, p. 16).

We can nonetheless bring in these notions of ties and obligations in order to analyse current family relationships using the anthropological concepts of group and kinship network. The first refers to a quasi-fusion of households within an extended family; the second to "a coalition of nuclear families in which closeness is experienced remotely out of a concern for reciprocal independence" (Dechaux 2001, p. 186). The idea of private solidarity therefore evokes the existence of a group, whereas that of mutual aid refers to kinship. While the anthropological concept of household (Weber 2002) is hard to discern on the basis of quantitative data, the indicators created by Vern Bengtson, whose six-part classification of solidarity is widely used in Europe today, (Bengtson and Roberts 1991) does allow the functioning of such families to be better identified. According to the model, mutual aid constitutes the "functional" dimension of solidarity; the frequency of visits corresponds to the "associative" dimension, and geographical distance to the "structural" dimension. With the combined use of these different forms of solidarity, configurations that make sense emerge (Girbaudi 1999). The task is to use this set of indicators to evaluate the strength of the relationships uniting the households of the same kinship group and identify the system at work. In line with Peter Willmott's research, and based on data from the study *Proches et parents*, Catherine Bonvalet

and Dominique Maison have highlighted a specific type of functioning, namely the local family entourage, which involves emotional solidarity, residential proximity, mutual aid and weekly contact (Bonvalet and Maison 1999). The findings invalidate the trend towards domestic withdrawal with the weakening of kinship: 30 % of respondents belonged to a local family entourage and 17 % to a dispersed family entourage, in which relationships among loved ones were strong in spite of geographical distance (Bonvalet 2003). Age and household type had absolutely no incidence on family functioning. This shows that baby boomers between 36 and 45 years of age in 1990 (the year of the survey), were no different from other generations, and that their matrimonial past did not influence whether or not they belonged to a local family entourage. We therefore decided to "revisit" the interviews conducted with baby boomers in Paris and London to determine the various forms of solidarity that link them to their parents and children and to identify several ways of functioning: local and dispersed family entourage, moderate families and isolated families. We should, however, mention that it was difficult to retain the same criteria, since the respondents did not always give details about the frequency of contact. Furthermore, geographical proximity turned out to be extremely subjective in the end. The way in which family ties are experienced by respondents was the aspect used to a greater extent to develop this typology. Family ties were interpreted not only by the respondent, but also by the researcher.

9.1   Local Family Entourage

Among the 90 respondents, 36 belonged to a local family entourage, 13 out of 30 lived in London and 23 out of 60 in Paris. One might have expected different behaviour to emerge from French and English baby boomers, insofar as England is often presented as being more bluenose and less attached to family values. The evidence, however, as noted by Peter Willmott (1986), states that the family remains an essential societal mechanism in both countries. This fact confirms data on residential proximity and contact published in various quantitative studies, such as the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) in Great Britain, and ERFI[3] and *Biographies et entourage* in France. This relatively high proportion (40 %) can be explained by the specific position of respondents in the family life cycle: the pivotal generation, as described by Claudine Attias-Donfut (1995).

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[3] "*L'étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles*" (ERFI). The French version of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), was part of the international Generations and Genders Programme (GGP) for the collection and analysis of socio-demographic population data from a large number of European countries over several years. The United Kingdom was not part of the programme.

9.1.1 The Local Family Entourage: Between Reproduction and Creation

In the life cycle, two main periods stand out as regards family mutual aid: when the children leave the family home and when the parents advance in age. At such times, "a mutual aid group is marshalled around a common cause, bound together by financial and day-to-day ties" (Déchaux 2007). Within this group, women, as might be supposed, play an essential role. They are the ones who first actively seek nearby housing for their son or daughter and ensure "close care" for their aged parents. When contact is daily and many meals are shared, the family functioning resembles a type of semi-cohabitation, as shown in the case of Martine, who provides a salient example of a local family entourage. Born in 1948 of Spanish parents, she has always lived in the same neighbourhood where her father was a craftsman. After her wedding, her uncle helped her to move into the flat above her father's workshop. Thereafter, Martine has used several homes. She lives in the same building in which her father works and her uncle resides. Quite naturally, she reproduced this life-style by setting up her 8-year-old twins in an independent apartment linked by interphone. Since the family flat had become too small for their three children, Martine and her husband decided to buy a two-room flat a floor down to be used as a playroom by the children. At the time of the interview, the youngest son was living in that apartment, whereas one of the twins had bought a flat with his fiancée in the same building, and the other twin had set up his home in the neighbourhood. Martine's parents, now deceased, used to live nearby, and two of her brothers still reside in the neighbourhood. The result is frequent visits and omnipresent mutual aid, whether in daily life or at specific times, such as the purchase of a home. Martine is reproducing a specific type of family, characterised by the values of work and family that she received from her craftsman father, and a mode of living together that she has transmitted to her children. In her particular case, the local family entourage partially encompasses the concept of the household[4] insofar as there is an almost-daily sharing of domestic activities on account of the emotional and physical closeness (in the building and the neighbourhood). The local family entourage can also be compared with the concept of lineage for, according to Florence Weber:

> When it involves a collective representation of family transmission, when it establishes links between past and future, when it interweaves intergenerational resemblances, such proximity groups individuals together into a lineage. (Weber 2003, p. 391)

In Martine's family, the mechanisms of household and lineage interlock and are expressed through deep-rootedness in a district of Paris. For her, family is a space for solidarity anchored in the neighbourhood where she lived as a child, young wife and then mother, and where she hopes to become a grandmother. This solidarity extends well beyond the limits of the family, since the neighbourhood is a place in which she has invested herself by volunteering in a charitable association for the

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[4] According to Florence Weber, "the household is based on a specific kinship bond: location in the proper sense of the term, coproduction and residence". (Weber et al. 2003, p. 391).

last 15 years. In this type of family reproduction, it is not rare to see situations of quasi-merging between the mother and daughter, in particular when the latter has remained single.[5] Annabelle is perhaps the respondent whose family best typifies a local family entourage oriented towards the mother. For, even if she decried the pronounced individualism of our society and announced the "decline of the family" and family values throughout the interview, it could be observed that such reflections do not apply to her family, in which the generations are close. Indeed, since leaving the parental home, Annabelle has lived in the same home, "two numbers down" from her mother, in the same street. A mutual aid system is now in place for her mother. Her brother, who lives nearby in a neighbouring suburb, and her nephew, who resides in the same neighbourhood (in a flat belonging to Annabelle's mother) take turns helping Annabelle's mother when she is away on holiday. Here too, residential proximity appears to be rooted in family history. Annabelle's parents used to live on the same floor as their parents and would have lunch together every Sunday. Annabelle and her brother have taken up this habit and re-appropriated the family functioning, which is the "reproduction type" of a local family entourage (Bonvalet 2003):

> No, it's a flat that belongs to my mum. So he's the one who lives there. It stays in the family. We get on well… Yes, we're quite family-oriented; we're used to… Well, you know, we were used to, my brother and I, my parents and my grandparents used to live on the same floor. Two doors—imagine this door and the door that you came in through; and that meant that we were always at my parents' place or my grandparents'. On Sundays, we always ate together. You see, we've always been used to living together as a family. And so we've kept the habit a bit.

> And approximately how often do you see your family?

> Well, for mum, it's every day, and for my brother, I'd say around, oh, once a week. Roughly.

The genealogical anchoring here should be underscored: Annabelle's family has lived in Paris for several generations. Indeed, geographical roots and local family entourage often go together (Bonvalet 2003). Such transmission of a mode of family organisation through geographical rooting can also be found in England, as illustrated by the family history of Bill. Born into a working-class family in East London in 1950, Bill grew up in a tri-generational house with his grandfather and one of his uncles. After the birth of his little brother, the family moved to a larger home in the South of London, away from the rest of the relatives:

> When I was born, we moved in with my grandfather who lived on Willmott Street, and I lived there, let's say, until the age of six or seven. I went to school on Colombia Street, across the street from where my shop is today. We left because we had only the upstairs, while my grandfather and uncle lived on the ground floor.

At the age of 11, his father died and his mother, who had just given birth to another son, had to move again. Single with three children, she decided to move closer to her extended family still in East London. When he got married, Bill left home to

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[5] Even if the statistical analyses do not show a dependency link between marital status and local family circles, some interviews, in particular those with single women, reveal the strength of their relationships with their mother.

move into a rented flat in Clapham. He stayed there only a few years, however, then moved to the county of Kent into company accommodation, where his two children were born. Six years later, he got divorced and returned to London to live with his mother, who was at the time housing her daughter and son-in-law. At the beginning of the 1980s, Bill met his new partner and succeeded in obtaining a public housing rental thanks to a local policy that gave priority to the children of tenants in social housing. A few years later, a right-to-buy scheme enabled him to purchase the home. At the time of the interview, Bill did not wish to move although he had thought about returning to Kent. He and his wife had chosen for the time being to stay in their flat located near their family—his sister, who lives with his mother, as well as his children who have settled in neighbouring municipalities—in order to give priority to contact with the family. These examples all share a genealogical depth involving several kinship groups. They also demonstrate the importance of studying the functioning of families over several generations and several family lines, as shown by Daniel Bertaux (1987).

Depending on the history of the respondents and their parents, or even their grandparents, several types of family entourage can be distinguished. Firstly, those that reproduce, as in the cases of Martine and Bill, a manner of living "as a family" are shaped by plural heritage. Such interlacing provides couples with room to manoeuvre in building their own family since they can decide on the "dose" of heritage from each line. Secondly, other families function "creatively", with the respondents having established the family organisation and "set the children up" nearby (Bonvalet 2003). This strategy was adopted by Odile and her husband, who arrived as a young couple in Paris, leaving behind family and in-laws in the regions. A generation later, they arranged everything so that the family could function as a semi-cohabiting local family entourage. They purchased a flat in the neighbourhood for their eldest son and set up the second in a studio in the same building. The result is very frequent visits and get-togethers: "Yesterday there was a football game, so my other son came over with friends and Antoine's girlfriend. So there are often quite a lot of people around." Significantly, in Odile's case, the domestic group is also a production unit, thus meeting all the conditions for a household (i.e. location, residence and production). Indeed, as we have seen, Odile and her eldest son work in her husband's company. Work ties are thus added to the bonds of kinship. The family becomes a production unit and a unit of reproduction through professional transmission from father to son in accordance with the rationale of lineage. Odile's husband transmits his know-how to his son to ensure the passing-on of this productive patrimony. This example shows how men are involved in the local family entourage in a different way. While the women are active in the concrete search for housing (they are the ones who visit the agencies, handle the formalities and ensure the practical organisation of the local family entourage), the men, when they can, call on their network in order to find housing or employment for their children. Some, like Maurice, Daniel and Pierre, even choose to create their own business in order to end their child's unemployment (cf. Chapter 7). In addition, men more readily mention the property aspect of "creating" a local family entourage. For the parents' intervention to find accommodation for their children

is not neutral, and the choice of location is not accidental. By purchasing property close by, parents give themselves the possibility of functioning as a local family entourage with their children. Charles and his wife clearly followed such a strategy when they bought two studios for their sons, one in the same street, the other in an adjacent neighbourhood. The local family entourage can therefore cover completely different situations. The examples of Martine and Odile resemble a household or composite family living in several homes. In this case, the local family entourage naturally falls into an extension of the nuclear family, whereby the parents, despite their residential separation, continue to be materially and financially present. Other types of local family entourage, such as Charles's, use the mechanism of lineage, in which patrimony strategies dominate and the autonomy of each household is greater. This mode can be a phase, with the children gradually moving away, or a more lasting way of living together that respects the autonomy of each household. Some respondents have lived their whole lives near their parents, as we have seen in the cases of Martine and Annabelle.

9.1.2   The Local Family Entourage: Among Parents, Siblings and Children

It is rare to see the whole family function in this way, even if some respondents reveal strong, sustained ties. This is the case of Bill, who functions in a local family entourage with his mother, sister and children. This is also true of Edouard, who describes his family as "old Parisians" because his whole family network (i.e. his parents before their deaths; his brother, who died a year ago; his sister-in-law, who lives 15 metres away; and his sister) is located in Paris—except his parents-in-law, who live in another region but whom he often sees. This geographical proximity is accompanied by emotional closeness, which is prolonged in the family home in Brittany. Similarly, Claude, a father of three children (aged 35, 32 and 26 at the time of the survey, and two of whom live in Paris) and grandfather of three, shares his life with his wife, who stopped working after the arrival of their children and their move abroad. Within the family, he explains, "we are in permanent contact. We adore one another, at least I believe so. And my wife adores her daughters and vice versa; that is certain." He also maintains very strong ties with his siblings (especially the youngest three) and his mother who, after living elsewhere, chose to move to the greater Paris area to be closer to her children. They have a routine: Claude plays tennis once a week with his brothers and has lunch in a restaurant with his mother. He is also close to his parents-in-law, who reside in Normandy and who helped him to acquire his second residence near them. They also assisted by babysitting the children when they were young, especially during school holidays. As one can see, Claude's family network is very dense and occupies a primordial place (siblings, mother, children, grandchildren, parents-in-law) in his day-to-day life.

