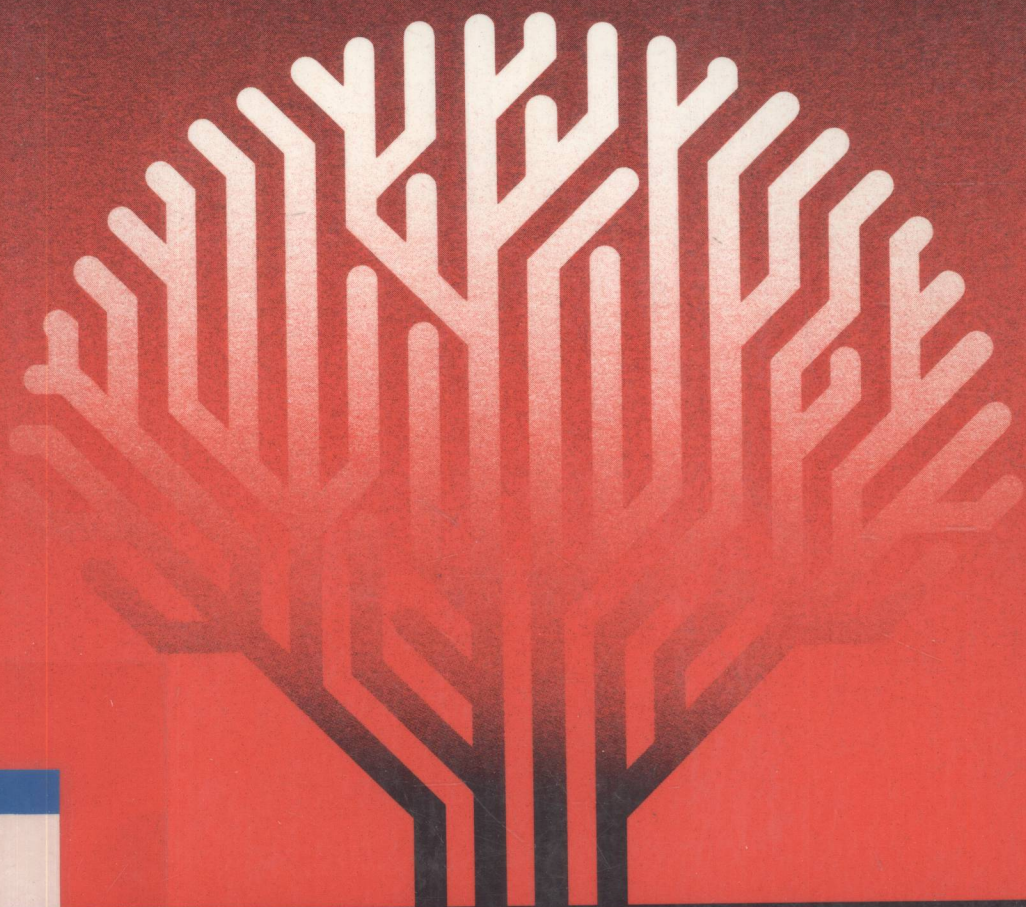


Emily M. Nett

CANADIAN FAMILIES

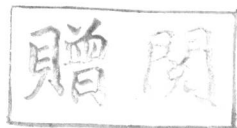
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CANADIAN FAMILIES Past and Present

Emily M. Nett



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Canadian Families Past and Present

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Preface

A caveat may be a peculiar item with which to announce a book. Still, I feel compelled to serve notice of this work's genealogy. A lifetime of everyday and academic experiences has shaped its ideas. My specialization in the Sociology of the Family began with immigration to Canada, long after I had completed graduate work in sociology. I learned about families in Canada along with my students, which may be the way in which most university professors acquire their expertise. Together we read the few publications on the subject which were available at the time.

Two were books with similar titles—*The Family in Canada*, and *The Canadian Family*. Professor Elkin's 1964 classic offered a reliable, concise guide. Professor Ishwaran's 1971 edited book placed at my disposal a number of informative articles, which began to round out my knowledge and raise questions. Throughout the rest of the decade, in rapid succession, came four more edited books, and several chapters in introductory sociology textbooks published in Canada. In the 1980s several edited books and two that are single-authored have appeared. All of them continue to inform me about family organization and processes in Canada. They have been invaluable in my own education and I am deeply indebted to the authors, editors, and contributors. Furthermore, the number of journal articles on various aspects of the Canadian family has increased greatly as more researchers and scholars plunge into innovative investigations of family-related questions.

