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HERE, FATHER DOESN'T KNOW BEST

What makes us different: patriarchal attitudes are flourishing south of the border, but Canadians are showing a marked divergence of opinion, says pollster MICHAEL ADAMS

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The fear of American popular culture's influence has been growing for decades. American movies and television programs, which spilled over the invisible Canadian border from the outset, began to make inroads into Europe in the 1950s. Coca-Cola was an international brand for decades, but in the 1980s it was joined by McDonald's as a ubiquitous icon of Americanization. Now the Internet promises to dwarf the impact of U.S. movies, television and fast food. Are we all destined to be Americanized? Is it just a matter of time?

Atop the list of countries seen as merging into American cultural hegemony is Canada, particularly English-speaking Canada. In his book, *Star-Spangled Canadians*, Jeffrey Simpson writes: "Canadians, whether they like or acknowledge it, have never been more like Americans, and Canadian society has never been more similar to that of the United States."

I, too, see signals that Canada is being absorbed into the American economy and culture. However, I also see evidence of Canadians remaining different from Americans in the ways we think, live and behave. There's some evidence that the differences are getting larger as the cultures diverge.

Nearly 20 years ago, my colleagues at Environics in Toronto and CROP in Montreal began a study of Canadian social values. In our first survey of Canadian values in 1983, we asked Canadians if they strongly or somewhat agreed or disagreed that: "The father of the family must be the master in his own house." We posed more than 100 such questions to respondents that year. Our intention was to track these 100 items over time, dropping some, adding others; we hoped we'd measure what was important to Canadians or what was changing in our values and perspectives on life.

The "father must be master" question has become legendary at Environics. We love it because it measures a traditional, patriarchal attitude to authority in our most cherished institution: the family. Sons inherit the land, starting with the first -- primogeniture prevents estates from being subdivided like amoebas. Sons inherit the family business as in *Smith and Son*. Sons, not daughters, are named "Junior" in the hope they will prove worthy of their father's aristocratic seed.

That first time, a total of 42 per cent of Canadians agreed that the father should be master, 15 per cent strongly so and 27 per cent somewhat so. Twenty-six per cent disagreed strongly, 31 per cent somewhat disagreed, and zero per cent had no opinion (this was one of the few topics on which everyone had an opinion).

We reported that the country was split on the subject, but that the figure probably represented a decline from the past. In Canada, the decision about what car to buy might not be dad's prerogative; mom and the kids might also have a say.

Every year thereafter a smaller proportion of Canadians agreed. By 1992, the year before Kim Campbell became our first female prime minister, only 26 per cent of Canadians still said dad should be on top -- a drop of 16 per cent in less than nine years. Our colleagues in France had been tracking this question since 1975 and they, too, were finding the same kind of systematic decline in the preference for patriarchal authority. So, too, in other European countries.

Nineteen ninety-two was the first year we began conducting social-values research in the United States, the world capital of individualism and egalitarianism, of civil rights movements and affirmative action (remember, an American was the first to deflower the feminine mystique). We speculated that the United States would be ahead of Canada and France on this trend.

We found to our surprise that 42 per cent of Americans told us the father should be master, while 57 per cent disagreed and 1 per cent had no opinion. The gap between the two countries was a substantial 16 per cent.

Many, including veteran U.S. analysts, found our research hard to believe. We kept doing our annual polls in Canada, which continued to show erosion in support for patriarchal authority. By 1996, Canadian support had dropped to 20 per cent. But the 1996 U.S. numbers showed a two-point increase in the proportion who thought dad should be boss.

In our 2000 Canadian survey, only 5 per cent reported being strongly in support of patriarchal authority, down from the 15 per cent we found in 1983 (bad news for Stockwell Day). This decline was an authentic social revolution. Despite unremitting attacks on boomer values by people like David Frum, political conservatism has not translated into cultural conservatism in Canada.

The proportion in France favouring patriarchal leadership had also declined from 61 per cent in 1975 to 30 per cent in 2000. The Bastille of French chauvinism was also crumbling.

In Canada, almost everyone was part of this revolution, even men, who by 2000 had only 23 per cent of their numbers in support of dad being boss at home. The 60-plus group showed the largest drop: In 1992, 40 per cent thought father should be master, but by 2000, only 26 per cent of this age group said so. The highest-income category was also the most progressive (only 12 per cent of those earning \$60,000 or more believed dad should be king of his castle). Married and single people were exactly the same.

Meanwhile, we found that where 42 per cent of Americans believed the father should be master in 1992, the number increased to 44 per cent in 1996. We wondered if this was a statistical anomaly. We went back into the field in 2000 to find out if the frontal assault on patriarchal authority by U.S. president Bill Clinton and television icon Homer Simpson would bring U.S. numbers more into line with those in Canada and France.

This time, 48 per cent of Americans said the father of the family must be master in his own home; 51 per cent disagreed and 1 per cent had no opinion.

