

**Integrating Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological  
Developments in Homeleaving Research\***

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### Introduction

The movement out of the parental home and into a separate residence is a significant and meaningful milestone for the majority of young adults en route to achieving adult status. Over the past several decades, however, we have witnessed dramatic transformations in the timing as well as in the circumstances underlying this transitional event. Compared with earlier decades, today's Canadian young adults are increasingly leaving home at later ages, and more often to form non-family households. These trends are similarly observed in the United States and in many European countries (e.g., see Aquilino, 1999; Cherlin et al., 1997; Galland, 1997; Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999). Moreover, moving out of the parental home is "reversible," in that young adults can return home to "refill the parental nest" as "boomerang kids" (Mitchell, 2000).

Researchers attribute broad fluctuations in homeleaving patterns to changing economic times and employment opportunity structures, as well as to alterations in marriage and family patterns, such as later ages of marriage (Boyd and Norris, 1999; Mitchell et al., 2000a). However, it is recognized that considerable heterogeneity at both the individual and macro level also characterizes the homeleaving process (Mitchell, 1994). For example, Canadian young adults display considerable variation in homeleaving behaviour by such characteristics as gender, ethno-cultural origin, family structure, school attendance, labour force activity and region (Boyd and Norris, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1989). There is also considerable variability in homeleaving processes

throughout Western industrialized countries. Overall, the growing body of literature on this topic supports the view that the prolongation, possible reversibility, and diversity of homeleaving introduces new and intriguing complexities that necessitate further study.

The purpose of this paper is to further contribute to this expanding field by:

1) describing key homeleaving trends and predictors; 2) presenting a conceptual typology that captures the complexity of the homeleaving process; 3) connecting the typology to theoretical advancements and selected methodological issues drawn from the research literature; and 4) outlining future research directions, challenges and the social significance of this area of research.

### Homeleaving Patterns and Predictors

#### *Homeleaving Trends in Canada and in Comparative Perspective*

This section provides a review of homeleaving patterns in Canada, but also considers trends in the U.S. and other industrialized countries such as those found in Europe. In Canada and the United States, the average age of (first) homeleaving is currently about 19.5, an age that has been on the increase since the 1970s (General Social Survey, 1995; Goldscheider, 1997). In fact, intergenerational coresidence is relatively common in Canada. For example, among unmarried people aged 20-24, 70.5% of men and 63.4% of women were living at home in 1991; an increase of about 10% since the 1970s (Boyd and Norris, 1995). Moreover, in 1996, over one-third of all unmarried adults aged 25-34 were living with one or both parents (Boyd and Norris, 1998). Among all young adults aged 25-34, it is estimated that the rate of coresidence is 13.4% based on 1995 cross-sectional data from the Canadian General Social Survey.

Young adults have also been increasingly delaying their homeleaving in the United States and in many European countries such as Germany, Denmark, France, Italy, and Great Britain (Galland, 1997; Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999; Nave-Herz, 1997; Rossi, 1997). Although prolonged coresidence in the parental home is relatively common in European countries, there is a high degree of variability in the propensity for young adults aged 20-24 to live with their parents. For example, during the 1980s, 90% of Italian males in this age group lived with their parents, compared with only 26% in Denmark. And, among those aged 25-29, 65% of men and 44% of women in southern European countries (Greece, Spain, and Italy) were living at home, compared to 25% of men and 11% of women in the three central and western European countries, including France, Germany and the United Kingdom (Cherlin et al., 1997). This compares with 20% of men and 12% of women in the United States aged 25-29 (Goldscheider, 1997), which is similar to the Canadian rates.

Intergenerational coresidence involving a young adult can be formed by either delayed homeleaving or when young adults return home. Home returning is important to consider as a distinct transitional behaviour because it has different demographic, sociological, and economic causal structures and implications (Mitchell, 1998). This phenomenon is also clearly interrelated with earlier homeleaving processes and timing and it affects the final age of departure from home. For example, persons who leave home at earlier ages are more likely to return than those who leave home later (Gee et al., 1995).

