Apples and Oranges:
A comparison of the United States of America and Canada.

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"Life in these United States," is a very popular section of the Reader’s Digest monthly publication. But with a Canadian readership of almost eight million, how well does the magazine relate to its audience? Sure there are differences between the United States and Canada, but how deep do those differences go? Seymour Martin Lipset argues that Canadian citizens are completely different from U.S. citizens. He bases his opinion on the assumption that we are all products of history. To an extent this is true but is it really as easy as comparing apples to oranges? Looking at the two country's pasts, political systems, and citizen's views on politics the analogy would hold true. However, what happens when to this parallel when the scope is narrowed down to the individual citizen level? Are Canadians and Americans all that different?

Lipset points out in his book, Continental Divide, that America was founded by rebellion, while Canada became an independent nation peacefully and slowly. In this regard, it is true that America and Canada are in opposition. Many of the current views citizens of both countries hold are rooted in the history of their country. Americans in general are very goal oriented, driven, and open to change. This is in order with what would be expected if history plays any role in the future. America
leads the world in change and new ideas, this can be attributed to the fact that in the past, American forefathers instilled in all Americans the belief that "what we have now can always be improved upon." In the 1770's, the ultimate proof of this belief was displayed when the American people fought a war with Britain in order to break away and form a new system of government. Canada, on the other hand, promoted conservatism to its citizens by peacefully breaking its ties with Britain. Canada changed very little from the split with Britain. The governmental system of Canada did not change from the days before the quiet secession. As a result of this, it could be argued that Canadians in general are very content with the way things are. This can be seen in many aspects of Canadian life. For example look at the class stratification. In Canada very few people change their class. If they are born middle class they will remain middle class, and that holds true for the other classes also. Canadians have very little social mobility, but the citizens do not seem to mind this, they are content with what they have. In America however, because of the drive the individuals have, there is a great deal of status change.

Another area in which Canada and the United States differ is the political system each country has. After the

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Revolutionary War, Americans created a whole new system of
government called a democratic system. In so doing they
made a structure that does not have a single person or group
of people controlling every aspect of the citizen's life,
instead there are many groups of elected officials that must
agree on what is best for the country in order to change the
current law. Because of the system of checks and balances
that the American government is based on, the rights of the
individual are secure. While in Canada, after the
succession from Britain, the old style of monarchical
government was kept in place, by instituting a parliamentary
system. In a parliamentary system the state is given a much
larger and broader role in the lives of the citizens, which
is similar to a confederal system. The Canadians also
believe in POGG. POGG stands for Peace, Order, and Good
Government. This means that the citizens basically trust
government officials because they were elected by the people
and they do not want to start a problem that can be avoided.
The government is comprised of elected officials, but these
officials, through party discipline and government
structure, have complete power over the country. The
Canadian system of government supports this "one power" by
allowing the prime minister to be a member of the House of
Commons, and leaving the Senate with a powerless position in
the decision making process. The Senate holds a powerless
position because, like the governor general’s position, it is more of a “rubber stamping” or “good for the image” job. Canadians enjoy many of the freedoms that U.S. citizens do, their freedoms are specifically written down in an exhaustive list in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, while the freedoms that Americans have are three very broad liberties; the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. This means that anything that is not written down in Canada is not a right protected from change by the government. In America, the case is reversed and anything that is not withheld from the United States citizens is protected as a right. The Canadian government, therefore, holds a more substantial role in the lives of the people as a whole.

The last major issue that Canada and America differ in is the view, of the general population, on government. Americans, on average, hold a feeling of distrust toward the government. Many people claim that the U.S. government is being Big Brother in the way it watches over them, and controls their daily life. It is true that the United States government does a lot of intervening in its citizens daily life, but most Americans do not really know what the government does for them. The reason people do not realize the role of the government is because they do not pay attention to the way government works. Americans have no interest in learning the ins and outs of government, they
only want to watch and criticize from afar. In Canada the exact opposite holds true, people on the average trust the government and support what it is doing. Even though government plays a much larger role in Canada than in the United States, most of Canada's people do not have the feeling that they are being watched or held back. The general consensus in Canada seems to be that government is good and is only protecting the citizens from things that are bad for the country. In part this comes from the history of the county and in part this line of thinking stems from the peoples' knowledge of how government works and what government does. The people of Canada pay very close attention to what is happening around them and also to how the government works. This knowledge allows the people to understand why the government does what it does, and it helps to build a link of trust between the citizen and their government.

Although there are many differences between Canadians and Americans, as listed above, there are also some similarities. Most of these similarities however, are found on the non-political level. Looking at the average person from each country, one is quickly alerted to the fact that the households are structured in much the same way. For example, in both countries, the average family size is
roughly equal, with Canadian families consisting of 3.1 members and American families at 3.2 members. The normal Canadian house is divided into 5.4 rooms with 2.1 bedrooms, while in America the norm is just slightly higher with 5.6 rooms of which 2.2 are bedrooms. The similarities between individuals do not stop there though, there is also a parallel between other aspects of people's lives.

Life expectancy comparisons reveal a striking similarity also; in both the U.S. and in Canada, men live roughly 73 years while women live about 80 years. While it is common knowledge that people in non-third world countries live longer, the extreme closeness in figures points to a common life style and background between Canadians and Americans. One of the lifestyle characteristics that may bring about this similarity is the standard of living in both countries. Canada's living standard is among the highest in the world. 83% of Canadians own at least one car, that number closely rivals America's 87%. Computers are owned by 21% of Canadian home owners and 26% of American homeowners. Obviously with figures such as these, it is easy to see that citizens of both countries share a high standard of living.

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2 All data on America comes from the 1990 United States Census. This information can be found at http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/

3 All data on Canada comes from the 1991 Canadian Census.
The last major area of similarities, that will be covered here, deals with education. In Canada, 11.4% of the population has a university degree. That number is just slightly higher than the 10.9% of American's with a college degree. This information not only points at a similarity between the two nations but it also shows that on the individual basis, Canadians and Americans have just about the same academic inclination. This fact bridges yet another gap between the people of each country.

Clearly then, when all the information presented here is looked at, it is easy to see that the people of Canada and the citizens of the United States are not the same, but they are not all together different either. There are distinct differences in history, government structure, and views on politics, but the individuals of the two countries are very similar when compared. So maybe the analogy of comparing apples and oranges does not quite fit, perhaps it should be thought of as comparing tangerines and oranges.
Bibliography


Note: On page four you made a comment that I believe says: “here you discuss individualism not democracy but limited government.” Unfortunately I do not understand what you were trying to convey with this comment. I tried to fix the other stuff, but this comment was left as is, sorry.