Course Description and Objectives

This course will offer a fresh perspective on continuity and innovation in Canadian families. As a family sociologist, I have observed that many courses in this area emphasize families and social change in several contexts: the institution and experience of family; the family structure or unit; the relationship of family to the wider political economy; caregiving and social support; awareness of and response to family violence, etc. While I agree with the importance of these foci, such courses do not always speak to the myriad changes or innovations in contemporary families that an increasing number of students are most interested in, such as over- or hyper-parenting, same-sex unions, LATs, boomerang kids, stay-at-home fathers, variations in the family and work trajectories of visible minority and Aboriginal Canadians, and the nature of transnational support in aging immigrant families. A focus on change is, therefore, important.

On the other hand, a good contemporary sociology of the family course should also acknowledge that there are familial experiences that have remained consistent over time. For example, the persistence of significant economic challenges associated with raising children or the migration of families for better social or economic opportunities. Indeed, if continuity is not acknowledged as central to families in a family sociology course, students may make the uncritical assumption that they need to learn only “innovative” ways of being a family today. For example, they may assume that gay couples using surrogacy to have children is entirely new when, historically speaking, this is a reproductive practice that has developed over time and is socially, historically, and legally constituted.

This course is unique in that while it will underscore social change or innovation, it will also purposefully consider continuity, that which seems to remain constant, in shaping families over time, be it norms, attitudes, beliefs, interactions, practices, processes, and/or ideologies. These considerations are particularly salient given that the social processes of immigration, aging, gendering, generationing, and racialization, alone and in intersection, are impacting an increasing number of Canadian families today.

Required Textbook and Readings


In addition to chapters from the textbook, a number of required readings will be posted as links on the CourseSpaces site for the course.

* A more detailed course outline will be distributed to students during the first week of classes.