Other people, sometimes as a result of their family history or a separation, form a local family entourage with their brothers, sisters, nephews and/or nieces. This is

the case of Paul, whose trajectory we presented in Chap. 3. Let us recall the main facts. Paul is one of those baby boomers who lived intensely from 1968 to 1970, leaving his parents at the age of 17 to join a commune. Unlike other baby boomers, he continued to live "on the fringe". After living in Latin America for several years, where he had a marriage of convenience to obtain a residence permit, he returned to Paris in 1985. While Paul has grown apart from most of his family, he has remained very close to one of his brothers. Indeed, this brother helped him upon his return, not only to find a job in a cultural association, but also to get a flat in Paris:

> That is to say, I have a brother with whom I get on very well. We are neighbours, right; he lives 100 metres away in the same street and, with him, we see each other very often very, very often. Even by chance at the market, then we'll eat out together; we do a tonne of things together. And I have a favourite nephew, who is my brother's son. They live next door; I really saw him grow up. It true that with the others, there's always at least a year between each visit.

In most of the interviews, family ties are certainly maintained, but are not as deep and, when they do exist, they are most often with children. That said, other respondents have become closer to their parents, either by moving, like Bill to London, or by having their parents come to live near them. With her husband, Linda, for example, has bought a large Georgian house and set up an independent apartment in it for her mother:

> We went into it with our eyes wide open, having shared the house, but with separate doors and separate bills. But we are unusual because we are able to offer that kind of support for my mother. It's something that is gone from traditional British society even though it is still there in a lot of ethnic groups in Britain.

The relationships underlying these modes of living together are, however, of different natures. With children, relationships are chosen and usually arise from strategies involving residences and patrimony; with parents, they stem rather from a moral obligation, the debt owed to parents. With parents' advancing age, the local family entourage can be transformed into a very restrictive load for baby boomers. This is the case of Juliette who, despite having two brothers, takes care of her aged parents alone:

> My father is at the bottom of his bed; he doesn't move any more… So, when my mother is ill, I have to go over there. So I drop in very, very regularly. It's hard… because I have to run around… For example, there was a time when my father was in hospital and my mother was at home because she was sick… So I would rush off to the hospital… then to her house… I was a bit… on my last legs…

Like Juliette (cf. Chap. 7), several respondents admitting to changing their residential plans to stay near their parents, including James, in London, whose mother is ill. He is all the more faced with the situation since his wife has to take care of her own parents. They are, as it were, obliged to continue functioning as a local family entourage.

While filial bonds appear very strong, the interviews reveal respondents' fatigue, resentment and even, at times, rancour. In this way, there is a double discourse, as observed by Vincent Caradec (2009). With time, relationships with parents are

experienced as a weight, a duty, and affinities diminish as the parents become a burden for the respondents (Bonvalet and Maison 1999). This weight of duty felt by baby boomers seems to be linked to the end of reciprocal exchanges and to their parents', and hence their own, lost autonomy. While the respondents very often assume their role of helper—or should we say, the female respondents do—some of them have trouble bearing the constraints of helping because their freedom to act is limited. For, as we have seen, since their youth, the baby boomers have lived in a society that values independence—the independence of generations and of women—and have freed themselves, or at least attempted to free themselves, from family obligations. They find themselves all the more unprepared because support structures are inadequate in both France and England. This feeling of being obligated to help, and the resulting weight of duty, can also be observed when the respondents' children return to live with them (cf. Chap. 8). Under such conditions, the local family entourage is no longer chosen, but rather endured, and can turn out to be "hellish solidarity" (Attias-Donfut et al. 2002). It remains no less true that one is more willing to change one's daily life and reduce one's freedom for children than for parents.

9.1.3   The Local Family Entourage, or the Art of Being Grandparents

While the local family entourage mainly involves lineage, i.e. ascendants and descendants; children and, through them, grandchildren are nevertheless the ones who are privileged. For when grandchildren arrive, the local family entourage can be the ideal framework in which to exercise one's "grandparentality", which, as we have seen, is expressed very intensely. Indeed, some sociologists speak of the grandparents' having "new clothes" (Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2002).[6] Geographical proximity enables one to set up a veritable system of mutual aid centred on babysitting. For instance, Claude, whose daughter lives in the same street, has "constant contact" with his grandchildren and "helps out" his daughters "whenever someone's got a cold, whenever this, whenever that". He makes the most of this occasional babysitting to bring together his three grandchildren and instil "family spirit" in them. Sometimes, the grandparents become their grandchildren's "nannies", which saves on child-minding costs for their children. This is the situation for Maurice, whose daughter and family live in the neighbouring municipality. Retired for a few months now, Maurice can take care of his two granddaughters every day. While he and his wife wonder whether they can continue such an arrangement, the situation suits them perfectly, since it provides them with balance during their retirement. Maurice's role in this system is to take the girls to and from school and be a handyman around the house. For her part, his wife prepares the meals for the enlarged family, which includes their 23-year-old youngest son who works full-time but still

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[6] According to Vincent Gourdon, this vision of a doting grandparent conveys "an incomplete or fantasised vision of the grandparents' story most of the time", (2001, p. 12).

lives at home because his salary is too low for him to move out. Satisfied with their retirement, the couple declare: "We have a good role now, the most beautiful role of our lives". Another striking example is the case of Jean-François, who functions "locally" with his children. The resulting help for the family is considerable. For example, when his eldest son had a break-up, he came back to the family residence. When his daughter separated at around the same time, however, Jean-François could not house both of them. The siblings then decided to rent a house together nearby, demonstrating how the siblings help one another. Thanks to this closeness, both physical and relational, Jean-François' children frequently visit him. The situation positively affects his "grandparentality" by facilitating and encouraging Jean-François' personal investment in his role as grandfather. Among his duties is going to pick up his grandson at his mother's when his son has professional obligations, (the couple is separated). In this sense, his son's divorce has not led to a slackening of family ties; on the contrary, they are closer, with the grandparents being twice as attentive and helpful to relieve the single parent. A bedroom is always ready for the grandchildren. As a result, Jean-François does not wish to leave the Paris area, preferring to be close to his children. Such cases of intergenerational cohabitation or remote cohabitation with daily babysitting of the grandchildren remain, however, rare. More often, the parents are called upon in case of problems, sick grandchildren or when the children want "to breath" by taking their holidays alone.

The fact remains that being a grandparent is an important time in the functioning of the local family entourage, as shown by the story of Shirley, aged 58 and widowed 3 years ago. She has two children, a 35-year-old daughter with a 7-year-old son, and a 33-year old son with a 10-year-old boy. Shirley's son lives a few minutes' walk away, and her daughter 15 min away, also on foot. Thanks to this proximity, Shirley's week is articulated by family meetings:

> Well I baby-sit once a week for my grandson and then I end up stopping the weekend there. Because when I came out of the hospital I went to stop with my daughter for two weeks and so I like I am going there Friday to look after him because she is going to Bingo with her sister in law and then I will stop there Friday night and I would stop there Saturday but I'm coming home Saturday and I am going back on Sunday night because I am going to look after him Monday because Monday she is doing a big shop for my father in law so I take him for that so I stop Sunday and am there early Monday and he doesn't go back to school till Tuesday and she goes to the father in law to do a big shop.

The local family entourage mode is clearly visible here. The members of the kinship group live close to one another, visits are frequent and mutual aid is the rule, for both ascendants and descendants. Despite heart problems, Shirley continues to take care of her father-in-law with the help of her daughter and daughter-in-law. Nonetheless, except in a few cases, it appears difficult to function in this way with the whole family. The children and grandchildren seem favoured, then the parents—or one's own parents, as it were—especially for women.[7] This situation does not threaten

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[7] While the principle of equality exists as regards the management of family relationships on both sides, a tendency towards *matrilatéralité*, i.e. a preference for the wife's line, can however be observed (Bonvalet and Maision 1999; Le Pape 2006; Jonas and Le Pape 2008).

links with the in-laws since they are integrated into the network, but not necessarily at a local level. A double system can occur with a local mode for the family and a dispersed one for the in-laws. There are, however, cases in which the family model is reproduced at the expense of the in-laws (in particular the wife's family), with an "absorption" by the family or the in-laws (Bonvalet 2003). It should be added that the local family entourage is not necessarily synonymous with a withdrawal into the private sphere. It can, on the contrary, be very open to the outside world (ibid.) and involve friends and neighbours, as in the cases of Martine and Pierre.

9.2   Dispersed Family Entourage

The family does not always function according to the previously described mode, whereby the members remain near one another. Major moves, professional mobility and conjugal trajectories can end up separating families geographically. Yet physical distance does not necessarily entail a weakening of ties. Despite the distance, some families maintain close relationships featuring weekly contact with one or several relatives and mutual aid. This type of functioning has been named "dispersed family entourage" (reminder: it differs from the local family entourage in that the households involved do not live in the same municipality or a neighbouring one). Of the 90 respondents in Paris and London, 32 belong to this category (nine in London and 23 in Paris). The meaning of geographical scattering should, however, be made clear. As we have seen, the local family entourage involves great proximity and favours an anchoring in the same municipality or a neighbouring one. Such geographical mooring gives the local family entourage a certain homogeneity and allows for the sharing of some domestic tasks (e.g. meals, housework, small repairs). The local family entourage is, in some respects, an extension of a composite household or even a modern version of the family, in which children and/or siblings no longer live under the same roof, but nearby, thus maintaining very close contact while preserving some independence. The functioning of dispersed families appears more varied inasmuch as the geographical distance may be tens, hundreds or, in the case of a move abroad, thousands of kilometres. We could have studied how kinship works depending on this geographical distance, but remoteness or, rather, the feeling of remoteness, is not at all proportional to distance in kilometres. Thus, in the same region, some families may function similarly to local family entourage, with driving replacing walking. This would explain why some respondents downplay their travelling time: e.g. "we're five minutes away" (in particular in the greater Paris area). Under such conditions, distance does not constitute an obstacle. Contact and visits are weekly, or in some cases, daily, and the anchoring is not on a municipal level but rather on a regional one. For other people, however, those 10 or 15 min in a car seem unbearable, especially when they double in the event of a traffic jam. What counts is the immediate proximity, the neighbourhood. Similarly, when one comes from abroad, in comparison with the thousands of kilometres that separate the immigrant from the rest of the family, distance within an agglomeration

becomes relative. In such cases, living in the same agglomeration—in particular, the Paris, Lyon and Marseille areas—is to be as close as living in the same neighbourhood. In the same vein, a distance of 100 or 200 km can, for some, be a barrier to relationships, while the same distance can provide others with the opportunity to meet up on the weekend. We therefore deemed it important to analyse how distance was experienced, while knowing that we were before cases in which geographical distance did not mean a slackening of family ties, but was the result of professional, family and/or economic constraints. Distance does not affect the quality of relationships or the intensity of mutual aid. Ties only differ in becoming more virtual when visits are less frequent. In the end, only geographical distance differentiates them. It should also be noted that, over the course of the family cycle, a family can move from a local to a dispersed family entourage and vice versa, depending on the location of the members. For if the kinship group can be separated at any time on account of the movements of its various members, some stages in the life cycle are conducive to such scattering. An example is the children's moving out, even if they often move near the parental home, especially in large cities. Another example is moving to employment hubs or university towns. For the parents, this remoteness, especially when prolonged by their child's settlement in the other region and when no other child has stayed behind, can cause them to question their residential choices. In this connection, several respondents are awaiting the end of their children's studies and their subsequent settling-down to decide on where to retire. Depending on the family history and the moment in the life cycle, two types of situations are possible: when the distance does not affect the intensity of the relationships or, on the contrary, when it hinders the closeness of the family members. In the second case, the dispersed family mode is experienced as a transitional period, the ideal being to reform a local family entourage. In the first case, the scattering of the family is accepted and a seasonal reunion of its members takes place.

9.2.1 The Dispersed Family: A Well-Tolerated Lifestyle

The "dispersed family entourage" is a way of functioning as a family that requires a certain ability to manage long-distance relationships. This skill can be observed in particular among executives (Bonvalet 2003), who are used to moving with the vagaries of their careers, and among immigrants and their children. For them, distance is not an obstacle, doubtless because they have known great mobility during their youth. Since childhood, they have gone through the experience of changing life settings and seen their parents make new friendships and relationships while maintaining ties with family. This aspect explains why the dispersed family, like the local family entourage, can be transmitted from one generation to the next. The case of Philippe illustrates our point. Originally from the Centre region of France, he is much attached to his relatives, regardless of whether they have remained in his home region. In contrast, his wife's contact with her family is rare, "through negligence", in Philippe's words. In frequent contact with his family (especially one

of his cousins with whom he was raised), he describes this bond as a veritable need within a deeply interiorised understanding of the transmission of family sentiment and ties. His wife, on the other hand, does not seem to have experienced this and is more distant with her family:

> Well, let's say that my wife doesn't have the same relationship with her family as I have with mine. So, er, she's a bit dis… a bit more distant. But I need to have, um, it's a need for… And then we are used to that, so, er, well, personally, I was raised like that. Family is, it's, um, well, you go see your family, right. While, um, apparently on my wife's side, less… She doesn't have the same relationships. You know, her family is really nice but she doesn't see them; she rarely visits them; she hardly phones them. Er, they don't have much contact, eh. Personally, I need that contact with my family; um, even if it's not a lot, I need that contact with my family.

This contact consists primarily of visits, phone calls, and emails, in particular with one of his young nieces. Likewise, geographical distance between Nadine and her loved ones does not seem to pose a problem for her, although she once functioned in a "local" mode, benefitting from the babysitting help of her young sisters who used to live in the same neighbourhood. After her multiples moves, as well as those of her children gone to live in the South, she finds herself in this situation, but does not seem "upset" by their departure. In fact, a system of several residences is in place and the family functions like a "clan", geographically distant but emotionally very close, which enables conflicts and crises to be managed within the family network itself:

> We've been able to develop links with the sister I'm very close to. Because when our children weren't talking to us, that way they had someone to talk to. So the problems of adolescence have gone rather well. (…). Things are signposted. And that's really, that's what I call the clan. What I defined my family entourage as a minute ago, that's my clan. And whichever one of us it is, we know that we can count on the clan. And my children know this. They've known it for a very long time. They've known it since adolescence and now it's their turn. Because the younger ones are coming up. I have a nephew who is 18, and it's not his mother he wants to talk to, it's my son, who is ten years older than him. So all that fits together. So now, as parents, we are a lot more reassured. We've tried to recreate. It's not because we're far from the others that there's no bond.

