



NY State Associations of FCS and FCS Educators
Centennial Celebration of the 1899-1909 Lake Placid Home Economics Founding Conferences

Panel Discussion: Preparing Future Family and Consumer Sciences Leaders
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As the only Canadian attending this Centennial celebration, I bring warm greetings and heartfelt congratulations from Canada (in honour of the 16 Canadian home economists who attended the Lake Placid conferences between 1899-1909). The members of today's panel were asked to share insights about how Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) university and college programs in New York State intend to prepare future FCS leaders. As moderator, I was asked to speak about the evolving circumstances of today's families and how these changes affirm the need for FCS professionals in the future. My approach involves stressing how important it is for university programs to design curricula that help FCS leaders unearth the underlying assumptions about family and consumer life in the 21st century. With ideological clarity comes better leadership and richer, more meaningful change.

Families live in a complex, integrated milieu - social, political, legal, economic, ecological, political and cultural. A milieu is the totality of surrounding conditions and circumstances affecting growth, progress and development. Families' lives also are deeply informed by ideologies, another component of the 21st century milieu. Future FCS leaders need a deep appreciation of the *power of ideologies*, understood to be the, often unspoken, values, beliefs and assumptions of truth behind human actions and interpretations of everyday life.

I suggest that today's families are mired in an ideological quagmire, understood to mean both soft footing and a complex or difficult situation. The economic neo-liberal ideology comprises privatization, decentralization, deregulation (all three resulting in less government support and protection) and individualism. People living within this ideological camp value their own self-interest, competition and efficiency. They assume scarcity, have little use for unions and define materialism as success. Hand-in-hand with neoliberalism is capitalism. This ideology values profit, wealth, property ownership and technological and economic progress. A third ideology is social Darwinism, with the familiar axiom, *survival of the fittest*. If people do not work hard and cannot pay for something, they do not deserve it. If they fail, it is because they were not able to reason and make good choices (they were not fit). They do not deserve support in the form of government policies because they are not contributing to the economic productivity of the nation (supporting them is an unforgivable waste of scarce resources).

This ideological quagmire also includes consumerism. It is common today to refer to the consumer society, labelled such because it has market values at its core (see above paragraph). In a consumer society, people define themselves by what they own. Consumer societies are very violent. People end up harming others and themselves through their consuming behaviour through no fault of their own, per se. Rather, global production systems and markets are organized and structured in such a way that it is very difficult to spend money and not tread on

the rights of other humans, species, even the planet. This reality is called structural violence, a feature of the ideology of consumerism. Finally, families are influenced by the ideology of patriarchy, which privileges men over women and conveys power to men. It is predicated on the assumption that certain groups should be marginalized and kept in disenfranchised, disempowered positions. The people on the lower rungs of society actually are the power behind the upper elite but are so oppressed that they do not see themselves in this light.

Within this ideological quicksand, families are said to have failed if they cannot pull their weight or stay in the game. Families are a key social institution, the cornerstone of societies. When other key social institutions adapt and change, they are said to be in transition (e.g., legal system, justice system, labour markets, the economy, governments, organized religion, et cetera). But, when families change the way they look (structure and demographics) and the way they try to meet their basic roles and functions in society, they are said to be in crisis. Through the lens of this complex ideological quagmire, the other social institutions watch families and assign a blame-the-victim scenario. Families are said to have failed and need to be fixed, rehabilitated, so they can work better.

Those living in these prevailing ideological camps characterize families as financially illiterate, inept credit and debt managers, unethical characters, and social failures. A powerful chain reaction is set in place. When portrayed this way, families feel undervalued, under supported, reprimanded, accused, penalized, blamed and they become distrustful of the system. This situation creates strong emotions - guilt, fear, anger, resentment, apathy, anxiety, suspicion and uncertainty. In a consumer society, informed by the ideological milieu noted earlier, people spend money and engage in other destructive behaviours to assuage these dark emotions, thereby perpetrating the vicious cycle and sinking people further into the quicksand.

FCS undergraduate and graduate program planners need to design curricula that helps future FCS leaders free people from this ideological quicksand. These oppressive chains mire families in a victim, push back and retrenchment mode at a time when they need to be liberated and empowered to change the human condition. FCS leaders can do this by being socialized to stand in the centre of this quagmire and amass energy around themselves (like a whirling dervish). With this collective, professional, synergistic energy, FCS leaders can help generate change for the good of humanity, and do so by working with families and the home.

FCS colleges and universities can augment traditional and longstanding approaches to curricula with a collection of new ideas: (a) families as a social institution in transition rather than in crisis; (b) beyond patriarchy, embracing new, liberating visions of power; (c) a culture of peace rather than a consumer society; (d) human rights and responsibilities to augment consumer rights and responsibilities; (e) consumer-citizens (even global citizenship and cosmopolitanism) rather than just consumers; (f) mindful markets and life-centered economies rather than capitalistic markets; (g) consumer moral leaders instead of just ethical resource managers; (h) transdisciplinarity instead of just interdisciplinarity; (i) integral practice (respecting chaos, tensions and uncertainty) instead of integrated practice focussed on balance and harmony; (j) complex, emergent problems instead of just complicated problems; (k) transformative (better still, integral) leadership instead of transactional or transmissional; and, (l) a focus on the human condition instead of just well-being and quality of life.

From this vanguard position, FCS curricula can socialize future FCS leaders to view families as empowered participants of the 21st century influencing the world using a new collection of ideologies that privilege life, relationships, humans, other species and the planet. Replacing century-old ideologies with new lines of thinking is a powerful way for FCS university and college programs in New York State and elsewhere to prepare future FCS leaders.