

Seasonal Sociology: How we mark, celebrate, enjoy, and dread the seasons

Lecturer: Dr. Tonya Davidson

Do you get a sense of cozy wistfulness in fall when the leaves are crunchy and the opportunities to buy pumpkin-spice everything have suddenly popped up? And, just months later, in January, find yourself bombarded with media and news messaging around weight-loss new year's resolutions that seem at odds with the thick stews and bulky sweaters the season demands? In this lecture series, you will explore how such rituals related to the natural world are highly social phenomena.

Throughout this series you will be introduced to contemporary Canadian sociology as well as multiple sociological interpretations of a variety of seasonal and social phenomena. Each week you will learn how sociologists unpack meanings ascribed to different types of weather, rather than seeing seasons as taken-for-granted facts of nature.

Join Dr. Tonya Davidson to explore sociological analyses of social seasonal experiences, from summer weddings to winter funerals, and from Mother's Day celebrations in spring to Thanksgiving dinner in fall. Together you will reflect on seasonal change in Ottawa, and analyse how seasonal experiences both bring society together *and* further entrench existing forms of social inequality.

Lecture Series Outline:

Week 1 - Introduction to Sociology and introduction to the seasons

In this class I will introduce participants to the discipline of sociology. I will introduce demography, and some seasonal demographic trends, seasons and the life course, and pay attention to the seasonality of summer weddings and winter funerals.

Week 2 - Spring

Spring is the season of messy puddles, Easter egg hunts, vacations for some, celebrating mothers for many. In this week I introduce the sociology of religion through an analysis of Vancouver's Sikh Vaisakhi parades, and the sociology of family through discussing a study on depictions of motherhood and fatherhood in Mother's Day and Father's Day cards.

Week 3 - Summer

This week we will discuss a long-standing and popular challenge many parents face in the summer: what do we do with the children? While childhood summers are often presented and remembered as endless, carefree, and idyllic, for many parents, summer produces an annual form of economic and social stress. We will discuss different parenting styles identified by sociologists, how these styles are classed, and how they influence Canadian children's summer experiences. We will also engage in a sociological analysis of summer cottage-going practices. Here's a preview: [Sweater Weather podcast on cottages.](#)

Week 4 - Fall

This week focuses on the body: the seasonally labouring body, and the seasonal crafting of the body through consumption. I will introduce participants to the sociology of the body through an analysis of the gendered and racialized labour of creating Thanksgiving dinner—both through the shopping and cooking done to prepare the meal itself, and through engaging with sociological research on the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program in Canada. We will also sip on a little sociology of pumpkin spice lattes. .

Week 5 - Winter

This week will focus on winter cities and their festivals, snow-shoveling, and leisure activities. We will discuss the social solidarity that emerges at skating rinks, and the inclusions and exclusions that are produced through professional winter sports. We will also discuss how city infrastructure can either reinforce or challenge ableism and ageism in winter cities. In Ottawa, winter leisure activities—communities creating their own rinks on the Rideau River, skating on the Rideau Canal, taking in a Senators game—all offer (partial) opportunities for social solidarity. Yet, the social organization of winter in Ottawa also means that the season is socially-produced as alienating for many. Sidewalks and steps into parks that are left snow-covered, icy, and dangerous produce a society in which winter is less magical than it is lonely and treacherous.

Week 6 - Ottawa all year long

In this concluding class we will look at seasonal change in Ottawa as something that is both cyclical and a series of larger historical changes shifted by changing work and leisure activities, and climate change. This lecture will include a discussion of the seasonal labour of the 19th century timber trade; the shift from a local food system based on agrarian time to a globalized food system based on "perpetual harvest;" and the seasonality of Ottawa's main waterways: the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers and the Rideau Canal historically and in an increasingly warming present and future.

Extra Resources:

Article: <https://newsroom.carleton.ca/story/understand-sociology-think-seasons/>

Book: Seasonal Sociology, Edited by Tonya Davidson and Ondine Park:

<https://utorontopress.com/9781487594084/seasonal-sociology/>