Nadine describes herself as "very family-oriented" and regularly visits her children and travels with her daughter. There are several houses in Brittany where the whole family gets together, a "reference point" for her "clan" and her children's father. Despite the distance and the parents' separation, Nadine's family, nicknamed the "Tour de France Family", seems strongly bound together. Her sisters created spaces to preserve the ties that are transmitted from generation to generation and to ensure the cohesion of the group by strengthening the feeling of belonging (Bonvalet 2003). As Nadine points out, her children are very attached to the houses, in particular because they are close to their maternal aunts. In such dispersed family entourage, holidays become special times for the family to get together. The family home, often presented as the house of origins and roots, constitutes the privileged setting for these reunions. As such, the "second home" plays an essential role in the functioning of these families as the fixed point, the anchoring spot, a founding space, according to Anne Gotman (1999), and the link connecting the different

generations. Lastly, the existence of such a place allows for some scattering of the family since the members can come together at any time.

As with the local family entourage, the examples of dispersed family entourage show how the mechanisms of household and lineage are tightly interlocked. The story of Chantal, who is married to a senior civil servant, perfectly illustrates this type of functioning, typical of executives whose career paths entail many moves in France and abroad. Mobility has become a kind of "habitus" for the upper classes, who show a great aptitude for mobility together with know-how and experience acquired over several generations. As we have seen, Chantal and her husband have always been there in difficult times, for instance, when their unemployed youngest son, his wife and their baby needed somewhere to live for a few weeks. Today, their children have left and live several dozen kilometres away. The couple is not, however, planning to leave their large house in the Parisian suburbs. They want to be able to welcome young adults there, especially their grandchildren if they come to Paris for higher education. For Chantal, the geographical separation of her family is not a problem, since everyone meets up every year for the holidays on Ile-de-Noirmoutier. In 1990, she inherited from her grandmother a small gardener's house, while her brother bought a boat with his share of the inheritance. Little by little, using her teacher's salary, she overhauled the house to be able to welcome her children and grandchildren there. The house has become "the centre" of the family. It is a property open to the family members (household), but also a place of identity with genealogical depth: six generations, going from the grandparents, who owned the oldest house on the Ile, to the grandchildren (lineage).

In London, 61-year-old Mark provides a good example of a dispersed family entourage that is characteristic of immigrants spread over several countries. Of Russian background, Mark has had an international career. His only daughter, from his first marriage, has a child and is a journalist in Poland. Retired, Mark divides his time between his main residence in London and his two secondary residences: a house in western England (that belongs to his new partner) and a house in Tuscany. Despite the distance separating Mark from his daughter, they meet regularly, whether in England, Poland or Italy, for holidays or family parties:

> My daughter lives in Poland. But I'm seeing her tomorrow, because she is over here for a few days. She normally stays in a hotel but this time she is going to move in here on Wednesday for a few days. And her daughter, Camilla, is with her mother in the Lake district. And they are all coming down to London, and her husband, or partner, is flying over. And they are going to the wedding of her first cousin. So they will all be here. I go over to Poland now and again to see her. And I saw them last year at our house in Italy. I spent a week with them. I was very pleased that we managed that we did spend that one week together.

Mark's case reveals one of the specific traits of baby boomers' family life, namely the complexity of family ties as a result of divorce. Indeed, Mark evokes the "arbitration" between his daughter and his current partner, who has two sons of her own. At Christmas time in particular, differing ties and places are in contrast, and sometimes competition. For while the experience of "fragmented time" (Martial 2003) which is characteristic of recomposed families, would seem to encourage

the creation of set places in which to reconstitute the family, various mechanisms can be at play (Clément and Bonvalet 2005). The second residence can be a place that divides, not least of all by separating conjugal and family territories according to lineage. It can also be a place that draws people together, helping to maintain, strengthen and sometimes even build kinship bonds. In this connection, Jacques' story is an exemplary case of a reconstituted family that creates new bonds and spaces. Born in 1945, this former executive had four children: two daughters from a first marriage aged 38 and 36, and a 23-year-old daughter and an 18-year-old son from a second union. His two older daughters have children, including one who is almost the same age as his youngest son. Holidays are an occasion to reunite the whole family and beyond, as he describes:

> What would happen when we went to do winter sports, we would rent several apartments… There were my children, my ex-wife's children, her ex-husband's children, because she got divorced again afterwards… No, there were, there were twenty of us… Well, step families just get bigger… So the holidays were actually really fun. There were young people from outside the family… when they were talking because… well, there were quite a lot of girls between the ages of 15 and 20… Oh no, there weren't any problems, they all really acted like they were brothers and sisters.

Place seems fundamental here in the functioning of such families through its structuring role in the kinship network (Bonvalet 2003). The place may be a second residence or a vacation spot somewhere equidistant for all family members. It could also be the house of the parents and/or parents-in-law, as in Vladimir's case. He continues to go back regularly to his first home (called the "family cradle") where his mother and sister still live. Such places often seem magnified in respondents' descriptions because they are viewed as the frame for family ties and the memory of lineage. Thierry, for instance, moved away from his hometown as a young adult to put some distance between him and his father, who did not see his future in the same way. Asked about the possibility of acquiring a second residence, he describes his attachment to the family home, bought when he was 11 years old and where his father lives at the moment. He mentions his emotions linked to childhood memories, including of his mother who is dead, thus expressing a special bond to her. He goes there four times a year to see his father, aunt and sister. It is clear that par Thierry is emotionally invested in the house: when he describes the transformations to it, he uses the pronoun "we". He was even married in the house. In addition, it has "become a family home for everyone", including his young children. Other respondents have family houses that have been in their lineage for a very long time. This is the case with both Edouard and Corinne. Although Edouard is very attached to Paris, the family home in Brittany, acquired by his paternal grandfather in 1930, is another important place for him. This is all the more true because he has gone there since childhood and continues to develop his relationships there. The house is a place to which he can withdraw, relax, bring the family together and invite childhood friends:

> Personally, ah, yes, of course, if you will, it's a family home that we went to practically right after birth, where we've always spent all of our holidays. So it's a strong anchoring point. It's also a lovely spot, so… (…) We are attached to it like the apple of our eyes (….) We all

have the same wish, that everything will go well and the house will stay in the family. So, we're taking care of that.

Similarly, Corinne goes to a country house belonging to her maternal family and located in Eure. Her mother is the one who uses the house the most, but Corinne goes there frequently, since it is near the other family homes, enabling huge inter-generational family reunions. It is the genealogical depth to the houses that provides Corinne and Edouard with a territorial anchoring and legitimizes their feelings of belonging to those places. The houses constitute a "bricks-and-mortar anchorage" and are perceived as "meaningful", to use Elsa Ramos's terms (Ramos 2006). These houses often reflect the whole family's real attachment to its patrimony. There is also a duty to preserve it, as indicated by Edouard, as well as in the example of Rosie's cousin, who bought Rosie's parents' house so that the property acquired so difficultly by them might not be lost but rather remain in the family. A house can become a symbol of family coherence that must not be broken up if it is to continue its role in the collective imagination as a lasting and immutable place that creates and founds family ties and heritage, thus continuing lineage (Bourdieu 2000).

Often presented in the media as being hyper-mobile and avid for consumption and leisure, baby boomers continue, it must be said, to spend their holidays as a family with grandparents, grandchildren, siblings and cousins, just as previous generations have. The family home and/or second residence can play this unifying role and constitute a "symbolic hub where the complete family structure is periodically recomposed" (Bonnin and de Villanova 1999). Such practices, although not linked to one specific class, do vary depending on social backgrounds. Holidaying in the primary residence of family members who live in the countryside is more likely among workers and retirees; using a second residence at the seaside or in the mountains, among managers and professionals (Le Wita 1998). A second residence is not reserved solely for the bourgeoisie, (some respondents with more modest backgrounds have transformed a house inherited from their parents into a second residence); lodgings rented for the holidays can also be used for "seasonal refocusing" (Perrot 1998). Nevertheless, striking inequalities can be observed, with some interviewees having no family place while others enjoy a system of several residences. The fact remains that such houses, when they do exist, carry much meaning and reveal a very pronounced emotional and existential dimension.

9.2.2   The Dispersed Family Entourage, the Result of Constraints

While executives and immigrants, used to mobility, do not necessarily suffer from being far from their relatives, the story is different for the other social classes, in particular employees and manual workers.[8] The dispersed family does not really meet the expectations of such households. It is accepted, while they wait for a later

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[8] In the survey *Proches et parents*, it was observed that the local family circle was, all things being equal, more common in these professional categories (Bonvalet 2003).

coming-together, but the local family entourage represents the "ideal" mode of functioning. Martin, for example, has mourned the loss of his local family entourage, describing the departure of his parents, who followed his sister, as "abandonment" even though he was 27 at the time. During difficult periods, however, Martin does not hesitate to go see his family, for instance, after his second divorce when he did not obtain custody of his daughter. He did not, however, stay. His third wife, distant from her own family, did not like the situation. He then moved near his parents-in-law, which Martin describes as a "suffocating" situation. Today, the couple live about 50 km away, the "right distance", letting them appreciate one another all the more. He sometimes visits his own family and has set up a holiday system whereby they can meet up in the same place to spend time together. It is therefore to Martin's deep regret that he does not function with his own family in a local family entourage mode, but he hopes to act differently with his own children. The dispersed family mode is more painful to accept when the children set up their homes in another region where there are no pre-existing ties. The distance only becomes greater. This is the case of Rosie, who has always endeavoured to maintain family bonds by choosing to live near her father, then her brothers and sisters. She seems very dispirited to see her children leave for the regions to escape life in Paris:

> I have two children who left for the regions because the Paris area didn't suit them at all: too much traffic, too much… They told me, "Mum, we're leaving". Well, so, it was harder for me to swallow than for them, I think. So now it's Christmas, birthdays, major holidays, that's cutting it tight… It's their choice and we can't go against their desire.

Rosie's account clearly conveys an interiorised norm of reciprocal independence between parents and children. Although she respects their independence, however, she is not any less disappointed to see them only for major occasions. Patricia, whose only son and his family have gone to live in Rennes, finds herself with the same obligation to function as a dispersed family entourage. This geographical distance is experienced more difficultly than in the case of Rosie who, firstly, is married and, secondly, has several children, whereas Patricia is divorced with only one child. Although Patricia regularly goes to Rennes (at least once a month), babysits her three grandchildren during the holidays and communicates with them by Internet, she nonetheless misses the period when her son worked in Orléans. At that time, she could there once a week to spend 1 day a week with her grandchildren and her son, who worked nights. Unlike Rosie, she sometimes feels far from her kin, especially since there is no family home in which to share moments together and fill that feeling of remoteness. In her childhood, Patricia never experienced having a house for family vacations, a place that would be meaningful. In 2006, her mode matched that of a dispersed family entourage since there were monthly visits, weekly contact via email, help babysitting the grandchildren, as well as emotional closeness. In contrast to the previous cases, however, the mechanisms of household and lineage are missing. One reason may be the absence of the father and the weakness of Patricia's relationship with her mother until the latter's death in 1978. It should be recalled that Patricia lived with her grandmother until the age of 13, since her mother was all alone to raise her.

Lastly, while family ties appear very positive, the picture needs to be balanced. Indeed, this type of functioning also has a downside, as shown by the story of Agnès. Living abroad, Agnès's physical remoteness inevitably spaced out meetings with her family, but she had always been very close to her parents, brother and sister and had regular contact with them during her whole life. For example, the Christmas holidays, usually celebrated at her place, her sister's or her parents', were an occasion for a large convivial family get-together. In the end, however, her parents' illnesses forced Agnès to return to France. After coming back, she constantly travelled to another region to be at the bedside of her parents, who were both much diminished. From that point on, Agnès completely devoted herself to her family, offering a lot of time and energy, in particular in her father's old age, to the point of being an obstacle to her plans. Describing at length the weight that her family had become, presenting herself as practically "crucified", she says, "that's what prevented me from taking wing, from doing sort of what I wanted". Today, however, Agnès is somewhat isolated: her family network has shrunk following the successive deaths of her brother and father and the departure of her daughter. The family entourage that remains (her mother, sister and sister's children, daughter, spouse) has become even more essential. Moreover, these changes have recently led her to rethink her position and role within the family. Not very attached to the Parisian lifestyle, she is considering leaving the capital to move to a region to be closer to her family (her daughter, sister and ill mother), the only family members who are still alive, who are incredibly important to her:

> What's left of my family—I say that because my father died, my brother is dead; we don't see his children—so there you go, I guard the little family cocoon that's left very preciously. I know that family isn't very important any more, but for me, it still is. Maybe I've been too involved in my family because, in a way, er, at a certain time, that happens too: the family gets smaller. And sometimes it even disappears and you have to tell yourself that, right! So, yes, I make the most of it.

In addition, while she has friendly contact with her in-laws, Agnès maintains a certain distance with them in order to avoid any family conflict (her in-laws do not share the same set of values as her parents-in-law). Indeed, the "family entourage" does not always allow for the fulfilment of its members and can, on the contrary, constitute an obstacle to autonomy (Bonvalet 2003). Over the life cycle, attachment and geographical distance can evolve, in particular during the parents' "ageing period". Under such conditions, family can be felt as "inflicted" and perceived as a weight that prevents individuals from becoming emancipated.