Women as editors and authors of books and journal articles have come more recently to the field. We have somewhat of an advantage over those who paved the way, I think, in having been intellectually nourished by another tradition. The new research on women with which feminist scholars have been enriching many studies in the university and outside it is pivotal, in that it infuses Family Sociology with a point of view which has too long been missing. This work has coloured my own outlook on Canadian families to a considerable extent, although not entirely. To my mind, substituting an analysis of women's oppression for sociological approaches to the family is as much a perversion as omitting the insights available from a feminist perspective. I believe that central as sex and gender are to the family, the study of families entails addressing a complex of related issues that are far broader in their implication than sexual inequalities in the current society.

The main focus of my interest in Family Sociology has been Canada, particularly the comparison of Canadian families in historical periods,

and the analysis of family trends. Accordingly, I have attempted to educate myself about this society and to understand it sociologically, as the discipline and its sub-field have developed in this country. I have earnestly tried to surrender to the spirit of sociological inquiry in Canada. I trust that I have been a convincing convert. I like to think that my views on families in Canada are enhanced by having been both "guest" and "family member."

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

This textbook is divided into two parts, although they are not so designated in the Table of Contents. The first four chapters are directly concerned with families in the societal context. I start with an introduction to the study of Canadian families, giving special emphasis to the many meanings of the word "family" and its qualifiers. I believe that careful and precise definitions are fundamental in a textbook. I do not see how else beginners can arrive at answers to questions they might have about changes in family relations and their consequences for persons in families. **Throughout the book terms which appear in bold-face type have been defined nearby in the text.** Students might be encouraged to make a list of such bold-faced terms and their definitions.

To correct for the fact that so often the textbooks used in courses in Canadian universities have been written and published in the United States, and therefore do not have Canadian content, a brief history of family study in Canada is presented in Chapter 1. The emphasis is on the continuity over time of a certain sociological approach, mainly macrosociology with a clear emphasis on economic factors. This pathway was first trodden by French sociologists in Quebec in the last century, and has been followed by Anglophone sociologists from a more recent time, up to the present. I therefore consider, in the second chapter, the domestic family as the smallest economic unit in Canadian society. I engage in speculation about the importance of food production and sharing in the origins of human family groups. Changes in family households and relationships that were associated with new technologies for providing family subsistence are discussed, from the hunter/gatherer groups to horticultural and agricultural societies to the industrial world. Contemporary multi-earner families are shown to be an emerging response to new economic and social conditions. Wife employment in the labour force is enhancing the material well-being of educated partners and their children, while at the same time the absence of a second income earner, or even one in some cases, makes other families and persons increasingly dependent upon inadequate transfer payments from governments claiming to be impoverished.

Chapter 3 describes the family as an institution in all societies. It includes a comparison of the ideal types of consanguineal and conjugal families. These types, associated with traditional and modern societies, are sociologically constructed out of the different sets of norms which regulate sex, reproduction, and childrearing and are supported by the societal constructs, or ideologies, of familism and individualism, respectively. As an example, Canadian society tends toward conjugalism, and it can be contrasted, for example, with the traditional Barabaing tribe of Africa, which has a more consanguineal family institution. Ethnic identification is important in multicultural Canada; therefore, ethnic variation in family processes and patterns is discussed.

In an attempt to round out the historical materials presented in the two previous chapters, Chapter 4 considers some issues in the complex overlap and interplay between the family and the Church, the state, and "the social." It raises questions as to whether proposals for a *single*, unified family policy are realistic in a pluralistic, rapidly changing society. Chapter 4 concludes the first part of the book.

In the next four chapters which make up the second part, I turn to a description and analysis of family relationships and interaction. Canadian society remains on stage, but it is the setting for the performances of persons in families. In Chapter 5 the changing constructions of childhood and parenthood are sketched in order to examine fertility, families as socialization units, and child training and care. Descriptions of new socialization contexts and experiences include families in which parents are divorced and often remarried, families which share childcare with non-family persons or groups, those in which fathers are more active in childcare, and lower and middle-class families. Then in Chapter 6 the problems created for family relationships by adolescents, and their sexuality in a highly eroticized culture, are discussed. Changed attitudes toward premarital sexual intercourse and changes in behaviour over a generation are documented. The problems in teenaged dating and sex are outlined, including parental disapproval, adolescent pregnancy, and the risk of sexually transmitted disease, among others. Both single life and living together are considered as alternatives to early marriage and preludes to later marriage.

Chapter 7 moves on to outline the changes over the past generation in the marriage contract and the meanings of marriage. It describes the process of getting married and the patterns of marital roles in sociological terms. Marital adjustment, communication, and problem spots in marriage are the subjects of Chapter 8. Particular attention is given to sexual adjustment, financial conflict, the birth of the first child, and marriage in the middle age and retirement phases of the family cycle. In this chapter too, conflict (including violence) and divorce are discussed. Remarriage as a part of the Canadian family scene is considered.

