

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE RURAL MILIEU AS A VARIABLE IN  
THE MAINTENANCE OF TRADITIONALISM:

attitudes toward courtship, marriage, and  
parenthood among French-Canadian adolescents.

by

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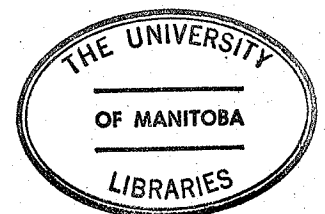
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## ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was presented to 457 rural and urban French-Canadian adolescents. Areas of investigation included attitudes toward the double standard, religion as a normative guide in dating, divorce, sex-role differentiation, family size, delay of child-bearing after marriage, birth control, interfaith and interethnic marriage, child-rearing practices and the importance of religious education. The data were compared controlling for residence and sex. Statistically significant residential differences were found with respect to attitudes toward family size, birth control, and familism, with urban subjects being less traditionally oriented than rural subjects. Statistically significant attitudinal differences due to residential background were found in the female segment of the sample with regard to interfaith marriage, family size, birth control, and the importance of religious education. Urban females were less traditionally oriented than rural females. Statistically significant sex differences were noted in attitudes toward the double standard and religious education. Males were less traditionally oriented than females.

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## INTRODUCTION

Interest in the Canadian family has gained considerable momentum in the last twenty years. Since Canada is noted for its effort in preserving the cultural heritage of its multi-ethnic population, it is logical that a considerable number of research studies have focused on the various ethnic groups which make up the Canadian population. Ishwaran's (1971) book, The Canadian Family, is an example of the interest in ethnic variations in the Canadian family.

Of the different ethnic groups in Canada, the French-Canadians have been the most extensively studied, for reasons which will be discussed later. Most of the major studies on the French-Canadian family have originated from Quebec, so-called French Canada. However, to date, very little attention has been paid to the French-Canadian family outside of its homogeneous setting, i.e., in Canadian provinces other than Quebec. This is particularly true of the French-Canadian family in Western Canada.

Researchers such as Miner, Hughes, and Garigue have provided valuable descriptions of the French-Canadian family in Quebec. Their descriptions have given insight into the relationships between the French-Canadian family and its surrounding community, roles and relationships within the family, as well as the general attitudes and values of French-Canadian people regarding issues which are related to family life. Also, various explanations of change within the French-Canadian family have been put forth by these authors.

This study raises the question of whether the studies reported are descriptive of the French-Canadian family, regardless of its environment, or whether these characteristics will vary, especially when the French-Canadian family is situated in a culturally heterogeneous setting such as Manitoba.

The purpose of the study is three-fold:

- 1) to contribute to the knowledge of the French-Canadian family outside of its major cultural setting,
- 2) to investigate variations in the French-Canadian family due to immediate environment, i.e., rural vs. urban environment,
- 3) to compare findings with previously reported research on the French-Canadian family.

#### Statement of the problem

Rural-urban differences in the French-Canadian family have been the topic of considerable debate among researchers in Quebec, as will be seen in the review of literature. This study then attempts to distinguish between rural and urban family-related attitudes of French-Canadian adolescents in Manitoba in order to identify situational variations, if any, within that particular component of the French-Canadian family.

Specifically, this study is a comparison of rural and urban French-Canadian adolescents by sex with respect to their attitudes toward courtship, marriage, and childrearing.

## CHAPTER I

Review of literature

In reviewing the literature relevant to the study of the French-Canadian family, the following topics will be considered in logical sequence:

- 1) a brief description of the "typical" North American family as viewed by Sirjamaki (1947) and Udry (1971),
- 2) a consideration of sociological work on the Canadian family,
- 3) a review of early studies on the French-Canadian family,
- 4) a discussion of two selected theoretical models related to the study of rural-urban differences,
- 5) a review of more recent French-Canadian studies, focusing specifically on family-related issues.