We were stunned.

The details were even more stunning: Forty-three per cent of American women agreed with the statement -- up nine points from 1992. And among baby boomers aged 35 to 44, 48 per cent said dad should be boss, up 12 points over 1992. This was the biggest increase of any age cohort. (Only 15 per cent of younger Canadian boomers take this position -- meaning that the gap between younger Canadian boomers and Americans in this cohort is an astounding 33 points.)

As in Canada, better educated Americans are less likely than their less educated peers to adhere to traditional patriarchal notions. Yet the college or university educated Americans are three times as likely as their Canadian peers to believe the man should be boss (38 per cent in the United States; 13 per cent in Canada). And in the United States, higher-income groups are only slightly less likely to defer to paternal leadership.

In Canada, singles (17 per cent) are no more likely than married folk (16 per cent) to embrace patriarchy. By contrast, U.S. singles (51 per cent) are more likely than their married peers (47 per cent) to think guys should be superior.

On this issue there's a consensus across Canada. Regional differences are barely outside the margin of statistical error: Quebec, at 15 per cent, is least likely to think father should be master, followed by British Columbia (17 per cent), Ontario and Atlantic Canada (18 per cent) and Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, all at 21 per cent.

But the United States is regionally divided: New England is least chauvinistic at 29 per cent, followed by the Plains states (36 per cent) and the Midwest (46 per cent). Above the national average are Texarkana (54 per cent) and the Deep South, where 71 per cent believe the gentleman of the house should be master.

Most likely to favour the notion of the traditional father are residents of small towns in America (54 per cent). However, Canada shows more homogeneity of social values. In cities of a million or more, 17 per cent think father knows best. The figure is 16 per cent in small towns and cities of 5,000 to 999,000 people; in hamlets and rural areas the proportion is a whopping 18 per cent.

I suspect many Americans will doubt our findings and question our methodology. Yet in each country we use exactly the same question and poll representative samples of people aged 15 or older.

Others will suggest that groups within America, such as Hispanics and African-Americans, may skew the results (it's presumed that they descend from more macho cultures). But at most, Hispanics account for 1 or 2 per cent of the large difference between Canada and the United States. The same is true for other American segments thought to be paternalistic in orientation: Sixty-two per cent of born-again Christians think father should be master, but 36 per cent of fundamentalists disagree. The same proportions of African-Americans (62 per cent) and Baptists (62 per cent) say dad should be on top, but significant minorities of each (36 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively) disagree. The 34.5 million African-Americans could only skew the Canada-U.S. comparisons by 1 or 2 per cent at most.

Besides, if the immigrant factor were significant, then Canada (where 17 per cent of the population is foreign born) should be more patriarchal than the United States (where 10 per cent is foreign born).

Interestingly, the difference between America's religious skeptics, the atheists (34 per cent), and the least skeptical, who are the born-again Christians (62 per cent), is 28 points. That's a

big gap and evidence of the larger culture divide in America. In Canada, the gap between groups is less extreme. The group least likely to think father should be master -- women (10 per cent) -- is just 17 points lower than the group most likely to agree -- those earning \$10,000 a year or less (28 per cent).

We're seeing distinct cultures on either side of our almost invisible border. American culture is divided on the issue of patriarchal authority and the divisions of opinion among various groups are wider than those in Canada.

The 49th parallel, the world's longest undefended border, is certainly the world's most porous border. For more than a century, Canadians have been inundated with U.S. products, movies, music, TV, sports, brands and icons. And yet, in the face of this flood, Canadians remain distinctly Canadian. In fact, our distinctness from the country that so dominates our economy and popular culture is growing in at least one important aspect of our value system: our concept of the authority that goes with being a man, a woman or a child in the family. It's no leap to assume the natural leader in the house is also the natural leader at work, in the church, in politics.

In 1976, Canada's Progressive Conservative Party elected a new leader, Joe Clark, whose wife, Maureen McTeer, kept her maiden name. Despite this, Mr. Clark became prime minister. Now Mr. Clark once again heads the Conservative Party, and has just served as marshall of Calgary's 2001 Gay Pride parade. Can you imagine U.S. President George W. Bush leading a Gay Pride parade in Houston?

For cultures that fear "going the way of Canada," of being inevitably absorbed into the U.S. cultural juggernaut, there's hope in these numbers.

Those who think that the "globalization" of commerce, culture, and communications will inevitably lead to the Americanization of values and lifestyles may have overstated the case. The opposite may occur, not as an ideological reaction or an act of public policy, but because we all have different roots and we react to globalizing forces in different ways, sometimes unconsciously.

There is certainly evidence, both empirical and anecdotal, that people, money, ideas, and images are moving faster and more ubiquitously than ever.

But perhaps American pop culture passes through our systems like the contents of a bottle of Coke.

Having tasted it, we remain ourselves.

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