The last chapter in this textbook, Chapter 9, belongs to both and neither of the two preceding parts. The content emphasizes various issues with which families in Canadian society today are intertwined, and ways in which family sociologists and other academics interested in families perceive them and study them. The approaches and theories used in investigations which touch on current social and personal problems affecting families are described with appropriate examples. Instructors who are teaching *The Family* as one course, and *Courtship and Marriage* as another, can add the last chapter to the first five chapters as a course in *The Family*, or to Chapters 1, 6, 7, and 8 as a course in *Courtship and Marriage*.

A NOTE ON BIAS

Scholars derive their understanding from the collective knowledge of their cultures as well as from their own unique encounters with their social worlds. Although like snakes we shed the skins of former sizes as we grow and develop, we retain our original characteristics or outlines. Initially I was shaped intellectually by what is now termed, with some derogation, mainstream sociology. In the days of more unified outlooks, we did not know that other paradigms would necessarily vie with what scholars in literature now term "the canon." I still question the claim that any single perspective within sociology has more validity than any other, just as I doubt that social science has more truths to offer than the humanities do. The inclusion of literary excerpts as illustrations in this book stems from the value I place upon the humanistic tradition. The long-established, so-called conventional Sociology, added to a liberal arts education with a strong smattering of philosophy and literature, forms the roots of the tree of which my *Sociology of the Family* as described in this book has become the crown. As Robertson Davies says in *The Rebel Angels* (1981), that hidden part of the tree, when uprooted, proves to be quite large, nourishing the visible part.

While I have tried to be faithful to developments in the very broad field of Sociology of the Family since I entered it in 1971, irrespective of national boundaries, I make no claim that this textbook provides a comprehensive survey of the field or even that it constitutes an intellectual challenge to my colleagues. My aim is a more modest one—to put in the hands of Canadian students of *The Family* a map of a distinctive, substantive area of social life in Canada. Obviously the data are not strictly Canadian; especially in the second part of the book I have had to rely upon other North American sources. As for the theories, their origins are explained in Chapter 9. Also, it should be noted that whereas I assume that students will already have encountered basic concepts and facts in an introductory course in sociology, for the sake of clarity I have

provided some review, which I believe students will find helpful. My greatest hope is that I have raised some issues of fundamental importance about human families, with which Canada's families, past and present, have much in common. For that reason, one final warning is necessary: this book is essentially about *families*—not households, not “lifestyles,” and not “relationships.”

Acknowledgments

There are many people whose support for this work has been invaluable to me, and most of them already know the extent of my deep appreciation. However, the five persons who graciously reviewed at least one entire draft of the manuscript deserve special mention for their direct contribution. The final version has been greatly improved by the detailed comments and kind encouragement of four colleagues at my university—Douglas Rennie, Seung Moon, Cheryl Albas, and Dan Albas—and the Executive Director of the Vanier Institute of the Family, Robert Glossop. Moreover, without the hard work of the entire staff at Butterworths, listed on the copyright page, this book would never have been finished *almost* on time, or even begun for that matter. My editor, Kathleen Hamilton, has been particularly important. Her fine sense of Canadian history and literature and her painstaking editorial skills have polished many a rough edge in the original manuscript. Finally, I am grateful to the Head of my department and the Dean of Arts at my university for providing, unsolicited on my part and under stringent financial conditions, most of the amenities which a faculty member requires in order to produce a publishable manuscript while teaching full-time. This included the services of several departmental secretaries, among whom Nancy Smith, with much interest and never a complaint, word-processed the entire first draft and most of its revisions.

Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>List of Boxes</i>	xv
<i>List of Cartoons</i>	xvi
<i>List of Figures</i>	xvii
<i>List of Tables</i>	xviii
 CHAPTER 1 Introduction	1
Importance of Studying the Family	1
Alternative Views of What's Happening to the Family	2
The Study of Family in Canada	5
Pre-Social Science Observations	5
Early Social Science	6
Family Study Within Recent Canadian Sociology	14
The Politicization of the Family	16
The Meaning of the Word "Family"	17
Family as Everyday Experience	17
Family as a Sociological Concept	19
Family Groups	21
Family Institutions	23
Conceptions of the Nuclear Family	26
Guidelines for the Sociological Study of Families in Canada	28
Drawing the Lines	28
Dealing with Pluralism and Changing Societal Meanings	29
Avoiding the Pitfall of Popularity	32
Summary	33
Notes	34
 CHAPTER 2 The Social Environment: Families in the	
Canadian Economy	35
The Origins of Family Economies	36
Family and Technological Development	39
Hunting and Gathering	39
Horticulture	41
Agriculture	42
The History of Family Economies in Canada	42
Preindustrial European Settler Families	43
Families as Economic Units in Industrial Society	46