Indeed, it is now widely recognized that an initial “launch” does not guarantee that “kids are gone for good.” Specifically, national survey data (General Social Survey,

1995) indicate that approximately 27% of all Canadian young adults between the ages of 19 and 35 have returned to live at home for four months or more (after a leave of four months or more) (Mitchell et al., 2000a). Returning home more than once is also not infrequent. In the Greater Vancouver Regional District (a highly urban area in Canada), for example, 41% of “boomerang kids” report that they have returned to live at home two or more times for a period of at least four months or more (Gee et al., 2000). Thus, a significant component of coresidence rates is comprised of home returners.

From an international perspective, temporary returns to the nest prior to permanent independent residence also seem to occur; particularly in the northern and central European countries (Cherlin et al., 1997). In the United States, rates of home returning are particularly high. Based on data from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households, Aquilino (1996) observes that 42.4% of young adults aged 19-34 have returned to live at home at least once for four months or more, after an absence of four months or more. Moreover, in countries such as Germany, young adults can maintain both independent and parental residences simultaneously (Nave-Herz, 1997). This body of research alerts us to the fact that homeleaving is not always permanent, and that the distinction between homeleaving and home returning may not always be “clear-cut.”

### *Factors Affecting the Homeleaving Process*

In Canada, the timing of homeleaving is affected by a number of important social, demographic and economic factors. Although a thorough discussion and comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, the most notable relationships for which consistent research support is found include the following. Children living in all types of

non-traditional or non-intact families leave home earlier than those of intact families (Boyd and Norris, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1989; Zhao et al., 1995). Young adults of foreign born parents leave home later than those of Canadian born parents (Zhao et al., 1995), as well as those engaging in more religious activities (Mitchell, 1994). Young adults living in Quebec exhibit later patterns of homeleaving compared to the rest of Canada (Zhao et al., 1995). In addition, females tend to leave home earlier than males (Mitchell, 1995); children with more siblings leave earlier; as well as those with fewer family material resources (Mitchell, 1994). Labour force activity and school enrollment of children also affect the probability of living at home (Boyd and Norris, 1998). However, other associations connected to socio-economic status (parental education, occupation and income) have met with inconsistent findings in the literature.

Furthermore, it also appears that the quality of parent-child relations (a form of “social capital”) influences the likelihood of early homeleaving as well as extended coresidency in young adulthood. Young adults with conflictual or problematic relations with their parents are prone to early homeleaving (Mitchell, 1994). Moreover, strong, positive parent-child relations are found to be more important than economic factors in “mature” young adult-parent coresidence; that is, living at home after the age of 25 (Mitchell et al., 2000b). There is also indirect evidence that homeleaving timing is affected by housing costs, employment opportunities, and the location of educational institutions (Mitchell, 1994; Zhao et al., 1995). Many of the above associations are also found in the U.S. (see Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999 for more detail).

Overall, the research on patterns and predictors of homeleaving demonstrate that this behaviour is clearly multifarious – it is shaped by factors embedded in the family and

community, as well as those directly connected to the individual. However, this body of research tends to measure homeleaving as a unidimensional state. Homeleaving is often measured at one point in time (first or last departure) and strictly in terms of physical separation from the parental home. What is often missing in these analyses are operationalizations of homeleaving as a process; one that is part of a financial or social-psychological context in which young adults become independent of their parents.

#### A Conceptual Typology of Homeleaving: Independence and Separation Processes

As a point of departure, and in recognition of recent research developments in the field, a conceptual typology of homeleaving is presented in which major dimensions of this process are captured. This typology conceives homeleaving as a dynamic and multifaceted process occurring along a continuum, representing varying degrees of independence and types of separation from the parental household. In support of this conception, Moore and Hotch (1983) have found that, when asked to decide whether or not they “had left home yet,” young adults differentially rated a variety of definitions of homeleaving. “Personal control” (e.g., less parental control, making own decisions) was viewed as the most important indicator of parent-adolescent separation, followed by economic independence, and physical separation.