The middle-class family model

Literature on the family in North America has characteristically focused its attention on an "ideal-type" family, the typical American family, "white, urban, middle-class, Protestant" (Burchinal, 1964: 159). However, studying the North American family in relation to an "ideal-type", while heuristically useful, can be misleading. Even in early American history, the cultural backgrounds of the North American population

evidenced great variation. Each immigrant family brought to North America the beliefs, customs, and attitudes of its native land, which still remain apparent today in varying degrees among North American families. Turner (1970: 4) has stated in this respect: "...actual family configurations are seldom precise replicas of culture patterns".

Nevertheless, the defense of a generalized approach to the study of the North American family has been supported with the following arguments: 1) many of the cultures which were brought to North America have become assimilated, such that differences are more relative than absolute and thus, there are sufficient commonalities to speak of the "North American family", 2) although it is limiting to speak of a generalized entity, it is often necessary to so generalize in order to assess the degree and complexity of social change. Because many factors contribute to family change and because it is undoubtedly true that these factors are closely interrelated, the respective influence of each of these these factors is difficult to measure. Procedurally, it is more convenient for the social scientist to speak of the American family as possessing homogeneous characteristics; consequently, the "typical middle-class family" model (Edwards, 1969: 4-6).

Although other authors have described the North American family, the descriptions of Sirjamaki and Udry will be reviewed here. These descriptions are not theoretical models and only serve to outline prevalent family values in North American society. As will be discussed later, such descriptions of the "typical" Canadian family are at present inadequate. This particular study attempts to investigate the

attitudes of members of "atypical" families, and thus a consideration of what is reported as "typical" family values seems appropriate. Only those characteristics of the North American family which are relevant to the variables under study will be reviewed.

Sirjamaki's "cultural configurations". One illustrative description of the normative American family is that of John Sirjamaki (1947). Sirjamaki outlines eight sets of norms which are most prominent in the white, urban, middle-class, Protestant family. Of these, the following are particularly relevant to this study:

- 1) Marriage is the normal way of life for adult members of both sexes, and marriage is defined as productive of personal happiness and satisfaction.
- 2) Marriage is based on love and free choice, i.e., "personal attraction", (Sirjamaki, 1947: 466).
- 3) The ultimate criterion for judging the success of a marriage is the personal happiness of the husband and wife. The logical consequence is that a relatively easy system of divorce is necessary to balance a marriage system wherein happiness is the criterion of success.
- 5) Childhood should be protected and prolonged. Children are physically and emotionally dependent on their parents and encouraged to be self-centered.
- 6) Sex relationships should be confined to marriage. Premarital and extramarital sexual experiences are condemned.
- 7) Husbands and wives should follow traditional roles, with men being expected to develop competence in occupational, social, and sexual

roles, and to support financially their wives and children. Women are expected to be primarily mothers and homemakers, and to cater to the needs of men. However, Sirjamaki (1947) adds that there is a tendency toward increasing equality for women, causing conflicting role expectations for both men and women.

7) Emphasis on individual values in the family, i.e., "The family should exist for its members rather than vice versa" (Leslie, 1967: 261).

Every member should be encouraged to seek personal fulfillment.

Familistic values are not very strong in the North American family.

Sirjamaki (1947) recognizes the fact that these norms do not apply to all North American families. He is, as he says, only attempting to "strike an average" (Sirjamaki, 1947: 465). It must also be kept in mind that with change continuously occurring, Sirjamaki's norms may not accurately describe the present value system of the North American family, since almost 30 years have lapsed since the publication of his work. The need for revision may be particularly true in the area of marital roles. In order to verify this, one need only consider a more recent description of the North American family.

Udry's "belief systems". Udry (1971: 11-14) discusses four belief systems which he feels are shared by the majority of North Americans. These are: 1) the Christian tradition, 2) democratic equalitarianism, 3) individualism, 4) secularism. These belief systems will now be reviewed.

#### 1. The Christian tradition.

Although many Americans do not, in practice, identify with

Christianity, many values currently associated with marriage are the result of the Christian influence in America. Some of these values are the permanence of marriage, monogamy, and the authority of men. Furthermore, due to the Christian influence, child-bearing is encouraged and sex outside of marriage is considered wrong.