Contemporary Families in the Canadian Economy	50
The Extremes of Family Wealth—Affluence and Poverty	60
Family Strategies for Coping with Poverty	68
Summary	69
Notes	71
CHAPTER 3 Cultural Dimensions of Canadian Families	73
Family as Normative System	75
The Centrality of Marriage and Parenthood	77
Cross-Cultural Variation in Family Norms	83
The Barabaiing	87
A Partial History of the Canadian Family Institution	89
Polyethnicity and Family Processes in Canada	91
Ethnic Groups	91
An Excursion into the History of Ethnic Groups and Families in Canada	93
Subcultural Diversity	101
Selecting a Mate	101
Making Decisions and Maintaining a Home	101
Caring for and Teaching Children Group Ways	102
Resolving the Dilemma of Familistic Traditions Amid Dominant Conjugality	103
Summary	105
Notes	107
CHAPTER 4 Canadian Families in the Context of Societal Differentiation and State Control	109
Historical Background	110
Role of the Churches in Earlier Periods	111
The Appearance of State Control and “The Social”	113
Further Expansion of “The Social”: Medicine	115
Social Security Transferred to the State and Liberalization of the Laws	116
The Current Scene	119
Family Policy	123
Comparisons with Selected Other Countries	125
Family Policy in Canada	127
Summary	130
Notes	132
CHAPTER 5 Parents and Children	135
Changed Meanings of Childhood and Parenthood	135
Procreation and Parenthood	138
Definitions and Trends in Fertility	138

Factors in Current Low Fertility	140
Consequences of Low Fertility for Family Life	142
Becoming Parents	144
Voluntary Childlessness	145
Decision-making	145
Parenthood Among Single Persons	146
Socialization, Childrearing, and Childcare	148
Primary Socialization	150
Childrearing	153
Childcare	154
Variations in Family Environments for Children	156
Working Class vs. Middle Class	157
The Impact of Divorce, Remarriage, and Care Shared with Non-Family	159
Summary	166
Notes	168
 CHAPTER 6 Adolescence, Youth, and Sexuality	171
Personal Development in Cultural Context: Becoming Independent and Autonomous	171
Parent/Adolescent and Parent/Youth Relationships	173
The Generation Gap and the Generational Stake	175
Two-Way Influence	177
Dating and Sexuality	178
From Dating to Getting Together	179
Sexual Experiences of Teens	182
Problems in Teenage Premarital Sexual Intercourse	185
Leaving the Family Home	189
Living Together	190
Where Does Singlehood Fit into the Picture?	194
Summary	195
Notes	196
 CHAPTER 7 Finding a Partner and Getting Married	197
The Meanings of Marriage	197
Getting Married	199
The Choice of a Mate	199
The Marriage Gradient and Marriage Squeeze	203
Personal and Interpersonal Factors in Choice	204
Love in North American Courtship	205
Tying the Knot	209
The Wedding Ceremony	210
Marriage Contracts: The Explicit and Implicit Codes	212
Marriage Roles	217

Conventional Roles	218
Shared Roles	222
Dual-Career Roles	225
Reversed Conventional Roles	226
Summary	226
Notes	228
 CHAPTER 8 Marital Adjustment, Divorce and Remarriage	231
Relationships in Marriage	231
Marital Adjustment: A Definition	233
Marital Adjustment: A Communications Model	234
Adjustment in Three Areas	236
Sexual Adjustment	236
Financial Adjustment	242
What Effects Do Children Have on a Marriage?	248
Adjustment Throughout Married Life	252
Two Contemporary Problems in Marriage	255
Spouse Abuse and Violence	255
Divorce	256
Remarriage	263
Summary	265
Notes	266
 CHAPTER 9 Issues, Perspectives, Explanations, and Methods	267
Introduction	267
Social and Sociological Issues	267
Sociological Perspectives as Guides to Understanding	269
The Social Facts Paradigm	270
Structural-Functional Theory	273
Marxian Theory	276
Systems Theory as Applied to Family Analysis	282
The Social Definition Paradigm: Symbolic Interactionism	282
The Social Behaviour Paradigm: Exchange Theory	286
Levels of Social Reality Theories	286
Sociological Theory and the Study of Families	289
Summary	295
Notes	296
 <i>References</i>	299
<i>Index</i>	327