Furthermore, researchers such as Goldscheider (1986), Jones (1987) and Cordon (1997) observe that there can be “semi-autonomous” stages of homeleaving or “intermediate situations” between full dependency and full autonomy. For example, some young adults can still be strongly tied to “home,” particularly while attending post-secondary institutions or during transitional periods, such as while travelling. Similarly,

the author's own research reveals that many young adults describe varying degrees of attachment to and separateness from the "home," although they have physically left the parental domicile (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2000a). Thus, the notion that separation from the parental home occurs along a number of physical, financial or material, and social-psychological dimensions is borne out in research studies. And furthermore, the extent to which youths initially separate from their parents has important implications for future living arrangement options and trajectories, as well as for long-term well-being.

The continuum of separation framing the proposed typology is represented by at least three major interrelated and varying domains – *physical separation*, *resource independence*, and *social-psychological separation*. First, mere physical separation from the parental household is the standard marker of leaving "home" and comprises the basis for most operational definitions of homeleaving. Yet, the physical distance between adult children and their parents may be extremely important in terms of the consequences of the departure from home. For example, children who move long distances to pursue educational or employment prospects may experience high levels of personal control, despite isolation from their family of origin compared to those who remain in the same community. Alternatively, physical distance can negatively impact the ability of a young adult to feel secure in achieving adult status.

Moreover, it may also be informative to document all physical household changes prior to homeleaving in order to fully understand physical separation from the parental "home." For example, subsequent to the introduction of a step-parent, a young adult can leave one parental household to live with the other parent. Recent Canadian research reveals that there may also be considerable geographical mobility among some ethnic



groups who maintain households in more than one country (Gee et al., 2000). A young adult could remain at home to finish school, although the parents move to another household in a new country. At a later time, the young adult might join the parents in the new country. Finally, it may be necessary to consider total numbers of household moves that a child has experienced to fully capture homeleaving patterns and processes. Moving with parents multiple times, for example, can remove a young adult from his/her “home” community and friends, which could ultimately affect the timing of homeleaving and later-life transitions (e.g., see Coleman, 1988; Hagan et al., 1996; for the disruptive effects of multiple household moves during childhood on later life transitions and trajectories).

Second, resource independence can further shape the homeleaving process. Young adults can set up an independent household but still rely heavily on parental household and financial resources. For example, young adults can continue to eat meals at home regularly, use laundry facilities and the family car, stay home on weekends, and receive help with finances (e.g. tuition and books, rent). This may also occur for significant and distinct time periods (such as while attending college or university), and may affect other separation processes, such as the extent to which young adults perceive that they are free from parental authority and supervision. Parents who heavily subsidize a child’s university education, for example, can also place restrictions on their child’s lifestyle, thus reducing perceptions of personal control and autonomy.

Third, social-psychological separation can occur on an affective-emotional level, such as feeling mature and independent of parental supervision or control. Young adults also often receive extensive emotional support from parents, even though they have

geographically moved to another locale. For example, some young adults receive daily phone calls or e-mail notes, and frequent visits, which affect levels of personal control. Conversely, some adult children become more independent emotionally from their parents upon leaving home, a type of separation that may define future family relationships and bonds. In addition, parental monitoring or control can become more obtuse and fragmented. Rules pertaining to curfew become ineffective and obsolete once a young adult sets up their own household, although lifestyle preferences may continue to be scrutinized.

The three domains of separation should be viewed as interrelated in a number of significant ways that have implications for the transition to adulthood, as well as for subsequent transitions in living arrangements, educational and occupational opportunity structures and well-being. More specifically, the degrees of separation associated with these domains may directly affect the timing of the final “farewell” from the parental home and the propensity to return home. For example, young adults who leave home earlier (at younger ages) and for reasons of conflict are more likely to return home because of their financial instability and emotional immaturity (Gee et al., 1995).