The predominance of French respondents' accounts should be underscored here. In theory, the dispersed family entourage, whether by choice or constraint, is an English family model, in particular during the first stages of life. Indeed, the children's residential separation, which is typically part of "becoming a responsible adult" in Great Britain, is based on an early independence of the children that is accepted and valued by the parents (Van de Velde 2008). That being said, among our British respondents, the local family entourage was slightly more frequent than the dispersed family entourage.

9.3   **Moderate Families**[9]

In the case of moderate families, family is not at the centre of an individual's relationships. Such a situation does not mean emotional distance and the absence of mutual aid, but the family unit does not work as a system, as in the family entourage, both local and dispersed. As such, the interviewees may have close ties with their parents and children, but the group does not function "as a family". They each do their own thing but are mobilised in case a family member has a need or problem. It is sometimes a question of the life cycle phase. For example, some young adult children have stronger relationships with their friends at that age but increase the intensity of their family ties when they have their own children. The relationships therefore exist but do not manifest themselves as strongly as in a family entourage in which contact is weekly and solidarity high. Other respondents have had more distant relationships with their families for a long time. This is the case with Luc, who was born in 1951 and grew up in a working-class family in western France, living in some of the first post-war social housing. At 21, he left his parents for Paris at the same time that his father set up his own business and bought a house in the centre of town. The emotional, as well as social, distance with his parents was thus prolonged. As he indicates:

> I didn't want to stay in their world, right. Especially when you're a teenager, you're a bit pretentious, so I hung out more in the city's artistic circles, fine arts, theatres, all that, and, well, my father didn't really like it.

During the interview, Luc describes himself as "self-taught". After having numerous jobs such as postman, library assistant and an extra in films, and several periods of unemployment, he took night classes and became a freelance photographer. In the meantime, he met the woman who would become his wife, with whom he had a son in 1977. Contact with his parents, who had not moved, was always distant, and his father's death did not change the situation. Rather, after his mother entered a relationship with a person whom Luc did not like, mother and son grew further apart:

> We prefer to tell her to come over alone, but often she'll come with that guy. She can't seem to understand that we don't like him, what. That happens in every family.

His contact with his sister is not any more frequent, and the situation is almost identical on his wife's side. If we turn to their son, we learn that he left the family home 4 years ago and, after a long stay abroad, moved to another region of France. It can be observed that even if Luc's feelings for his son are strong, their family life does not function according to a family entourage or household mode. While Luc has assisted his son financially, by paying for higher education in another part of the country, and materially, by helping him move each time, such contact is far from being that of a family entourage. Family does not seem very present, whereas

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[9] In previous studies (1999, 2003), we called this type of family "*famille atténuée*", a translation of Peter Willmott's "kinship network". Since "*atténuée*" has a somewhat negative connotation, however, we have decided to use the term "moderate family" (*famille-modérée*), which better reflects its functioning, not as a solitary group, but through two-on-two relationships.

friends occupy an important place. Claire's story is similar to Luc's. Like him, she has broken away from her home environment: raised in a very rigid milieu, she wanted to lead a less conventional life. Her relationship with her parents, especially with her mother, still shows some of that rebellion and generational conflict. They remain distant, not only geographically—her parents live 200 km from Paris—but also emotionally. Now retired, Claire goes back to the family house every 2 months, mainly by obligation. Divorced and the mother of two sons of different fathers, she does not act towards her family in a way that matches a family entourage mode, since her contact with her children is more monthly. Her eldest son, who works in South-East Asia, visits her once a year, while her youngest son, who lives "five minutes away", "comes once or twice a month" to her home or that of her ex-husband, with whom she remains very close. In effect, after their separation, he found a flat in the same building in order to maintain the parental couple. Like in Luc's case, there are favours and exchanges between Claire and her son, the ties that bind them are close, and time spent together is regarded as special. The moderate family does not mean an absence of relationships, but rather involves different types of relationships based on choice. In Claire's case, choosing extends to her own children: she recognises differentiating between her two sons, the youngest being her "favourite son":

> My favourite son, so to speak… people sometimes freak out when I say "my favourite son"… Once they're adults, you can have a favourite… He is much nicer than the other one.

Likewise, Nadia, who is originally from northern France and, as we mentioned, rebelled against her family as a teenager, had a mode close to the moderate family at the time of the survey. Her situation, however, is more the result of a specific period in her life cycle, in particular her parents' death and her family situation (she is raising her 11-year-old daughter alone). The dispersed family entourage that existed when her parents were alive changed after their death. Moreover, the siblings' contact, which is certainly as deep as ever, has become less frequent since the parents are no longer there to play their linking role as family pillars. It also cannot be excluded that she will find this new mode of family life in a few years when her daughter has moved out.

Are moderate families more common among individuals or couples who do not have children? The answer is not clear, since many childless people become closer to a brother or sister, a nephew or a niece, as in the case of Paul in Paris, who forms a local family entourage with his brother and nephew. In London, however, a few interviews conducted with childless couples, more common than in France, reveal this type of family. This is the case of John, 58 years old, who has been in a couple for 24 years and has no children. Despite having fairly distant ties to his family, he is not isolated and would like his family to be geographically closer to him. Similarly, 56-year-old Henry, who has been married for 32 years and made the joint decision not to have any children, demonstrates an alternative mode. His network is particularly small because he has no siblings, although his wife has three sisters, one of whom is dead. This dearth of close family ties is, however, largely made up for by a network of friends made through a volunteer association to which he dedicates several hours per week.

9.4   Isolated Families

While several respondents enjoy a family environment in which contact, get-togethers and help are integral to its functioning, others appear isolated in terms of family. Such situations may result from family history or from life events such as deaths or separations. In the survey *Proches et Parents*, we were able to identify "isolated" individuals without an elective family network, i.e. people who named no family member among their nearest and dearest. Such individuals account for a small proportion, i.e. 7 %, of the respondents, thus confirming the research conducted by Alain Blum (1986) and Hervé Le Bras (Blum and Le Bras 1985). Age appears to be a determining factor: 11 % of those over 60 are isolated as regards family, double the number of those under the age of 60 (Bonvalet and Maison 1999). Not having children is the most discriminating variable (13.1 %), followed by having a low level of education (11.4 %). Analysis by social category also reveals that such solitude is more common among farmers, manual workers and the economically inactive. In effect, if sociability in these groups depends primarily on family and, in particular, lineage (Heran 1987), an absence of descendants would seem to reinforce isolation. (Kaufmann 1994a, b). On the other hand, an analysis of the respondents' networks of friends demonstrates that a kinship deficit can be attenuated through friends, especially those living in the same neighbourhood. In fact, three types of isolated individuals can be distinguished: those who are alone, without any network of family or friends; those who "make up for" their lack of family through friends; and those who are in conflict with their family.

9.4.1   Isolated Loners

Hervé seems to be the most representative "isolated loner". When asked to describe his network, he replies that it is a relatively simple matter. His entourage of loved ones is limited to his daughters "through descent and intimacy" and his sister, even if, although she lives in a nearby suburb, he sees her fairly seldom and, although she owns a house in Spain, he has never been invited there. In addition, he has very little contact with his older brother, who is not part of his network and does not seem to exist anymore in Hervé's eyes, as the following interview extract shows. "I had, I still have a sister and I used to have a brother who was completing his military service in Germany. There you go." His relationships with his siblings appear to lack closeness and solidarity. Hervé regrets that he will not have support to raise his daughter alone when she is a teenager. It does turn out that family history and numerous life "accidents" have led to his isolation. Indeed, Hervé's description of his childhood is completely different from that of his current life. He seems to have had a dense, joyful and happy family life, a "fantastic childhood" and an "amazing adolescence" in Algeria: a "dream", in his own words. His arrival in France at the age of 16 was a sudden rupture. He describes that period as a "complex time that marked me" and involved transitional lodgings, staying at different people's houses

and the scattering of the members of his extended family and even his nuclear family, as he was separated from his mother, sister and brother. At the age of 18, he lived with his mother, to whom he was very close, until her death 5 years later. Ties with his brother and sister had already begun to weaken. Hervé then went through a series of conjugal break-ups. His first marriage, during which he had a daughter, ended in divorce. A second marriage produced a second daughter and a second divorce. He has maintained no contact with these ex-wives and still feels hurt from being separated from his two daughters. Hervé says that he feels closer to his eldest daughter now that he has a granddaughter. The only place to which he regularly goes is this daughter's house. Unfortunately, at the time of our interview, she had just moved abroad to follow her husband. As for Hervé's relationship with his second daughter, with whom he was in conflict when she was a teenager, it is changing "for the better". To his deep regret, he also went through a third conjugal separation after 8 years of "semi-cohabiting". As a result, Hervé feels extremely alone and isolated, a feeling exacerbated by unemployment and the resulting financial troubles: a "hopeless" situation. Asked about his future plans, he says that forming a couple is at top of his list:

> Well, if there is a project that I'd like to achieve, that's the one that would be near the top. Oh, yeah, really. Really, because I believe we all need tenderness, we need… I think that would be one of my first wishes (….) let's say the first goal that seems to me to be feasible over the short term, is that one. It's that one first. Let's hope that the others happen. That I take up painting again, that I go back to… that I sort of re-learn how to live, because, honestly, I'm not living. But I'm not losing hope.

> So, you want to re-learn?

> Well, I especially want to be allowed to re-learn how to live. And even, really, to re-learn how to live with myself because I've forgotten myself. (….) So I'm not living. There are times when I tell myself, "You're missing what's essential". So, I'm forgetting myself. That's to say, I've sort of put myself between in suspension.

His account conveys a man's difficulty in living alone, a loneliness highlighted by Suzanne through her experience with her entourage. Effectively, it can be assumed that male solitude weighs more heavily when men are single. This may be related to the cleft created by divorce and not having custody of the children, but also to having a less dense network than women's, which is often built up through children (Clément and Bonvalet 2006). Moreover, "it is more common for men to start a new couple" (Cassan et al. 2001), which probably reflects the weight of solitude. Hervé's family isolation is all the harder to assume because he lacks a network of friends, apart from a few neighbours among his "relationships". Robert shows many similarities to Hervé, even though one might not at first think that he is isolated in terms of family. In reality, he sees his family often: he goes to his mother's home every weekend and they attend mass together on Sundays. Then he has lunch with his siblings in their mother's house, where his sister currently lives. However, complete incommunication and many latent conflicts can be observed among the various family members. When asked about the marital status of his sister, who is about to get married, Robert says that he does not get involved in those sorts of stories. His sister purchased a house in Brittany with her "boyfriend" and Robert has

not yet been invited there. In the same vein, when we learn that his sister lives with his mother and will soon move out to get married, Robert is very terse about his mother's housing plans: "I'm not the one who's going to get involved. It's not my job to take care of my mother; it's rather her job to take care of me." Furthermore, his affinity with his brothers does not appear very convincing. They spend a fair bit of time together, but share little complicity or intimacy, as is the case with Francine, who says that the "only thing" she has "in common" with her sisters is their "parents and childhood". One also learns that Robert has been put under legal guardianship and suspects his mother of initiating the measure. Moreover, just like in Hervé's case, solitude has weighed heavily on Robert since the death of his ex-partner, with whom he was no longer living, especially now that he is retired. He is currently looking for a new activity to "chase away black thoughts". His plans do not include moving somewhere else, especially if it is just "to be alone". To make matters worse, Robert has very few friends and no contact with his former colleagues.

These accounts highlight men's difficulties in living alone. Since women, as we mentioned, are less likely to find a new partner and therefore more likely to find themselves alone, their experiences also warrant examination. Let us look at the life of Françoise, divorced and childless, as an example. Born in southern France in 1952, she is the only girl among six siblings. She has studied throughout her life. After graduating, she began medical school, then dropped out and later took night courses in psychology and worked during the day as a pharmaceutical sales representative. She moved out when her parents divorced in 1972 and met her husband the same year. Françoise worked in his company until 1983, when they separated and she became penniless. Fortunately, she benefited from family solidarity: her mother took her in and one brother helped her three times with her career. She worked for 10 years in a company where one of her brothers was employed. Her family network has, however, dramatically shrunk over time: both of her parents have died and, out of five brothers, three are dead. In addition, while Françoise was close to one of her brothers and his nephews for a long time, seeing them during the holidays, these ties started to weaken 2 years ago. At the time of the interview, she described herself as "a bit unsociable, unsociable and at the same time very sociable". Françoise enjoys her solitude, which is not synonymous with isolation. On the contrary, she has many activities, including contemporary dance classes and going to the cinema with a 90-year-old friend. Energetic and professionally active, she takes a course every holiday in order to further her training as a psychologist.

Françoise nevertheless recognises that she has been in a transitional period and looking for something more. "It's true that I've sort of been in a period of… maybe a gestation of something else, I don't know…" This "something", we learn at the end of the interview, is sharing her life with someone, a "proposal" recently made to her that is prompting her to rethink her situation.

> I can't see myself remaining all alone, so I'll certainly be with someone, because I have a proposal now but I have, I feel that as a result, I have to think about it, yes. But I'm starting to get used to the idea!