List of Boxes

1.1	Courtship Behaviour of Montreal and Quebec City Women ..	7
1.2	Le Play's Disciple Comes to St. Irénée in 1862	11
1.3	Family as Institution	24
1.4	Are Lesbian Households Families?	30
2.1	Self-sufficient Family Economies in Mid-nineteenth Century Canada	45
2.2	A Family Business in Saint-Pascal, Quebec, 1891-1970s	52
2.3	Poverty in Canada, 1984.....	65
2.4	Persistent Poverty	67
3.1	Who Is a Relative?	76
3.2	Half-French Children Among the Huron	94
3.3	A Barbadian-Canadian View of Adoption	104
4.1	Childcare and Control by Parents and Experts in Crestwood Heights in the 1950s	117
4.2	A Death in the Family	120
4.3	Best to Stay at Home, Author Tells Women	122
4.4	On Canadian Public Policy-makers	129
5.1	Unmarried Motherhood	149
5.2	Nine Adult Skills That Help Children Thrive	155
6.1	Making "Going Steady" Official: Accepting His I.D. Bracelet	180
6.2	Highlights of the 1985 Gallup Poll on Teenaged Attitudes Toward Issues of Sexuality	184
6.3	Premarital Sex Can Affect Marital Sex	187
7.1	How Families Restricted Marriage Choices in Winnipeg's North End in the 1950s	202
7.2	The Explanation of Adams's Model of Courtship	206
7.3	Preventing a Husband or Wife from Disposing of Family Assets Without the Approval of the Spouse	216
7.4	Losing One's Self in the Role of Housewife	221
8.1	Some Skills for Non-defensive Communication	237
8.2	A Husband's and Wife's Different Sexual Scripts	239
9.1	Major Sociological Paradigms	271
9.2	The Process Whereby Under-class Adolescents Are Ejected from Their Families	288
9.3	Child Neglect or Cultural Disorientation?	293

List of Cartoons

Sociologists do not know whether ethnicity is a major component of identity among Canadians.

For Better or For Worse, Lynn Johnson 92

Although to an outside observer, melded or blended families appear to be similar to those in which the parents are in their first marriage, from the perspective of the participants the boundaries may be quite different.

Herman, Unger 162

List of Figures

1.1	Dictionary Definitions of "Family" and Related Terms	18
1.2	Chris's Two Nuclear Families	22
1.3	The Canadian Census Family	27
2.1	Average Income of Families and Unattached Individuals, 1951-1981	53
2.2	Schematic View of Well-Being	63
4.1	1980 White House Conference Target Areas for Family Policy	127
5.1	Period Total Fertility Rate, 1921-1981, and Completed Fertility Rate for Cohorts 1894-1953, Canada	139
5.2	Percentage Distribution Marital Status of Total, Male and Female Parents, Canada, 1951 and 1981	147
6.1	Pros and Cons in Non-marital Cohabitation	193
7.1	The Marriage Gradient	203
7.2	Hours Spent in Household Work per Week, by Married Men and Women	223
8.1	Average Income by Age of Family Head, 1951 and 1981	245
9.1	The Interrelatedness of Social Issues, Sociological Theories, Research, and Policy	269
9.2	A Summary of the Ecology of Sociocultural Risk and Opportunity for Children	283

List of Tables

1.1	Highlights in the Development of Family Study in Canada, 1860–1960s, and in the Field of Family Sociology Since the 1970s	8
2.1	Selected Household Statistics for Canada, 1951 and 1981	54
2.2	Percentage Distributions by Selected Characteristics, Within Income Deciles of Census Families in Private Households, 1970 and 1980, Canada	56
2.3	Four Measures of Poverty	64
3.1	Four Cultural Universals Found Within All Family Institutions	78
3.2	Selected Features of Family Institutions Defined	84
3.3	Family Institutions and Societal Conditions, by Type	86
5.1	Demographic Characteristics of a Population with a Total Fertility Rate of 1.7 Births per Woman and a Life Expectation of 75.2 years, Canada	143
6.1	Sexual Attitudes of Teenagers Compared with Those of Adults and by Gender and Religious Affiliation	176
6.2	Canadian Surveys of Premarital Sex Among University Students	182
8.1	Median Ages of Canadian Women at Family Life Course Events, 1831–1840 to 1951–1960 Birth Cohorts	254
8.2	The Five Top-Ranked Reasons for Marital Breakdown, as Provided by the Separated and Divorced in Selected Surveys	258
8.3	Calculation of Equalization Payment Owed on Divorce	262