In further support of a typology that integrates non-physical aspects of homeleaving, Canadian research (Mitchell and Gee, 1996a) demonstrates that about 80% of the reasons for returning home are related to financial factors, albeit one out of ten young adults return home because of psychological reasons (e.g., need for emotional support, immaturity). Furthermore, many young adults state that a major pull-factor and benefit of home returning is to experience “the comforts of home,” such as home-cooked meals, parental emotional support, and other perks associated with the parental home

(Mitchell, 2000). Returns to the parental “nest” may therefore be indicative of “incomplete” transitions to adulthood among some young adults who have not moved far enough along the continuum of separation in all three domains.

Hence, a typology of homeleaving separation may assist in refining and elaborating how we conceptualize leaving “home,” in addition to adding insight into the dynamics of this complex behaviour and guiding further study. In particular, a conceptual typology of homeleaving can facilitate an understanding of the process of separation from the parental home. However, what is needed is an overarching theoretical framework that bridges individual and family factors to structural/macro processes, such as changing economic opportunities and social policies, cultural change and regional/community-level factors. Therefore, the purpose of the next section is to explicate how a synthesis of life course theory and the concept of “social capital” (Coleman, 1988) can be used to integrate the conceptual typology of homeleaving separation as part of a larger landscape of shifting demographic, socio-economic, and cultural change.

#### Linking the Conceptual Typology to Theoretical Advancements

In this section, the preceding typology of separation will be linked to recent theoretical developments in this field. Although much of the homeleaving literature lacks theoretical as well as conceptual framing, one recent development has been the resurgence and growing popularity of life course theory (e.g., Elder, 1995; Giele and Elder, 1998). This perspective is currently applied to many areas of family life from a wide variety of academic disciplines and fields such as child and family development, family medicine,

nursing, sociology, public policy, social work, education and public health (e.g., see Price et al., 2000).

Life course theory has also been successfully synthesized with the concept of “social capital” (Coleman, 1988, Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998). The explanatory power of this synthesis stems from amalgamation of two complementary streams of conceptual development that have been productive in their application to a number of substantive areas including homeleaving and the reproduction of social inequality (e.g., Mitchell, 1994). It will also be shown that the fundamental principals of this synthesis align with and specify aspects of the physical, financial and social-psychological domains of the typology of independence and separation. Moreover, it will be evident that this synthesis provides flexible and dynamic framework encompassing socio-demographic, cultural, socio-economic, individual and family resource intricacies in the homeleaving process.

The life course approach to family life encompasses changes in individuals and families over time and how they are influenced by the larger societal context (Price et al., 2000). A key concept for understanding change is the transitions that individuals and families experience over the life course, as well as the possibility of transition reversals (Hohn and Mackensen, 1989). Age-related transitions are assumed to be diverse, socially created and shared (Hagestad and Neugarten, 1985:35-36) and patterns of support and assistance, such as household living arrangements, are viewed as shaped (and reshaped) by historical circumstances and cultural traditions (Hareven, 1996).

This perspective incorporates both the macro and micro-levels of analysis. On a macro-level, the current economic climate experienced by young adults, in tandem with broader socio-demographic trends such as delayed marriage and family formation, and

increased post-secondary enrollment affect homeleaving timing and trajectories. On a micro-level, however, it is recognized that transitional expectations and behaviours may be redefined in the face of specific parent-child characteristics and circumstances (Mitchell and Gee, 1996b). This is because families respond to or adapt to life events or situational circumstances in diverse ways. Returning home, for example, can be positioned at the centre of a discord between normative expectations and reduced opportunity structures in the transition to adulthood. However, the degree to which young adults experience inequality in expectations and opportunities can depend upon access to family and individual resources.