It is definitely very characteristic of the baby boomer to believe that their love life is not over after the age of 50 or 60, even if Françoise's interview points more to the fear of growing old alone. Clara, single and childless, has points in common with Françoise: both grew up in a large family and then saw their family network shrink in a few years. Clara lost her father in 2001, her two brothers in 2004, then her mother 5 months later. She now finds herself alone and seems bereft, especially since she was extremely close to her mother, devoting most of her time to her:

> My mother was the most precious thing I had. I also adored my father, but my mother lived alone for four years, so I took care of her a lot. All my weekends, all my holidays were for my mother…

After the death of her mother, Clara was faced with inheritance problems and got into a conflict wither her two nieces, who wanted to sell the family home. The situation was all the harder since Clara was almost viscerally attached to that house, which was a very important place representing the male line. She used to go there at the weekend to recharge her batteries and escape Paris, where she is a shop manager:

> That house was my whole life. Now it's like my arm is missing, it's as though it's been cut off… For me the house was a lifeline because it was there where I wanted it. My grandfather was, it was my grandfather's house. My father was born in that house, in the room he lived in! So…and I was forced to sell it. No one asked for my opinion either. They said, "Yeah, but you'll be better in Paris. You've got friends in Paris. You'll just get bored here." I said, "My life is here."

Yet, unlike Françoise, Clara is not completely isolated from a family point of view. She has become closer to a 76-year-old first cousin who looks strangely like her mother, thus enabling Clara "to rediscover her a bit" at last.

9.4.2   Isolated Sociable Individuals

In the preceding interviews, the dark cloud of solitude makes the general tone rather sombre. Hervé faces problem after problem; Françoise hopes that a new relationship will transform her daily life; and Clara fills her mother's absence by projecting onto her cousin. Hélène's interview stands out all the more starkly in that her lack of family ties is not accompanied by a relational isolation, or even a feeling of loneliness, since she is in a "part-time" couple. After the death of her father a few months earlier, her family network shrank: she no longer had contact with her brother and no other family remained (except a sick aunt). On the other hand, in contrast to Hervé and Robert, Hélène has a special network of friends, in particular two childhood friends with whom she has very close relationships today. She also has other friends who live in Paris or abroad, with whom she keeps in touch. Reciprocal accommodation occurs within this network: Hélène is often invited by her friends to their second residences, and vice versa. They or their children stay with her when they need to come to Paris. Jérôme, born in northern France, also provides an exemplary case of another way of living when family ties are weak or

non-existent, through the creation of a large network of friends. Jérôme became blind when he was 18 months old and was placed at the age of 10 in a specialised institution in Paris. He studied accounting and then found a job in a company. This separation taught him to live far not only from his family, but also from all of his relatives. Indeed, he has not even met most of them. Nonetheless, he has always kept in contact with his parents and brother. At the age of 45, he was laid off and has not had paid employment since. Exempted from having to look for work on account of his disability, Jérôme was unemployed at the time of the survey. This inactivity does not, however, stop him from being extremely busy. He plays chess in a club for the blind and has increased his responsibilities at a library for the visually impaired, which enables him to satisfy his passion for books. On top of chess, and books, Jérôme loves music. He "bathed" in it during his childhood and was trained in it at the specialised institution. Like most baby boomers, he was marked by the music of the 1960s, especially with the arrival of rock:

> Oh… That was extraordinary! I was born with rock and roll…I remember I had some… Let's take the great groups… Johnny etc. came out… Was it 1961? I was twelve years old then… I followed all those people; I evolved with all those people, the Beatles… That whole musical generation that did everything between 1960 and 1975, really… It's extraordinary what was going in in music at that time…

As he explains, his blindness, which could have been a social handicap, actually helped him to fend for himself, open up to the outside world, go out a lot and meet many friends. He was socialised largely through the world of associations and seems far from being isolated. Even at home, he stays connected to the outside thanks to the Internet, used with special equipment for the visually impaired. Similarly, Peter, isolated from his family, has been able to form solid friendships, especially through music. Born in England in 1953, he experienced a chaotic childhood. An adopted child, he spent the first years of his live on the Isle of Wight, then went to North America with his parents. In 1968, his father was killed:

> By the way, the reason why much of my life is quite tumultuous, my father, great guy, he went to work one day in Miami Beach in '68–'69, he had moved from oceanography into reagents, it's about discovering–it's about […] blood […] medical essentially. And a couple of guys saw him get out of his car in the parking lot one morning, he was the director. They was looking for wages guy to take his briefcase. Instead of taking it, they just went up and emptied a gun on him, so he was killed. That was national news. My mother decided to take my sister and I back to England for a British education. So from 16–17 years old, I was completely alone with no family finance or support.

During his youth, he belonged to many rock groups in which he played drums. Having never had a stable job, he divides his time between music and the Internet (he introduces people to new technologies), earning little. Like Jérôme, music has an important place in his life and has enabled him to build a network of friends to make up for a dearth of family relationships (his mother died in 1990 and his sister immigrated to Latin America). At the time of the survey, he was with a French woman but not sharing his home with her.

9.4.3   Isolated Conflicted Individuals

There is, in addition to isolated loners and isolated sociable individuals, another type of isolated person, characterised by a lack of family ties. This situation may sometimes be the aftermath of a rocky, at times painful, family history in the past lives of respondents, as is the case for Joël, Carine, Clara and Ida. It may also result from current disputes, for example, over an inheritance "received before it was time" or a son-in-law regarded as "inadequate", as Dominique describes. As for Sarah, she no longer has contact with her mother, who abused her throughout her childhood and adolescence. Nor does she see her father anymore, who refuses to answer her phone calls. Similarly, Ida has never known her mother and hardly knew her father before going to live with him as a teenager. Asked about her network, she describes herself as an "orphan", since her father died in 1993. In addition, at the time of moving in with her father (at around the age of 17), Ida had a falling-out with her mother-in-law and has not seen her, or her half-brother, since. Joël, for his part, grew up in a farming family in southwest France. In 1974, at the age of 26, he went away to work for the French national railway company, which offered him social housing in the Paris suburbs a few years later. When Joël announced his homosexuality, his family's reaction was categorical: rejected by his parents, he had no support from his sister or brother. In contrast, his friends did not turn away:

> It was when I told my mother that I was homosexual that…she took it really …When I announced that to my parents… I phoned my brother… My sister and my brother-in-law… They were in … I said, "When you go back… talk to mum about me to try to minimise things and everything…" And then instead of… comforting her… they did everything to …to cast me in a bad light…

He has therefore maintained few links to his family, except after his father's death, when he re-established contact with his mother and siblings. There is, however, no longer any trust, and these relationships, especially with his 80-year-old mother, are based essentially on moral obligation. On long-term sick leave for major depression, he now finds comfort from his friends. As we have seen, some isolated conflicted people differ from isolated loners by having a relatively dense network of friends that makes up for a lack of family solidarity. Others, like Carine, find themselves alone after a conflict with their parents or children. Her solitude is linked to a painful family story rooted in the past:

> I did the same thing as my father. I got married to a man who wasn't from my social class, who was working when I met him and who suddenly, abruptly, stopped working… immature…

Like her parents, Carine and her husband separated after 13 years of marriage. Very close to her father, she devoted all of her time to him and stopped working when he became dependent. Yet the situation was very difficult on account of their adult parent/child relationship, in which Carine was relegated to her position as "the little girl who is ordered about". After his death, she took care of her mother, who was suffering from cancer and whom she had not seen for 20 years. It was at that moment that her depression began. Since then, she has had no contact with her only

son, who has given no sign of life. Unlike Joël, who was surrounded by friends when he came out of the closet, Carine finds herself completely cut off from her network of friends and has had to face her family problems alone. However, the total isolation in which Carine finds herself is very rare. In the survey *Proches et parents*, those who named no loved one—whether a friend or relative—represent only 1 % of all respondents.

9.5   Conclusion

In large numbers, the post-war generations founded families and have maintained close ties with both their ageing parents and their adult children. An analysis of their functioning reveals clearly defined family groups, such as the family entourage—both local and dispersed. The family entourage is characterised by strong bonds, frequent contact (at least once a week), mutual aid and emotional closeness. Then, depending on the location of the parents, children and/or siblings, two types of family entourage can be observed. Firstly, the local family entourage involves a neighbourhood-centred lifestyle with loved ones. This residential proximity, which facilitates exchanges while respecting the independence of each, proves particularly practical when baby boomers' children move out and when their parents are very old. In most cases, the respondents have chosen (or had the impression of choosing) to function within a local family entourage, using veritable strategies to manage homes and patrimony. One reason for this choice is that their personal fulfilment includes being parents and grandparents and they do not necessarily experience family as an impediment to their freedom. That being said, when solidarity requires a reorganisation of day-to-day life to take in a child and his or her partner or to take care of a parent who is losing his or her autonomy—in other words, to form a new household in which "we" takes precedence over "I"—family constraints may become hard to bear, forcing baby boomers, especially women, to limit their activities.

Yet geographical distance does not necessarily weaken family relationships, as the dispersed family entourage demonstrate. Get-togethers are admittedly less frequent, but relationships are not any less intense, featuring telephone calls, assistance and emotional closeness. Holidays and weekends are all the more special as times to be shared. The family entourage lasts through time and generations and it shapes a "family group" capable of combining the mechanisms of the household and lineage. For some of these families, the transmission of patrimony—keeping the family house in the family—enables them to reactivate kinship bonds, with the house symbolising the family spirit that they wish to pass down to their grandchildren. Other mechanisms that preserve emotional ties exist, but get-togethers are less frequent and help comes only when need has made itself felt. Such families have been designated moderate. Unlike in the family entourage, the whole does not make a system, and the family resembles a network like any other in which relationships are based on "elective ties uniting people, two by two" (Weber 2002).

Family entourage and moderate families do not cover all family configurations. There are cases, albeit rarer, in which the family over time and because of life events has withdrawn from the scene, leaving room for friends or even isolation. When other social ties replace the family, in particular through associations, we are speaking about isolated sociable individuals. Other people find themselves in a relational isolation following the loss of loved ones or a family conflict. We have observed, however, that the majority of the respondents in London and Paris belong to the family entourage. This large proportion stems from the position of the post-war generation as the pivotal generation in a family trajectory, caught in the middle between ascendants who are growing old and descendants who are beginning their adult lives. The family entourage also constitutes a way of dealing with financial difficulties affecting the various generations, with the crisis resulting in greater family solidarity. Lastly, another factor encourages the creation of the local family entourage, namely geography. The great capitals of Paris and London are cities that offer more opportunities in terms of employment and nearby housing.

The fact remains that the rise in individualism, which characterises our modern societies, does not seem to have jeopardised the intensity of intergenerational bonds or the existence of family groups. It would even seem, to paraphrase the title of an article by Jean-Hugues Déchaux, that the family cannot be understood through individualism (Déchaux 2010). Indeed, the logical conclusion to the valuing and promotion of the individual, who is encouraged to "become him/herself", would be the individual's refusal to make sacrifices for the family. This thesis comes up against the family norms still present in Europe today. Jean-Hugues Déchaux effectively shows that these norms have not been diluted with the onset of modernity; rather, "there exists a whole social construction that regulates independence, a regulation of intimacy and interpersonal relationships based on largely unpublished schemes of normativity" (ibid., p. 96). Such standards are disseminated by other means, such as the media, in particular women's magazines, specialists (e.g. doctors, psychologists), social services for children and the family, and so forth. They define what is a "good couple", a "successful education", the "right age to have children", the "right way to experience one's sexuality", the "right way to get divorced" (ibid., p. 101) and, currently, the new art of being grandparents or living in a recomposed family. In reality, "each person has to be unique and independent but is subject to diffuse, terribly powerful normative pressure" (ibid., p. 104). Under these conditions, the standard of residential independence, which remains dominant in France and Great Britain, has led to the near-disappearance of composite households. One could, however, wonder whether the local family entourage is, in some way, a modern form of family in which remote cohabitation replaces intergenerational cohabitation, allowing each generation's autonomy and independence to be respected. As such, the local family entourage may constitute a resource conducive to each person's fulfilment, a resource that can also be observed in the dispersed family entourage. The local family entourage could then be seen as a family archipelago connected by intense relationships in spite of geographical remoteness. Maintaining spaces of reference, to use Anne Gotman's term (Gotman 1999), through generations, or creating them,

thus appears to be a key element of family life from which baby boomers have not departed despite their greater mobility. The way in which the respondents have built their space or shaped their territory—most often "as a family" but sometimes "without family"—reveals the diversity of family modes, whether or not they continue from generation to generation.

Chapter 10
Conclusion

Industrialized societies have undergone a series of major changes since the end of World War II, and the earliest baby boom generations have been present at all of them. Their birth coincided with that of the Welfare State, which has since accompanied them at every step of their lives. In their youth, they benefited from the steady improvement in living standards, be it in income, health, education or working conditions. When they embarked on their adult lives, at the end of the so-called Glorious Thirty, unemployment was still very low, while a veritable sexual revolution was underway. In this particularly propitious environment, their lives inevitably followed an upward trajectory—leading some to dub them the *gilded generations* (Chauvel 2002)—, and they became the pioneers of a new social order. If there is one area where they particularly made their mark, it must surely be the family, for in the space of 60 years, this institution underwent a veritable metamorphosis, as prevailing norms fell by the wayside and the family moved from the singular to the plural. It is therefore from this angle that we studied the baby boomers, asking whether they formed a specific generation and, more specifically, whether they *reinvented the family*.

In 2006, we reconstructed the trajectories of 90 baby boomers. Thirty lived in London, 60 in and around Paris, and all of them belonged to the middle classes. As far as possible, we attempted to set their personal stories in a broader context. A demographic context to start with, looking at all the important changes that had taken place since the end of the nineteenth century—not least the reversal of all the main indicators from 1965 onwards. A social context, too, with the rise of individualism and the modernization of society, with a focus on the protest movements that were to have a direct impact on the family as an institution in the 1960s.

