**Canadian Misconceptions That Drive Me Nuts!**

*by Mike Thorburn, TheSoko.com*

**Do Canadians have misconceptions about themselves and other countries?**

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Anyone who has traveled to a foreign country and introduced themselves as Canadian knows about the many misconceptions that float around about us and many of them border on the absurd. Do people actually believe we're all beer-swilling, dog-sled-driving, igloo-dwelling Eskimos, eh?

Lester B. Pearson, then the undersecretary of External Affairs, addressed a youth congress at the United Nations headquarters in 1947. He insisted that Canadians were more than just "a few frozen farmers and trappers huddled in igloos around the North Pole." We're also all familiar with comic Rick Mercer, who has had President Bush lauding the efforts of Prime Minister Poutine. Even Peter Jennings once commented, "Canadians have an abiding interest in surprising those Americans who have historically made little effort to learn about their neighbour to the north."

While that might certainly be true, how much better are Canadians in their perspectives on the world and themselves? Not as far ahead as you might think – here are a few popular ideas that Canadians have that drive me up the wall.  
  
**He Shoots, He Scores**

The popular notion that hockey is representative of our country and the seriousness with which many Canadians take the sport, are both simply a mystery to the rest of the world. I remember one of the many America vs. Canada debates that are prone to happening in my foreign travels, this time in Taipei. While one Canadian was lauding Canada's hockey brilliance, the American he was arguing with said simply, "Whatever, it's just hockey." Simple, concise and an absolute argument-ender.

While it's unbelievably huge in most parts of Canada, the sport of hockey is an afterthought just about everywhere else in the world. Even stateside, the revenue from hockey broadcasts in the United States puts it on par with arena football and extreme sports. Fox Sports was even desperate enough to try to give the puck red comet tails to make it easier for viewing audiences to see the elusive piece of rubber. The population of Canada and the US comes out to around 330 million people and with India's population of over a billion, how surprised can you really be that a whole lot more people are watching cricket? Hockey is a great game, but that's the point: It's just a game.  
  
**Our Neighbours To The South**

The disagreement between the Canadian and the American naturally spilled over into the relationship between the two respective countries. While Canadians are eager to distance themselves from Americans, Americans are secure in the belief that Canadians are nothing more than a barnacle on their hull – powerless without their bigger, stronger brother. While both can be argued ad nauseum, it's the Canadian perspective that irritates me the most.

The notion that Canadian society is drastically different than American society is simply naïve. Anyone that's ever been a cross-country trip knows that trying to define Canadian culture is next to impossible. The culture is a mish-mash of individual and unique groups which all have their own individual charms. Whether you're gallivanting down George Street in St John's, Newfoundland or skiing on the slopes of Whistler, B.C., your experiences in Canada are going to be profoundly diverse. The United States is no different. My experiences in New York City or Boston have varied unbelievably from the time I've spent in California or Arizona, and while there are clearly similarities between the two cultures, the shared stereotypes make up a larger group that can be known simply as "North American culture".  
  
Haggling over the similarities and differences will have you going in circles. The misconception (shared by a countless number of countries) that Americans are ethnocentric, loud and obnoxious is the same sort of pigeonholing that Canadians are often the victim of, yet we do the exact same thing to our southern neighbours. Many Canadians mock the obesity problem in America, yet Canada is the 15th ranked country in obesity deaths and the United States is the 5th. Governments aside, are we really that different? Despite our efforts to distance ourselves from Americans, we favour many of the same celebrities, sports stars and fashions.

**Not So Well-To-Do**

A final misconception that truly irks me is how ignorant Canadians are about the poverty in our country. We're proud (and should be!) of being ranked the 6th best place in the world to live by the United Nations, but in a 2005 report by noted economist Armine Yalnizyan (a study performed for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives), it was revealed that over 1.7 million households are living on less than $20,000 per year, while post-secondary education costs have double and tripled.  
  
In the early 90s, 75% of unemployed workers were receiving government benefits, compared to 38% now. An even more disturbing fact is that the number of homeless is figured to be a quarter million, which is a staggering amount considering our population now rests at under 33 million in total.  
  
Other concerns, such as child poverty, have actually increased since the government pledged to eliminate them. So clearly we're not all as well off as we would like to imagine.