Families vary in the resources (economic and non-material) available to their members, thus influencing the timing and nature of transitional behaviours across the life course. Some families, for instance, can amass material resources, such as furniture, kitchen appliances, an automobile, and loans to assist the young adult successfully set up an independent residence. In this sense, financial capital invested into the young adult by parents may allow the young adult to maintain physical separation while being less independent in terms of financial resources.

However, not all resources are materially-based. Thus, the concept of “social capital” is useful in elaborating how many important intangible aspects of family ties and communities affect transitional behaviour. This might include such “intangibles” as the quality of family relations and “familistic” orientations related to ethno-cultural membership (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1993; Mitchell et al., 2000a) affect transitional behaviours. This concept can also be used to incorporate the interpersonal dynamics associated with the social-psychological aspects of the separation process.

Social capital is defined as a valuable resource that “exists in the relations among persons” (Coleman, 1988: 100). Unlike other types of resources (e.g., financial or economic), social relationships form a key resource that once accumulated, can be drawn on or accessed when needed. This “stock” of social capital, therefore, constitutes a valuable resource for individuals and families in achieving their interests, one that makes possible otherwise impossible goals (Boisjoly et al., 1995). This resource exists in the form of family supportiveness as well as within the broader community.

Notably, young adults without strong, positive affective family bonds may not be able to secure the benefits of extended household living arrangements or parental resources when needed. They also tend to exhibit less frequent contact with parents than “connected” young adults once they leave home, perhaps as a means to establish social-psychological distance from their parents. As a result, they may not enjoy the benefit of remaining at home, of returning home to “regroup,” in the event of unemployment or divorce, or of accessing other parental resources, such as advice or a loan in an emergency situation.

Social capital also includes ethnic and religious institutional supports. In this sense, some ethnic groups create “institutional closure” and display norms and values that emphasize strong family ties, family centredness, obligations and traditions. Ethno-cultural factors, therefore, may affect the homeleaving process and the propensity of family members to share living accommodations at certain points in the life course. For example, in Indo-Canadian families, children rarely leave home to attain “independence” since they are typically expected to leave home only for marriage. Multi-generational living is also relatively common in this cultural group (Gee et al., 2000).

Furthermore, the type and nature of social capital has the capacity to influence a young adult's feelings of personal control and other social-psychological dimensions of home separation. Young adults who physically leave home but receive intensive day-to-day attention, contact and support beyond what they perceive to be necessary may experience low levels of personal control. In fact, Portes (1998) argues that there can be negative consequences of social capital when it restricts or limits personal freedom and autonomy. This occurs because of strong pressure from parents and/or the community to conform to particular expectations, customs or traditions. Gendered expectations of "appropriate" behaviour also fall into this category. Boyd and Pryor (1989) argue that daughters may be less likely to live at home than sons because their social lives are more closely monitored or supervised. Thus, social capital enriches our understanding of how and why family and community social ties affect homeleaving and separation processes.

Finally, the timing and context around which homeleaving occurs can instigate a "chain reaction" with regard to the timing of future transitional behaviours. This "domino effect" could determine how intergenerational exchanges of support unfold over the life course, which has important implications for family health and social-psychological well-being. For example, young adults who leave home (physically) with strong parental support (emotional and financial) may be more likely to return home and/or to successfully complete other transitions to adulthood (e.g., the completion of college or university). These young adults may also be more likely to provide an elderly parent with support (which can involve coresidence) during their middle-aged years than those with weaker intergenerational ties.

In sum, the blending of life course theory and the concept of social capital facilitates an understanding of the linkages among macro-level structures and family/cultural change, family resources, and the process by which young adults separate from their parents. The “merging” of these two conceptual streams also highlights the long-term consequences of homeleaving behaviour with regard to future life course trajectories and individual/family well-being. As such, this synthesis offers a comprehensive understanding of the timing, pathways, contexts and implications under which patterns of homeleaving occurs.