10.1 A Shared Situation or a Generational One?

Like all demographic generations, the baby boom cohorts have had a number of shared experiences, by virtue of the social and historical context (Mannheim, 1928/1990) in which they have lived their lives. For a start, their childhoods were

all marked by postwar austerity, followed by the *radiant* Glorious Thirty. The majority grew up in large families with stay-at-home mothers and authoritarian father figures. Ironically, although this was represented as the golden age of the family, it was actually the outcome of a series of rifts and ruptures—not just with Malthusian practices, nuptiality and fertility timing, but also with childrearing practices, as parents henceforth lavished care and attention on their offspring, leading Hervé Le Bras (1983) to conclude that "the family of the 1950–1970 period […] was a unique, or at the very least extreme, blip on the screen of human history". Some of our respondents painted a picture of childhood without a cloud in the sky (the implication being that there was no divorce or separation). Although they also described extremely poor living conditions, owing to the lack of modern conveniences and the housing shortage that beset both countries after the war, they rarely claimed to have suffered from it, and indeed had quite positive recollections of their early childhood. The amused and slightly nostalgic tone adopted by some of our respondents contrasts markedly with other respondents' accounts of *early discontinuities* in the parent-child relationship, as the result of death or divorce, fostering or other forms of child circulation—at odds with the conventional image of the family as a solid and permanent institution in the 1950s and 1960s (Clément 2009). Others described extremely painful and difficult relations with their father, mother, or both. Our respondents therefore identified with not one, but two images of the family— one authoritarian, hierarchical and repressive, the other happy, united and carefree -, and both might come through in the space of a single interview. Given the radically different families the baby boomers would go on to form, it is difficult to say how far the more rosy descriptions of postwar families are a posteriori reconstructions.

Most of our respondents received a very strict upbringing, especially those growing up in France. Many of them were sent to boarding schools or religious institutions, and complained bitterly about the lack of freedom they had endured during their adolescence. Even so, they were early beneficiaries of postwar economic growth, and in the early 1960s became fully paid-up members of the consumer society, whether they liked it or not[to justify the phrase below]. Together with their immediate predecessors, born just before or during the war (Marwick 2003; Bantigny 2007), they contributed to the emergence of a youth culture that had its own badges of membership (clothes, magazines, radio programmes) and clamoured loudly for freedom, especially sexual freedom. These protests eventually led to the rejection of authority not just in the public sphere but in the private one, too, such that the family came to be regarded as the crucible of domination and social repression. What came across in some interviews was how music provided a means of expressing opposition to the consumer society and the desire for a different world, with rock music and groups like the Beatles symbolizing the counterculture. Some of our French interviewees actively rebelled against the family, with its rigid parenting style, paternal authority and stifling lack of freedom, and chose to distance themselves from it, at least for a time. Only when they reached adulthood and went away to university or entered the world of work did the baby boomers finally experience autonomy. The winds of freedom and equality (both sexual and intergenerational) eventually started to blow in Britain in the 1960s and in France after May 1968. This *revolution*

was to turn social relations upside down. It brought sexual liberation, permissiveness, freedom of expression, and new family forms, and changed the baby boomers' whole worldview, as well as that of society.

It was when they started to compare their youth with that of their parents or their children that our respondents started to realize just how favourable an economic and historical context they had enjoyed in the 1960s and early 1970s. They made a clear distinction between their generation and that of their parents, who had had to endure the war years, and acknowledged that theirs was a privileged generation as far as employment and home ownership went, by both their parents'—and their children's—standards. They described themselves as "lucky", "spoilt brats" belonging to a "fortunate", "incredible", "dream", "laidback", "easier" or "happier" generation. The same *gilded* thread ran through all their narratives, where they were wont to omit all mention of conflict with their parents, in order to focus on their first tentative steps as adults. Even though the baby boomers' parents did have a hard life, especially in the 1950s, they were still able to profit from the upturn in the economy, and our respondents painted a far less sombre picture of them than Louis Chauvel has done[1]. Rather, their parents were depicted as forming a dynamic generation, fully in charge of their own destiny, and successfully rebuilding their lives after the war, even if they never quite shook off their wartime habits. Our respondents were far gloomier about what the future might hold in store for their children and even their grandchildren. Their vision was deeply pessimistic, with AIDS and unemployment both recurring themes.

As they set out in life, the baby boomers confidently expected to enjoy a *radiant future*, and the ease with which they found work contrasts with the current uncertainties of the job market, with its hallmark precariousness. All the talk about the housing problems encountered by today's young people underscores the exceptional nature of the housing market just a few decades ago. Like people born just before or during the war, many of the early baby boomers were able to purchase detached homes in the inner or outer suburbs, taking advantage of various schemes (government-subsidized loans, the French saving to buy scheme introduced in 1965, Margaret Thatcher's Right to Buy policy) that allowed them to enjoy upward residential trajectories (Bonvalet et al. 2007).

The long and winding path to residential separation that today's young people now have to follow was highlighted by Parisians and Londoners alike. Owing to the parlous state of the job market, and the attendant difficulty of gaining financial independence, their children were increasingly being forced to postpone this stage. More years spent at school, delayed entry into the world of work, and eye-watering high rents, plus the absence of essential networks, but also *more positive* relationships with their children, were just some of the reasons cited by our baby boomers for longer intergenerational cohabitation and a more gradual entry into adulthood (Golkalp 1981; Blöss and Godard 1990; Galland 1997; Van de Velde 2008; Sebille 2009).

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[1] For Louis Chauvel (2002), the baby boomers' parents belonged to a sacrificed generation.

Another thing the baby boomers have in common is their attitude towards the couple, as well as to female employment and contraception, the latter being viewed as one of their major victories—a *genuine freedom* that allowed women in particular to escape their parents' moral straitjacket. Changes in family life only came about because of women's changing place in society. Liberated by the advent of effective birth control and the legalization of abortion, female baby boomers refused to remain confined in the private sphere as their mothers had done, and went out to work en masse. This liberation came too late for those who were born in France immediately after the war. Too young to take advantage of the pill, some of them inevitably ended up in shotgun marriages. They therefore entered married life before the institution of marriage had endured the first of what was to be a series of shockwaves, and some of them never had occasion to question the notion of the holy bonds of matrimony, unless they later divorced and found themselves in a new relationship. By dint of nonmarital cohabitation, separation and divorce, the baby boomers eventually forced the whole of society to recognize that some of the moral rules that had previously governed the family no longer held, and that there were other ways of living in a couple and being parents besides forming a nuclear family. By introducing or updating alternative forms of family life, making cohabitation commonplace and taking the stigma out of births outside marriage, separation and divorce, they also served as role models for previous generations keen to escape the rigid family morality of the 1950s and 1960s. These were not sudden changes, and did not take place with the same intensity in France as they did in Britain, where single-parent and recomposed families were more common. In France, each generation introduced changes that the subsequent generation then adopted and extended, whether it was the start of women going out to work before they got married (with no premarital cohabitation) for the generations born between 1945 and 1950, or living alone prior to youthful cohabitation, for the generations born between 1950 and 1955 (Toulemon 1994). The early baby boomers can therefore be seen as forming a pivotal generation who gradually managed to impose changes in social norms through sheer weight of numbers.

Last but not least, the baby boomers all hold the same discourse on the family. Our respondents had strongly internalized the vocabulary of individualism, and described the changes that had taken place in terms of crisis (*society in crisis*, *loss of bearings*, *absence of continuity*), resulting in *social* but also *relational poverty*. Although this language suggests that the family was an early victim of this so-called crisis, when we asked our respondents to talk about their own families and the way they functioned, a more nuanced picture emerged. Individualism seemed to be reserved for other people, as they stressed the importance of family ties and described the support systems they had put in place. We can therefore assume that talking about *conflict*, *incomprehension* between parents and children and the *decline* of values is simply an integral part of modern intergenerational relations. Back in 1974, for instance, when concerns started to surface about the future of the family, a survey by INED (Roussel and Bourguignon 1976) showed that family ties remained strong after children had left home, even if a question about subjects that were best avoided in conversation hinted at generational conflict. Our baby boomers, who

were not even 30 when the survey was conducted, were therefore much the same as other married children in terms of geographical proximity to their parents and the support they gave or received, with any differences concerning their opinions and values, rather than the intensity of their relationships. In 1990, another INED survey, entitled *Next of kin, close friends, and relatives*, asked French people of all ages about their family relations and their geographical proximity to other family members. This also showed that baby boomers, by then aged between 36 and 44 years, remained highly committed to family solidarity—a finding that was confirmed by the *Event histories and contact entourage* survey (Bonvalet and Lelièvre 2005) 10 years later, when our baby boomers were just beginning to turn into what is now referred to as the *sandwich generation*. Across the Channel, Peter Willmott (1988) reached much the same conclusion, writing that "the evidence from [mine] and other recent studies shows that relatives continue to be the main source of informal support and care, and that again the class differences are not marked". In short, we have certainly not been witnessing the demise of the family. Even if some of our respondents had distanced themselves from the conventional family model, most of them enjoyed an extremely close bond with their parents, and had done so throughout their lives, with looser ties remaining the exception.

In answer to the magazine *Autrement* (Leridon 1992), which published the front page headline "Is the Family Finished?" in the 1970s, we would therefore retort "Certainly not". Early fears (Koyré 1971), some of them expressed by our respondents, that rising individualism might weaken the family proved to be unfounded. Instead of bringing about the "death of the family" (Cooper 1970) and an end to family solidarity, the ideas popularized in the 1960s, especially those of May 1968 in France, brought about a *quiet revolution*, where the adult baby boomers set about establishing a different type of relationship with their own children—one that was in tune with modernization and the rise of individualism insofar as each generation was allowed to retain its autonomy and realize its full potential.

Although they gave their children a more flexible and liberal upbringing than the one they had received, and instilled in them the values of freedom and autonomy, the baby boomers also passed on their parents' principles and values—not the contradiction it might seem. They therefore took their parenting duties very seriously and were not at all laxist, despite being dubbed the *soixante-huitard* generation (Bawin-Legros 2008). They were extremely anxious about their children's future, and especially concerned that they might slide down the class ladder (Maurin 2009)[2]. These worries beset our respondents in both London and Paris, although the latter seemed to make particularly strenuous efforts to help their offspring gain a foothold on the employment or housing ladder. Some mothers, fearing their children might be forced to move out of the area, would trawl local estate agents, while some fathers went as far as to start up a company just so they would have a job.

Increasing life expectancy over the past half century, especially among the elderly, has placed baby boomers in a quite unprecedented situation. Many now retain

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[2] See also the first chapter (Les métamorphoses des classes moyennes) in Bacqué and Vermeersch (2007).

their status as children into their sixties and even their seventies. Their parents, that is, the generations born between 1915 and 1930, had generally lost their parents when they were still quite young, and seen their children gain their independence at an early age, for by the 1970s, the postwar housing shortage had finally started to ebb. By the time they were in their fifties or sixties, they were therefore largely free from family demands, consistent with the new emphasis on independence and autonomy. The generations born after the war, however, are having to cope with a radically different situation, in that some of them find themselves burdened with two generations at the same time. As we have seen, their parents are living longer, while their children have been hit by the dearth of stable employment and affordable housing in the wake of the economic crisis. Their dual role, as the children of sometimes frail elderly parents and the parents of adult, but nonautonomous children, is made all the more difficult by the fact that they did not have any model to follow, and society continues to celebrate independence and worship youth—as indeed do the baby boomers, despite all the attendant contradictions and tensions.

The baby boomers have therefore shared a number of important experiences—entering into adulthood in favourable economic conditions and a climate of freedom, going out to work en masse (in the case of women), transforming the way people form unions and families, forging closer parent-child relations and, just as they were hoping to retire, becoming a sandwich generation. Even so, our respondents' accounts reflect a wide diversity of trajectories and individual stories[3] that has nothing to do with the heterogeneity of the middle classes (Chauvel 2006).

10.2   Heterogeneous Histories and Situations

Ever since Louis Chauvel (2006) published his groundbreaking work, there has been an assumption that the generations born between 1946 and 1954 were particularly fortunate, forming a *gilded* generation compared with the *sacrificed* generations that came both before and after. On closer inspection, however, we find that some of them had a bumpier ride, linked to the heterogeneity of their occupational or family history, as well as to their attitude towards their family, be it one of distance, continuity or discontinuity. The reality is therefore more complex, with members of this generation experiencing sometimes diametrically opposed situations. While some found jobs in management and enjoyed a steady upward trajectory, others endured periods of unemployment, or remained in a permanent state of rebellion on the fringes of society. Furthermore, some baby boomers were caught by the downturn in the economy and made redundant (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). For while most of our respondents described their early lives as "carefree", several later ran into hard times owing to problems either at work or at home. Some were laid off once, if not several times (Clément et al. 2007), in the course of their career, saw their business collapse, were placed under guardianship,

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[3] For evidence of the considerable diversity of their situations and occupational histories, see Appendix 2.

or encountered debt problems. The unemployment that had so far spared the baby boomers now caught up with them with a vengeance. Several respondents explained that just as their parents' generation benefited from postwar economic prosperity so, too, did the baby boomers when they entered the world of work. However, whereas the former had retired by the time unemployment started to be a problem, some of the latter were not so fortunate. Although the lack of security among "older workers" (Aouici 2007) on the eve of retirement was partly due to an ailing economy, it can also be explained by the marginal nature of certain trajectories. The events that took place in their youth, especially those of May 1968, had left a lasting impression on several of our interviewees in London and Paris, distancing them from their families and causing their paths to veer off in unexpected directions (Mannheim, 1928/1990). As part of their revolt against society, they refused to integrate, and some of them went abroad, later returning to a series of odd jobs, temporary work or short-term contracts.