## 2. Democratic equalitarianism.

The value of equality among all people began as a political value but has extended to relationships in the family, especially male-female and parent-child relationships. Equality of the sexes is emphasized and children also learn very early to challenge the authority of the parents.

## 3. Individualism.

Individualism is a particularly strong value in America. Our society fosters the development of the individual personality and the achievement of individual goals to the subordination of group and family goals. This has brought about the wider acceptance of divorce and the little concern for family traditions.

## 4. Secularism.

Udry (1971: 14) defines a "secular society" as "one in which there is a generalized willingness to change social patterns and traditional beliefs", as contrasted to a "sacred society, in which people are reluctant and resistant to social change of any kind". This willingness to accept change encourages change to occur rapidly in the society, thereby affecting and transforming family relationships.

Comparing and contrasting Sirjamaki's cultural configurations

with Udry's belief systems, one finds many common factors which describe American family life. Both authors emphasize the importance of marriage in our society. Sirjamaki speaks of marriage as being the ultimate life goal of both men and women, while Udry relates marriage to the Christian influence with the consequent values of permanence, monogamy, and the authority of men. The values described by Sirjamaki are those of love, free choice, and happiness in marriage. Both authors relate American sexual values to the Christian tradition. Both authors emphasize the value placed on childhood. Sirjamaki explains divorce by relating it to the high value placed upon personal happiness in marriage, the logical consequence of failure to achieve happiness in marriage being divorce. Udry, however, relates divorce to the value of individualism. In essence, the two authors' explanations are similar, as personal happiness is a component of the value placed on individualism. Both authors emphasize the value placed on child-bearing in American society. Lastly, both authors speak of male-female roles in marriage. Sirjamaki (1947) describes traditional roles while recognizing that changes were taking place toward greater equality at the time. Udry's (1971) analysis reflects the changes that have taken place in male-female relationships and he stresses that marriage is becoming a more equalitarian relationship in this respect, adding, however, that conflict still exists between the traditional and modern orientations.

In sum, Sirjamaki and Udry are quite consistent in their respective descriptions of the North American family, although their works were



reported many years apart (1947/1971).

### The Canadian family

Having briefly reviewed the value system of the "typical American family" as described by Sirjamaki and Udry, the question arises, "How does the Canadian family compare with the American family, and furthermore, is there a "typical" Canadian family?". Because this study is concerned with a particular segment of a Canadian ethnic family, French-Canadian adolescents, the available literature on the Canadian family will be reviewed so as to provide a framework within which the French-Canadian family can be studied. Because family systems are often closely related to societal structures, a selected characteristic of Canadian society, cultural pluralism will also be discussed.

One characteristic which is frequently mentioned as a distinguishing feature between Canadian and American society is cultural pluralism in Canada. Ossenberg (1967: 202) says, "Unlike the United States, Canada is a plural society in almost every sense of the term". Ossenberg (1971: 124) defines a plural society as "a society which has become segmented in terms of diverse and discrete institutional systems including the family, religion, and at times political and economic systems. Canada is similar to many plural societies wherein the concept of the "mosaic" has been encouraged and perpetuated. Pluralism is a characteristic common to many of the former British colonies".

Thus, whereas American society holds the "melting pot" ideal (Arnold, 1970: 13), Canadian society has been frequently referred to as a "salad bowl" (Ishwaran, 1971: 19) or "mosaic" (Porter, 1965), wherein ethnic differences are encouraged and the preservation of these differences is positively valued. In this respect, Canadian society clearly distinguishes itself from American society which attempts to assimilate its immigrants into the "American" way of life.