Recent research (e.g. see Mitchell et al., 2000a) has successfully applied this synthesis to better understand how ethno-cultural factors affect young adults’ living arrangements in Canada. Increasing rates of home returning, for instance, especially during economic recessions and high unemployment, are viewed as indicative of non-linear and changing transitions to adulthood. This phenomenon clearly supports the view that the lives of family members are integrally linked to macro-level trends and patterns (Elder, 1994). However, young adults and their families do not respond or adapt to macro-level change in a uniform fashion, and social capital related to ethno-cultural membership can affect transitional behaviour in important ways. Notably, young adults whose mother tongue is English are significantly more likely to return home than those with French or “other” mother tongues (Mitchell et al., 2000).

Preliminary findings from the Culture and Coresidence Study (Gee et al., 2000) also show that ethno-cultural factors affect living arrangements, such that Canadian young adults with Chinese, Indo (e.g., India, Pakistan), or Southern-European origins are more likely to be living in the parental home (excluding returners) compared to those



with British origins. British-Canadians, however, are the most likely of these four groups to return home (23.5%), compared to 17.3% of the Chinese, 15.8% of those with Southern-European origins and only 8.7% among Indo-Canadians. These findings are attributed to diversity in familistic attitudes and behaviours (e.g., norms and expectations) that may act as a form of social capital mediating the timing of life course events and living arrangement choices. We now turn now to discussion of selected methodological issues and research challenges that need to be addressed to connect conceptual and theoretical developments to programs of research in this field.

### Methodological Issues

The purpose of this section is to link conceptual and theoretical discussions to a number of key methodological issues, including:

- **Defining and Measuring Homeleaving** -- A clear definition of homeleaving is essential and should reflect the complexity of the behaviour as a process of separation. We also need to ask what it means to leave “home” in relation to the achievement of adult status. Duration away from home must also be established (such as absences of four or more months) and standardized to facilitate international comparisons. In addition to asking respondents when they physically leave the parental home, data should be collected on non-physical dimensions of homeleaving (e.g., financial independence and social-psychological separation). Data should also be collected on first leaving and final leaving, at minimum, and questions on home returning should be incorporated, since homeleaving is not always a linear process.

- Homeleaving Reasons/Pathways/Destinations -- Individual reasons for leaving home (or returning) experiences are often used as proxies for motivations (e.g., conflict, schooling, employment, etc.). However, these may be *ex post facto* rationalizations rather than actual motivating forces. Also, the use of a singular reason often masks the complexity of the decision-making process, as well as macro-level demographic and economic trends (e.g., marriage, educational and unemployment rates). More detailed and contextual data are required to better reflect what we are beginning to realize about the dynamics of this process. In addition to ascertaining homeleaving pathways/trajectories (e.g., for marriage, school), it would also be informative to have data on the type of household/residence that is formed after homeleaving. For example, leaving home to live with another parent, sharing an apartment with roommates, living in a series of hotels/hostels while travelling or boarding with another family while attending school all have very different implications with regard to conceptualizing and measuring homeleaving.
- Research Design -- Reliance on cross-sectional designs has posed significant limitations for the use of independent variables and establishing causality that could be used to capture and test conceptual and theoretical dimensions. However, this is often problematic because many of these variables can not be assumed to be sequentially prior to the homeleaving or returning behaviour. In addition, there are methodological pitfalls associated in differential exposure to risk of transitional behaviours. Typically, a form of event history analysis (e.g., proportional hazards) is used to model the probability of leaving home (timing or duration) or returning home among those who have left at least once. Longitudinal research is also necessary to

document changes in household living arrangements, the sequencing and duration of other transitional behaviours, etc. over meaningful time periods.