Moreover, although the baby boom generations are often credited with bringing in a brave new world of the family, they have also had to live with the consequences of occupational and/or conjugal and family discontinuity. Divorce, for instance, forced housewives to become full time wage earners. For although the model of the working woman did indeed supplant that of the stay-at-home mother as more and more women gained their independence, it was a gradual process. As a result, two (if not three) female models initially coexisted: one where women were homemakers or secondary wage-earners (Battagliola 1997), and one where they went out to work full time. Women who opted for the first model cited the difficulty of establishing a work-life balance as a justification for staying at home. Their choice also reflected an emphasis on the family, with motherhood representing a strong component of their identity—values shared and reinforced by their partners, especially in Britain. Although greater value was placed on women's work in France, it still generated inequality and conflict within the couple, and some women nevertheless chose to stay at home. They sometimes came to regret their lack of social and financial recognition, but never went so far as to call this arrangement into question. For them, the conjugal couple and parental couple were one and the same thing, so separation or divorce automatically entailed breaking up the family (Clément 2009). By contrast, women who went out to work did make a distinction between the two, and took it for granted that divorce was a possible outcome of marriage, their wage-earning status making any contradictions easier to manage. The fact remains that these generations of women had to make the difficult choice between taking their mother (usually a housewife) as their role model, and adopting the new and unfamiliar model of the working woman. They had no precedents to guide them, and their inner conflict was compounded by tensions within the couple (Pagis 2009). Thus, as one model gradually gave way to the other model, and the ideology that had dominated their mothers' lives was replaced by another no less normative and stigmatizing one, so female baby boomers found themselves in a wrenching tug of war between family life and the world of work, living for themselves and existing for others.

Our male respondents also touched on the subject of divorce, portraying it as an interruption in their life trajectory. It created an especially deep rift in their lives

if they failed to obtain custody of their children[4]. Divorce constituted a potential source of instability in their residential trajectories, as well as in their occupational ones (Bertaux and Delcroix 1991), with the spiral of break-up and unemployment sometimes plunging them into debt. Their narratives show that divorce did not have the same effect or meaning for men as it did for women (Clément 2009), although the latter could also experience it in different ways, depending on whether they were wage earners or housewives.

Divorce and family blending created a whole new *dramatis personae,* including ex-partners, new partners, children and stepchildren, and subjected the bond of love and the filial relation to fresh contradictions (Blöss 2002). Nobody had a preordained place in these new configurations, and places might also be redefined over time. In several instances, the bond between the ex-partners and children remained intact, with the parental couple coming together for Christmas and other family gatherings such as birthdays.

After a relatively carefree youth, thanks in part to the favourable economic context, the baby boomers' lives were therefore rather more chaotic. As a result of economic precariousness and the advent of *families in the plural*, our respondents' residential and family trajectories became both more complex and less linear, especially when they reached the middle of their lifecycle.

Lastly, whatever their family and occupational trajectories, the our interviewees found themselves part of a *sandwich* generation. They came up with a range of solutions, which also varied according to whether they were aimed at the ascendant or descendant generation. In response to the difficulties encountered by their children, the overprotective baby boomers made unstinting efforts to help them, willingly putting up with intergenerational cohabitation, be it in London or Paris. Herein lay a deep paradox, for in their own youth, they had fervently defended the notion of early autonomy. Having to cope with the increasing frailty of their elderly parents when they themselves were on the brink of retirement—something that previous generations had never had to do—was a further source of contradictions, as these additional family obligations risked depriving them of the freedom and self-fulfilment for which they had always clamoured. The way they reacted depended on their family history and their sex, as well as on the number of brothers and sisters they had, for we should not forget that the generations born after the war often belonged to large families, so now that their parents were growing old, the issue of sibling solidarity became more important. Those respondents whose parents were still in good health generally made little mention of what was to come—a form of denial vis-à-vis not only their parents' dotage but also their own twilight years. Some of them, faithful to the baby boomers' image of selfishness, remained *impassible* to calls for solidarity, usually because they had distanced themselves from their family or because one of their siblings had stepped into the breach. Others took advantage of the fact that a brother or sister was in a better (geographical) position to look after their ageing

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[4] Several of them stressed the difficulty of obtaining custody of their children back then—a problem also brought to light by a study of the recomposed families formed by members of their generation (Clément and Bonvalet 2006).

parents to remain in the *background* as *passive helpers*. Then there were the *active helpers*, who found themselves on the *front line*, at the core of an informal support system. Thus, although modern society has seen the rise of the individual, family duties still make themselves felt. Moreover, they continue to concern women first and foremost, as they are seen as being *naturally* responsible for looking after their ageing parents or parents-in-law. After all the stress of trying to achieve that elusive work-life balance, they now find themselves faced with a new dilemma: should they fulfil their obligations as daughters or concentrate on their career? In the face of society's insistent calls that they look after their dependent parents—calls taken up by politicians -, continuing to work and postponing retirement represents a form of resistance to family commitments. There is also an element of financial inequality, as the burden of ageing parents is far less onerous if women have the wherewithal to pay somebody to care for them in their place. According to Jean-Pierre Lavoie[5], there has been a masculinization of female behaviour, with women starting to get other people to do things rather than doing them themselves. When it comes to organizing this support at arm's length, the local entourage of family and friends can offer the ideal solution, combining geographical proximity, informal support and regular visits, and preserving the children's (and ageing parents') residential independence and personal autonomy.

10.3 Do the Baby Boomers Form a Specific Generation?

Determining whether the children born during the baby boom form a specific generation, in the sense of a sociological generation, or what Mannheim (1928/1990) called a "generational group", is a complex business and takes us straight to the problem of identification (i.e., self- or other-assigned identity) (Olazabal 2009). The baby boom was first and foremost a demographic event, in that the generations born between 1946 and the mid-1960s or 1970s, depending on the country, were immediately labelled as the *children of the baby boom* by demographers. The student protests in the 1960s later led researchers such as Margaret Mead (1970) to claim that the baby boomers' generation introduced a new *cofigurative* culture that clashed with their parents' *postfigurative* culture and thus created a *generation gap*. According to Jean-François Sirinelli (2003), the children of the baby boom did indeed take on a generational identity of their own, by leaving two enduring marks on society: the protests of 1968 and their entry into the world of work at a time when society was undergoing profound change that only they understood. Again according to Sirinelli, the uniqueness of the baby boom generation is "clear for everyone to see", as the scales of both space and time changed when they reached adolescence and have kept on changing ever since. It is a generation that was positively *spoilt* by history and by the economy, according to Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet

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[5] A researcher at the Centre of Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology (CRÉGÉS) in Montreal.

(2000), as well as Louis Chauvel (2002). Despite these verdicts, sociologists remain cautious about claims that the children of the baby boom constitute a sociological (or social) generation, and have come up with a number of criteria, including being born between 1945 and 1953, at university between 1968 and 1973, and in employment prior to 1973 (Hamel 2009). This implies that all baby boomers are children of the baby boom, but not all children of the baby boom are baby boomers. This nuance contrasts strongly with the very black-and-white attitude taken in the media and by politicians, who either vilify the entire generation[6] or else sanctify it. In recent times, for instance, they have taken to portraying the baby boomer at 60 as a consumer fond of travel and determined to stay young for as long as possible[7]. This assigned identity as an archetypal individualist or egotist only serves to blur the picture, and potentially risks giving the term *baby boomer* a pejorative meaning[8]. Furthermore, many people now associate the baby boom with the retirement boom and even, in France, the *grandpa boom*, much to the chagrin of some of our respondents, who are loath to be associated with old age and all the connotations of dependence, loneliness, poor health and the feeling of being a burden on society (Clément et al. 2007).

Our respondents found it hard to define themselves as members of the baby boom generation precisely because it does not have a single definition. It is not enough to have been born after the war during a large wave of births to feel a collective identity[9]. Although key historical events like May 1968 did foster this feeling in some of our respondents, like female employment, they did not necessarily touch everyone's lives. What came through in the interviews were individual stories, rather than a social history, possibly because the baby boom generations experimented with such a diversity of individual trajectories, especially when it came to the family. Their family trajectories were characterized by the adoption of *new* configurations, such as single-parent households and recomposed families, while the traditional linear lifecycle was replaced by serial family formation, especially among men (Cassan et al. 2001). Owing to the rise of the recomposed family, some

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[6] There have been several books on this theme aimed at the general public with such evocative titles as *Les trentenaires ne vous disent pas merci* (Guimier and Chardonneau 2006), *Nous enfants nous haïront* (Jeambar and Rémy 2006) and *Les* baby boomers *finiront bien par crever* (Samson 2005).

[7] This dimension of the baby boomers has been of intense interest to British and American researchers (Freedman 2001; Huber and Skidmore 2003; Harkin and Huber 2004; Willetts 2010).

[8] See Ignace Olazabal's chapter entitled "Être ou ne pas être un baby boomer. Identité assignée et identité autoattribuée" (Olazabal 2009).

[9] We found it necessary to reformulate some of our questions in the course of the interviews, one of the reasons being precisely that very few interviewees spontaneously acknowledged their membership of a particular generation (that of the baby boom). Given their disinclination to talk about belonging to or identifying with the generation of the baby boomers, we asked them to compare their own generation with those of their parents and children. Once they had been encouraged to provide their own definition of the baby boom generations, they lowered their guard and became more forthcoming. Despite the geographical distance, baby boomers interviewed in Quebec proved to have much in common with our own respondents, not least their reluctance to define themselves as baby boomers (Olazabal 2009).

of our respondents had only recently become parents, and therefore did not feel *concerned* by the typical baby boom issues of retirement and ageing, demonstrating that it is an individual's position in the lifecycle that counts, not his or her chronological age. Clearly, then, our respondents constructed their identities (and not just occupational identities) according to their individual trajectories (Dubar 2004). This may explain why they failed to forge a collective identity, as this requires a positive principle (Wieviorka 2005) and a process of collective assertion. Some respondents did not recognize themselves in the baby boom generation, and very few actually laid claim to the identity of baby boomer, the only exceptions being those who had played a particularly active part in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s and remained proud of what they had done, and women who had campaigned—and continued to campaign—for women's rights.

That said, when we asked our respondents to compare their generation with those of their parents and children, it became clear that it did have several distinguishing features, not least a shared value system that most definitely was not that of their parents or, indeed, that of their children. As Sabrina Aouici (2007) reminds us, far from watching the transformation of society from the sidelines, the baby boomers engineered the transition between two totally contrasting worlds: that of their parents and that of their children[10], successfully imposing new values, all the while preserving the notion of transmission, which is what families are really *about*[11]. For although our analysis of interviews highlighted the difficulty of passing on anything at all in such a precarious and unstable society, especially for fathers, transmission nonetheless took place, and simply concerned other areas (memory, a family culture, a way of being together, etc.) that are harder to grasp and to measure.

One thing is for sure: the baby boomers certainly did not spurn their parents' legacy. They walked in their footsteps and there was never any question of erasing the past. We can see them as the victims of an *age effect*, for as they have moved through their lifecycle, they have increasingly subscribed to their parents' *postfigurative* culture, seeking to pass on behaviour and values, especially the grandparents among them (Gourdon 2001; Olazabal 2009). This is not to say that the nature of transmission has remained unchanged, as relations within the family have had to adapt to a combination of modernization and mounting individualism. The baby boomers gave their children a more liberal upbringing than the one they had received, and ensured that each generation of adults retained its autonomy and independence, by trying to enable all the members of their family to achieve their full potential, though not at the expense of their own freedom. We can see this change at work in their reliance on paid helpers for their elderly parents so that they do not have to be constantly at their side or live under the same roof as them, as they would

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[10] Our interviewees described three successive societies: that of their parents and their own childhood, characterized by war and extreme rigidity; the Glorious Thirty, when society changed dramatically, both economically (full employment, the "white heat of technology", etc.) and socially; and a high-tech world with greater freedom, but also a number of social ills afflicting the whole of society, including unemployment, AIDS and a generally more precarious existence.

[11] As Émile Durkheim (1892/1975) wrote, "The individual is not an end sufficient unto himself".

have had to have done in the past (Guberman et al. 2009). The life histories of our respondents in London and Paris show that the notion of a purely individualistic mindset, where *Gemeinschaft* is superseded by *Gesellschaft*, and people live in a *me* rather than a *we* society, is rather simplistic. Although there are periods where the *me* prevails, there are others where a delicate balance is established, and even where the *we* wins through, owing to the continued existence of family constraints and moral obligations, albeit in a more subtle (Déchaux 2010) and variable form, depending on sex and background (Blöss 2002). For although people can now adopt a *pick n' mix* approach to conjugal and family behaviour, not everything is socially accepted and permitted, and the context of freedom belies the existence of discreet, but effective, collective constraints. Contraception, for instance, has generated a procreative norm whereby the conditions for having a child are now socially defined (Bajos and Ferrand 2006), but women's maternal specificity is still valued. As for divorce, a bevy of experts have constructed a model of the *good divorce* and good parenthood (Théry 1996). This does not mean that inequalities are a thing of the past, as greater individualism can have a paradoxical effect on women, with motherhood and all its attendant representations counterbalancing their independence and thus compromising their freedom.

This is why, at a time when all the emphasis is placed on personal development and elective bonds, it is important to acknowledge the strength of blood ties and the obligations that flow from them. The family cannot be viewed solely through the prism of individualism, and "the universality of the model of individualism is thus reduced to the level of the postulate of an ideal-typical model" (Blöss 2002).