The above difference between the two societies is one which the author feels has a notable bearing on family life. If families in the United States are encouraged by the melting pot ideal to adopt similar value systems (Wrong, 1964), then it may be possible to describe the "typical American family". The situation in Canada appears to be quite different because ethnic families in Canada are able and therefore likely to maintain their beliefs, customs, and traditions. It is difficult to describe specifically how this process works, but one could surmise that rather than overt pressure to preserve ethnic differences in Canada, one finds a lack of pressure toward conformity that is found in American society. As a consequence of this maintenance of cultural differences, it becomes very difficult to speak of the "typical Canadian family". In fact, Elkin (1968: 92) states, "There is no one Canadian family. ... As the geographical setting and as the social class, religious, ethnic, occupational, and other groupings vary, so too do our families". Apart from the viewpoint that there is difficulty in defining what being a Canadian means (Jacobson, 1971), perhaps this is one reason why a sociology of the Canadian family has not been developed.

It must be noted that sociology in general has experienced slow growth in Canada. Clark (1974) suggests that this may be due to the strong British influence in the development of the Canadian social sciences. While sociology in the United States has experienced a tremendous growth since 1920, rapid growth of sociology in Canada has only taken place since 1960. It is quite understandable, then, that the study of the family in Canada has lagged behind the study of the family in the United States.

In some cases, the assumption has been made that the Canadian family is similar to the American family (Ishwaran, 1971). This is evident in the extensive use of American textbooks in Canadian universities. However, in recent years, efforts have been made to encourage and integrate research on the Canadian family (Elkin, 1968; Ishwaran, 1971). Still, research into the Canadian family has only recently gained momentum. Ishwaran gives three reasons for this:

1) Canada is a younger nation than the United States and has only recently experienced problems which would generate family sociology, 2) Canada's immigration policy has ensured that tensions between ethnic groups do not explode as in the United States, 3) because sociology tends to be problem-oriented, ethnic groups do not get studied until a problem arises, e.g., the French-Canadians. Ethnic groups in Canada are more autonomous than in the United States. As a result of the limited research in the area, Canada is thought of as being mainly bicultural.

It is difficult, for the reasons tendered earlier, to speak of the English-Canadian family. Vallee and Whyte (1968; 850) support

this statement by saying, "An entity called English-Canadian society probably exists, but only in the minds of those who lack a substantial knowledge of the whole of Canada". Because such a large number of ethnic groups comprise "English-Canadian society", it is therefore difficult to generalize about the English-speaking family. However, Schlesinger (1972: 4-6) attempts to describe families in Canada, and outlines a series of characteristics of Canadian families, which are similar to those noted of the American family. Some of these characteristics are: personal (vs. social) interests in marriage, acceptance of divorce, equation of love and sex (whether within marriage or not), the trend toward sexual equality of men and women, emphasis on children's rights, loss of productive functions in the family, high church membership as well as loss of power of the churches in instilling moral values and lastly, high family mobility. Schlesinger's account is highly generalized and certainly not descriptive of many segments of the Canadian population. Furthermore, Schlesinger does not indicate the sources of his generalizations and it is therefore difficult to assess the accuracy of his statements. However, it must be noted that Schlesinger's book was not intended as a summary of the research done on the Canadian family, but rather as a source book for students (high school) in family life.

Recent attempts have been made to describe the Canadian family on the basis of census information (Kubat and Thornton, 1974). Of relevance to this study is the dramatic decline in rural farm population in the prairie provinces, as evidenced by 1971 census data.

Kubat and Thornton (1974) also point out that census data indicates that the stereotype of the large Quebec rural family is no longer valid. The authors also report a recent trend toward early marriage and slight age differences between marriage partners, with the median age of first marriage being 23.5 years for males and 21.4 years for females (Kubat and Thornton, 1974: 87).

To the author's knowledge, there are no other recent works which have attempted to describe a "typical Canadian family" in terms of roles and relationships within the family, common values held by Canadian families, etc. Certainly as stated by Ishwaran (1971: 6), the French-Canadians have received the most extensive consideration in sociological literature. There are several reasons for this:

- 1) their ethnic solidarity is supported by a common language and religion. Wrong (1964: 25) says, "French-speaking Canadians are a good deal more culturally homogeneous than either Americans or English-speaking Canadians";

- 2) another factor is that French-Canadians in Canada are fairly geographically isolated. Although French-speaking Canadians are found in all parts of Canada, the majority are residents of Quebec. Thus, many French-Canadian studies have emanated from Quebec;

- 3) French-Canadians in Canada have received more privileges in the constitution than other ethnic groups and by law, they have been guaranteed the preservation of their language and religion, i.e., the system of bilingualism, with French being one of the official languages. Therefore, it could be said that the preservation of French-Canadian

culture has been facilitated in Canada, and thereby, French-Canadians have remained to date the most solid and distinct ethnic group in Canada.