- **Sample Size** -- One of the research paradoxes is that large national data sets tend not to contain detailed measures. However, data sets with “better” measures typically do not contain sufficient numbers of cases required to conduct sub-sample analyses, such as multiple state analyses of movements out of and back into the parental home.
- **Measurement of the Homeleaving Separation Typology/Theoretical Concepts** -- A more complete set of measures of physical (e.g., distance), financial (exchanges of economic and household resources), and social psychological separation (feelings of personal control, contact, parental monitoring, etc.) require inclusion in research. And how do we best measure family and individual resources such as social and economic capital? Useful indicators of social capital might include: quality and strength of intergenerational relations; family structure (presence of one or two parents), number of siblings (competition for time and attention), peer influences, ethno-cultural membership, religiosity, and adherence to traditional family values. Indicators of economic capital could include income (individual and family), family wealth (e.g., from savings and investments), gifts and loans, and provisions of goods and services (e.g., furniture, meal preparation).
- **Unit of Analysis** -- If one child is used, which one should it be? The selection may bias results, given that birth order and household size are important predictors of homeleaving. It may be fruitful to employ families as the unit of analysis, capturing the perspective and characteristics of both the parent and the child, although this uncovers a new set of methodological challenges. For instance, some research

suggests that parents are more likely than children to report them still living at home (Young, 1987).

- Cohort and Trend Analysis -- The complexity of age, period, and cohort effects need to be addressed to disentangle and elaborate macro-demographic and social trends and micro-individual characteristics of those involved.
- Multiple State Analyses -- Leaving home should be placed in the context of other events, such as age at completion of full-time education, age at entry into the labour force and age at marriage. We also require more complex risk analysis methodologies to model multiple transition movements and the linkages among them.
- Quantitative and Qualitative Issues -- There may be significant value in triangulating data using diverse methodologies in order to extend our understanding of the nuances of this behaviour. For example quantitative studies could be informed or contextualized by examining subjective elements such as: What does it mean to leave home and how might this vary according to cultural background? What is the decision-making process underlying homeleaving behaviours? What kinds of negotiations occur between parents and their children during the homeleaving process? How do other family members and extended kin (e.g., grandparents, siblings) affect homeleaving?
- Data Linkages -- Data sets need to be linked to connect micro-level, individual information to from different data sources. These data need to be tied to large-scale aggregate level data on economic, family/cultural change, social policy and housing conditions. For example, connecting information on rates of homeleaving to societal-level changes in fertility or family values regarding the desirability of independent

family living would be useful. Linking data to relevant social policies and housing conditions is also important. Youths may be more likely to leave home, for instance, if the government has sponsored numerous work opportunities for youth or because there is an abundance of cheap rental accommodations.

### Future Research, Challenges and Social Significance

Several key recommendations for future research can be identified from this work. However, these must be tempered by the inherent challenges faced by researchers in meeting these objectives. While existing large data sets may provide excellent information on some aspects of homeleaving (demographics) they may have to be triangulated with other quantitative data sets and smaller qualitative studies in order to effectively contextualize large-scale trends and patterns.

There is also a need to measure degrees of separation during the homeleaving process, and to track other living arrangements after leaving home (e.g., cohabitation). Furthermore, linkages between macro-level changes to individual behaviour are needed. In this regard, cross-cultural and cross-national research is required to delineate both common and diverse processes of change to disentangle the effects of individual, economic and cultural forces. In addition, comparative analysis can provide new ideas and frameworks for analysis (Goldscheider, 1997) and help to explain variability in patterns of homeleaving and home returning.

Finally, longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in providing researchers with sequential measures on the long-term implications of homeleaving. For example, how does this process impact on individual and family well-being and health?

The answer to this question could explicate the consequences of separation processes involving young adults; factors that extend into middle and old age. A young adult who physically separates from home at a very young age (e.g., 15, with little parental support), for example, could be disadvantaged in terms of other life course trajectories (such as encouragement to finish school). In turn, a “chain reaction” of life-long disadvantage could be put instigated, affecting educational, employment and social opportunities, which in turn could jeopardize a young adult’s health and well-being on a number of key levels. Indeed, this process may contribute to the reproduction of inequality, from one generation to the next. Clearly, this information would be of great practical value and social significance and would be of interest to researchers, policy-makers, family life educators, health professionals and communities.

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