The baby boomers we interviewed in London and Paris sought to achieve this model of individualism by acknowledging that theirs was a sandwich generation, all the while refusing to allow their family to become their sole raison d'être when they retired. Most of our respondents, especially those belonging to the upper middle classes, refused to be pigeonholed as a parent, stay-at-home mother, grandparent or *child carer*. As such, they perfectly embodied the plural, "multi-socialized" actor described by Bernard Lahire (1998/2003). On the eve of their retirement, they were therefore bubbling with new projects and keen to pursue extra-occupational activities, while others were eager to engage in new relationships providing the right person came along. Even so, this desire for independence and autonomy was not allowed to harm family solidarity and support systems, for in this respect, the baby boomers are about continuity, not rupture, despite the inexorable rise of individualism over the past 40 years. If rupture there is, it is more to do with the couple, as the baby boomers have had far less linear trajectories that the previous generations, with periods living in a couple interspersed with periods living alone. Just as family ties, especially the filial relation, remain a constant in their lives, so conjugal relations are constantly being renewed, either within the same couple or within a new one. This does not mean that they are any less vital than they once were. Simply, they have lost their singularity. This is how the baby boomers have reinvented the family, for instead of rejecting it, they have shown that it can be adapted in order to reconcile their desire for freedom with the needs of their close family entourage.

Appendix

Appendix 1

2006 Semistructured Survey of Baby Boomers

The purpose of this survey was to compare the residential, occupational and family trajectories of members of the 1945–1954 generations living in and around London and Paris. It came in three parts. The first of these, funded by the Parisian Urban Development, Construction and Architecture Plan (PUCA), focused on the residential and geographical histories of 30 baby boomers in London and 30 in the Paris region, and gave rise to a book entitled *Les* baby boomers*: une génération mobile*, published jointly by INED and Editions de l'Aube. Funding from EDF enabled us to supplement the 30 original Parisian interviews with a further 30, resulting in the drafting of a joint EDF-INED report (Clément et al. 2007). The third and final research programme was financed by the French Ministry for Research as part of its "Terrains, Techniques, Theories" concerted incentive action (ACI), and examined the baby boomers' family trajectories. The aim was to reconstruct recent changes to the family via the story of the generations born between 1945 and 1954, and perhaps nuance reports by various French and British sociologists of growing individualism in family relations, with their unique combination of affection, duty and mutual support.

Fieldwork

Between April and July 2006, we conducted 90 interviews with men and women in equal number, born between 1945 and 1954. The French respondents lived in two *arrondissements* of Paris (15 in a central *arrondissement* undergoing gentrification and 15 in a more peripheral one) and two municipalities in the inner suburbs (15 in each). In Britain, 15 interviews were conducted in a district of Inner London and 15 in a South London suburb. We formed our sample by telephone prospecting people listed in telephone directories and applying strict criteria (date of birth, sex,

social background). This profiling ensured that they did not belong to the capitals' élites and were also quite distinct from the working classes, at least in Paris. Instead, they corresponded to the middle classes who typically pioneer inner-city gentrification (the "everyday adventurers" studied by Catherine Bidou 1984), or at the very least watch it taking place. Their occupations reflected the diversity of the middle classes, highlighted by Louis Chauvel[1], that makes it so difficult to study them as a group, especially when comparing Britain and France, which each have their own definition of *middle class* (Bidou-Zachariasen 2000). This difference was highlighted back in 1925 by Edmond Goblot, who noted that the French middle classes "do not exactly match the English middle class…" who are called "'middle' because there is still an upper class. In England, people at the level of our own middle classes cannot be distinguished from the working classes". Some of our respondents therefore belonged more to the upper middle classes (university lecturers, managers in the private sector, engineers or the self-employed), and some to the intermediate middle classes (teachers, municipal employees, people working in the voluntary sector), while others were scarcely distinguishable from the working classes, owing to financial difficulties arising from unemployment, ill health, precarious jobs or lowpaid part time work (especially in London, where several women worked as cleaners or barmaids). They also belonged to the earliest wave of baby boomers, born between 1945 and 1954, or as Sabrina Aouci (2007) describes them, "old workers, young pensioners". Their conjugal and family situations were extremely diverse, as they included first or second unions, single-parent households and people living alone. Their employment status also reflected the general trends for this age group, with men and women in stable employment, a few on the dole, some already retired or in early retirement, or disabled[2], plus a few housewives.

The decision to conduct our survey in both London and Paris meant that we had to devise a common exploratory framework, in English and French, and an interview guide that had both unstructured and semistructured components. The interviewers therefore had a comprehensive guide to help them conduct the interviews[3], the aim being to disentangle the complex web of family, occupational (especially the later years) and residential trajectories described by the respondents. The interviews were divided into several sections, including one that was devoted

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[1] See in particular the section where he questions whether the middle classes are actually a class (Chauvel 2006).

[2] After the first few interviews, we realized that our male respondents had highly specific profiles. They often lived alone and were economically inactive, and frequently had underlying health, employment or family issues. Unlike women, men's unemployment is often associated with health problems. To correct this systematic bias, we reformulated our criteria and issued instructions to avoid exclusively recruiting people who were economically inactive (de facto or de jure: jobless, on sick leave, etc.).

[3] This does not mean that the interviewers did not have any leeway, as they frequently reformulated the questions in the course of the interviews. For instance, if respondents did not spontaneously express the feeling of belonging to a specific generations (i.e., that of the baby boom), they would be asked a new question about how they would define the baby boom generations, and if that failed to elicit notions of membership and identification, the interviewees would be asked to compare their generation with those of their parents and children.

to family life and family ties, both retrospective and prospective, allowing us to view intergenerational relations through the prism of the respondents' experiences of family life during their childhood and adolescence (in the 1950s and 1960s) as well as the family history they were currently writing with their children and grandchildren. By comparing and contrasting these different relations, we would be able to explore how the family had changed over the previous 40 years and determine what made the baby boom generations special.

Most of the interviews were held in the respondents' homes and lasted between 1½ and 2½ h. The investigators were instructed to question a single interlocutor, although some interviews were conducted in the presence of a third person, usually the partner. Far from being a hindrance, this made it possible to pick up subjects of conflict and even glimpse negotiations taking place within the couple, especially concerning residential projects linked to retirement, which were often reformulated in the investigator's presence. All the interviews were transcribed in their language of origin and, where necessary, translated for the purposes of this book.

Data Analysis

We conducted a classic thematic analysis, but also submitted the interviews to NVivo (QSR International). This software package applies an inductive approach. The experimenter begins by going through the corpus to identify and code different *meaning units*. The software creates a subfile (node) for each topic that is identified, into which it gathers all the relevant words and passages, decontextualizing them in the process (i.e., removing them from the context of the interview). This method allows the meaning of the interviews to be extracted, and the nodes can then be browsed, as Frédéric Deschenaux and Sylvain Bourdon (2005) explain:

Each time the analyst reads an excerpt… he or she must ask the following questions: 'What is this document about?', 'What is this particular passage talking about?', 'What is this person saying?', so as to pick out the main ideas and grasp the overall meaning.

We were able to identify around 30 topics in the transcripts (activities, friends, attitudes to growing old, the baby boom as a generation, unemployment, consumption, childrearing, dependent children, environment, family, grandchildren, inheritance, youth, politics, housing, plans to move house, retirement plans, religion, secondary residences, retirement, health, residential trajectories, work, holidays and travel, living in a couple and neighbourhood), which we then coded accordingly.

Appendix 2

Respondents in Paris

Name	Date of birth	Marital status	Number of children	Occupation
Jérôme	1945	Single	0	Long-term sick—IT worker
Patricia	1945	Divorced	1	Retired engineer
Mireille	1945	Married	1	Retired civil servant
Pierre	1945	Married	2	Retired bank manager
Claire	1945	Divorced	2	Retired civil servant
Maurice	1945	Married	2	Head of voluntary group
Chantal	1945	Married	2	Teacher
Jacques	1945	Divorced—cohabiting	2	Retired designer
Edouard	1945	Remarried	2	Consultant
Corinne	1945	Married	2	Home-maker
Philippe	1945	Remarried	Step-children	Retired bank employee
Clara	1946	Single	0	Shop worker
Robert	1946	Single	0	Retired technician
Bernard	1946	Married	1	Manager
Agnès	1946	Married	1	Retired teacher
Olivia	1946	Married	2	Teacher
Christiane	1946	Married	2	Long-term sick council employee
Nicole	1946	Divorced	2	Musician
Suzanne	1946	Divorced	2	Child-care worker
Hervé	1946	Divorcé	2	Unemployed salesman
Claude	1946	Married	3	Commercial manager
Clément	1946	Married	4	Retired manager
Dominique	1946	Divorced—semi-cohabiting	1	University Lecturer
Hélène	1947	Single- semi-cohabitant	0	Laboratory technician
Vincent	1947	Married	2	Manager
Yann	1947	Married	2	Retired employee private sector
Joël	1948	Single	0	Long-term sick employee private sector
Léonard	1948	Single	0	Night worker
Annabelle	1948	Single	0	Accountant
Isabelle	1948	Married	1	Retired accountant
Léonie	1948	Married	2	Retired teacher
Martine	1948	Married	3	Bank emloyee

Name	Date of birth	Marital status	Number of children	Occupation
Jean-Paul	1948	Married	3	Marketing consultant
Jean-Claude	1948	Divorcé	3	Commercial director
Vladimir	1948	Married	3	Manager
Solène	1949	Single	0	Insurance sector manager
Carine	1949	Divorced	1	Long-term sick private sector worker
Charles	1949	Married	2	Teacher
Jean-François	1949	Married	2	Skilled worker
Daniel	1949	Married	3	Unemployed private sector worker
Paul	1950	Separated	0	Unemployed translator
Francine	1950	Divorced	1	Long-term sick office worker
Philippe	1951	Married	1	Unemployed teacher
Luc	1951	Married	1	Self-employed
Odile	1951	Married	2	Teacher
Thierry	1951	Married	3	Consultant
Françoise	1952	Divorced	0	Consultant—coach
Carole	1952	Veuve	1	Book-keeper secretary
Nadine	1952	Divorced	2	Accountant
Nadia	1953	Single	1	Part-time public sector worker
Ida	1953	Divorced	1	Publishing typesetter
Elisabeth	1953	Married	2	Home-maker (high level of education)
Sarah	1954	En couple	0	Unemployed domicilary worker
Juliette	1954	Married	2	Home-maker (high level of education)
Magali	1954	Séparée	2	Office worker
Christine	1954	Married	2	Disabled not in work force
Rosie	1954	Married	2	Sales person
Véronique	1954	Married	3	Office worker
Martin	1954	Remarried	3	Accountant
Serge	1954	Married	2	Unemployed worker

Respondents in London

Name	Date of birth	Marital status	Number of children	Occupation
Mark	1945	Divorced—cohabiting	1	Retired teacher
Aileen	1945	Separated	3	Long-term sick, former chef
Irène	1946	Married	1	Long-term sick self employed
Dennis	1946	Married	1	Consultant
Paul	1946	Married	2	Head of voluntary association
Linda	1947	Married	1	Art teacher
Richard	1947	Married	2	Teacher
Maureen	1947	Divorced	2	Manager in voluntary association
Gary	1947	Single—cohabiting	2	Teacher
John	1948	Single—cohabiting	0	Independent publisher
Shirley	1948	Widowed	2	Domiciliary worker
William	1949	Married	2	Office manager
Susan	1949	Single	2	Manager in a voluntary association
David	1950	Remarried	2	Photography teacher
Bill	1950	Remarried	2	Shop-keeper
Tom	1950	Remarried	3	Council worker
Henry	1950	Married	0	Manager
Carol	1951	Divorced—cohabiting	1	Voluntary sector worker
Steve	1951	Remarried	4	Teacher
Alison	1951	Married	4	Osteopath
Julia	1952	Married	2	Counsellor
Helen	1952	Single	2	Social worker
Peter	1953	Semi-cohabiting	0	IT worker
Mary	1953	Divorced	1	Consultant
Brenda	1953	Married	3	Administrative employee
Judith	1953	Single	1	Social worker
James	1954	Divorced-cohabiting	0	Council worker
Andrew	1954	Single	1	Council worker
Carolyn	1954	Married	1	Teacher
Barbara	1954	Cohabiting	1	Unemployed former bank manager

Appendix 3

Other Surveys

2006 Event Histories and Contact Entourage Survey

The data for the *Event histories and contact entourage* survey were collected by INED between March 2000 and September 2001. It was a survey designed to reconstruct the family, occupational and residential histories of 2830 Parisians born between 1930 and 1950, of whom 1045 belonged to the baby boom generations. This random sample, drawn from the 1999 census, was representative of the people in this age group who lived in the Ile de France region. The *Event histories and contact entourage* survey was the latest in a long series of INED surveys: *Triple biography* (1981), *Population and depopulation of Paris* (1986), *Next of kin, close friends and relatives* (1990). Its questionnaire included items that tracked the residential, occupational and family situation of the respondents and their families year by year. This allowed us to reconstruct their individual trajectories in considerable detail and also to look at the paths followed by several different generations, focusing mainly on the female respondents and their mothers. The main results were published by INED in *La Famille à différentes échelles. De l'entourage à l'espace résidentiel* (2012).

European Social Survey

The purpose of the European Social Survey (ESS), a major biennial study launched in 2002, is to chart changes in the values, attitudes and behaviour of populations in more than 30 countries. Initiated by the European Science Foundation, the ESS is hosted by the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys at the City University, London (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/).

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