Quebec, of course, is the cultural homeland of French-Canadians. Consequently, Quebec is frequently referred to as French Canada. However, to equate French Canada with Quebec is somewhat misleading, in light of the distribution of French-speaking people across Canada. This study focuses on French-Canadians outside of Quebec, thereby attempting to contribute to a wider knowledge of the French-Canadian family.

Since the majority of research has been done in Quebec, these studies will be considered first, after which the studies from western Canada will be reviewed. The major works will be presented in the time sequence in which they were done. Thus the early studies will be followed by the more recent studies.

#### Early studies on the French-Canadian family

The early French-Canadian studies give insight into the traditional values held by the French-Canadian family. Although one can expect that French-Canadian family values have changed since the early studies, as family values in general have changed (Parsons, 1955), these studies are relevant in that some of the traditional French-Canadian family values are being tested in this research. In reviewing the early studies, only those characteristics of the French-Canadian family which are relevant to this study will be discussed.

Gerin's work. The first sociological studies in French Canada began as an interest in the rural aspect of the French-Canadian culture. Leon Gerin (1971), a pioneer in the study of French-Canadian society, described French-Canadians as basically a rural society.<sup>1</sup> Gerin (1971: 32. 54-5) describes French Canada as the "stronghold of the family" with the two leading institutions being the family and the Roman Catholic Church. According to Gerin (1971: 43), the mother was the "ruler of the household" in the habitant<sup>2</sup> family. The family was the main educational institution in St. Irene, imparting traditions and rules of social behaviour to the children. Formal education was neglected and individual effort was not emphasized.

Miner's work. Other researchers have also described French Canada as a rural society. Miner's account of St. Denis, a French-Canadian parish in rural Quebec, is a "description of the old rural French-Canadian folk culture in its least altered form" (Miner, 1939: VII Preface). The territory defined by parish boundaries was the center of social life including religious, civil, and economic activities. At the core of the rural life was the family unit in which all members shared responsibility and cooperated toward the ultimate goal of family unity. Large families, averaging ten children were common,

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1. It must be noted that, although the above cited article was published in 1971, Gerin's work dates back to the beginning of the 20th century.

2. The term "habitant" refers to "a settler or descendant of a settler of French origin belonging to the farming class in Canada" (Webster, 1967).

one of the suggested reasons being the need for labour on the farm. Also, the Roman Catholic doctrine encouraged large families. In this context, the importance of religion in St. Denis cannot be overlooked and will be further discussed in a subsequent chapter.

In St. Denis, family unity was exemplified by extensive kinship recognition. Children married according to their parents' wishes, usually with members of the family's social circle. When a child was born, the godparent was usually a family member, again a manifestation of family solidarity.

Child-rearing in St. Denis was largely the responsibility of the mother. Although the birth of another child meant an added burden for the mother, it was usually welcomed by the father because it meant an additional helping hand. A child began to participate in the religious and economic life at the age of six. At home, the boys occupied separate bedrooms from the girls and the sexes were also segregated in schools. Ideally, interest in the opposite sex should only occur when one was ready for marriage.

One of the salient characteristics of St. Denis was its homogeneity of religious affiliation. Since there was hardly any contact with other Christian expressions, Roman Catholic doctrines were accepted without question or contradiction. Children were taught the religious doctrines early and these beliefs formed the basis of the rules of conduct. Says Miner (1939: 94), "The religion is the focal point of a body of sentiments concerning correct social behaviour". To conform meant the reward of heaven and nonconformity meant the threat of hell. Religion