Céline Dion, the ADISQ Controversy, and the Anglophone Press in Canada

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Abstract: ADISQ, the organization that honours excellence in the Quebec music industry, gave francophone singer Céline Dion an award for being the Anglophone Artist of the Year in 1990. At the ADISQ gala that year, which was televised live across Canada, Dion refused to accept the award. Dion’s decision to not accept the award, and the statement she made when turning it down, became the basis for a controversy that received a great deal of coverage in Canada’s anglophone press. This paper examines anglophone press coverage of the ADISQ controversy involving Dion. After outlining press coverage of Dion and ADISQ during the years prior to the controversy, the paper identifies how the controversy began and analyses the issues that dominated the coverage. The paper also examines follow-up coverage of the controversy; it identifies how subsequent news stories on Dion, including some that were written several years later, linked the controversy to other issues.

Introduction

The Association québécoise de l’industrie du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo (ADISQ) is the organization that presents the trophies for the music industry in Quebec. These trophies, known as Félix Awards, are named after revered Québécois songwriter Félix Leclerc. ADISQ hands out its Félix Awards at an annual gala that attracts attention from across Canada. In 1990, this annual event was televised live across the country, with Dion in attendance. During the gala, Dion was presented with the award for Anglophone Artist of the Year. However, when she refused to accept the award, it sparked a controversy that received a great deal of coverage in Canada’s anglophone press. This paper explores how the ADISQ controversy involving Dion was covered by the anglophone press.

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Résumé: L’ADISQ, l’organisme qui reconnaît l’excellence dans l’industrie de la musique au Québec, accorda à la chanteuse francophone Céline Dion le prix du Meilleur Artiste anglophone de l’année 1990. Au gala de l’ADISQ cette année-là—qui fut télévisé en direct partout au Canada—Dion a refusé d’accepter le prix. Cette décision, ainsi que les commentaires que Dion a faites en refusant le prix, suscitèrent une controverse qui fit couler beaucoup d’encre dans la presse anglophone au Canada. Cet article examine comment la presse anglophone a couvert cette controverse de l’ADISQ impliquant Dion. Après avoir tracé les grandes lignes des reportages sur Dion et l’ADISQ dans les années précédant la controverse, cet article identifie comment la controverse commença et analyse les questions qui dominèrent dans la couverture de celle-ci. Cet article examine en outre la couverture suivant la controverse; il identifie comment des reportages ultérieurs sur Dion, y compris certains qui apparurent plusieurs années plus tard, associerent la controverse à d’autres sujets.

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televised gala which is traditionally one of the most watched programs each year in Quebec. Among all the performers who have won Félix trophies since the awards were established in the late 1970s, one in particular stands out: Québécoise singer Céline Dion has won more Félix Awards than any other recording artist. The Félix that Dion won for her first English-language album is perhaps the most interesting. Dion’s refusal to accept the trophy during the 12th annual ADISQ gala in 1990 sparked a controversy. The controversy was one of several that marked the early history of the Félix Awards (Grenier, 1991), and it received much coverage by the anglophone press inside and outside Quebec.

This paper examines how the anglophone press in Canada dealt with the ADISQ controversy involving Céline Dion. It draws on some points which media researchers have made about news stories and controversy in order to interpret the coverage. David Taras (1988) indicates that “drama is the prime ingredient of most news stories. Drama requires sensationalism, winners and losers, and an emotional human element but most of all it requires conflict” (p. 222). Although many news stories address conflict, not all of them address controversy. Controversy necessitates one more ingredient: there must be conflict between different versions of reality. In other words, controversy in news coverage is based on what Gaye Tuchman (1978) refers to as competing “truth-claims.” Controversy is particularly associated with news stories that have a political dimension; as Graham Knight (1982) notes, the opposition between political actors and the formal need to balance interpretations of an event or issue (in the interest of “objectivity”) are among the factors which give most forms of political news “a sense of controversy” (pp. 25-26).

The analysis presented here focuses on two arguments. The first argument suggests that there were two conflicts around truth-claims in the anglophone press coverage of the ADISQ controversy, and one of these conflicts became dominant. The second argument suggests that subsequent news coverage involving Dion linked the controversy to other events and particular themes while sometimes raising issues in the central conflicts.

**Early news coverage of Dion and ADISQ**

Céline Dion was born during 1968 in the small town of Charlemagne, Quebec. She began her recording career at the age of 12. Her first two albums, *La voix du Bon Dieu* and *Céline Dion chante Noël*, were released in 1981. A third collection of songs, *Tellement j’ai d’amour pour toi*, appeared during 1982. The latter album gave Dion her first major success. It sold over 50,000 copies within a year (Dagenais, 1984). It also earned Dion four Félix Awards, making her the biggest winner of the night at the ADISQ gala in 1983.

There was some anglophone press coverage of the ADISQ gala at which Dion received her first Félix Awards, but differences existed between the coverage inside and outside Quebec. The *Montreal Gazette* wrote its own extensive story on the gala and the headline mentioned Dion by name (Griffin, 1983). This suggests that the ADISQ gala was of interest to anglophones in Quebec, and it also suggests that they had some knowledge of Dion. Outside Quebec, the anglophone
press coverage apparently reflected a lower level of interest in the gala and a lack of familiarity with the francophone singer. A few newspapers in English Canada, the Calgary Herald and The Globe and Mail, picked up a brief story on the gala from the Canadian Press (1983a, 1983b). Dion was the focus of the headlines in these newspapers, but the headlines referred to her as a “singer” or a “15-year-old singer” instead of identifying her by name. Dion received better coverage in the anglophone music press. Music Scene, a trade publication for the Canadian music industry, devoted the entire cover of one issue to a photograph of Dion standing at a microphone crying tears of joy while she held one of her Félix Awards. The same issue contained a small article on the ADISQ gala; the title of the article referred to Dion by name, and the first paragraph focused on her (“Céline Dion: Star of the ADISQ Gala,” 1984).

The differences between the anglophone press coverage inside and outside Quebec were generally sustained in reports that mentioned Dion’s successes at other ADISQ ceremonies during the 1980s. Dion was presented with Félix Awards for her work on several more French-language albums, including a few that sold well over 100,000 copies. She won two Félix trophies at the ADISQ gala in 1984. The Montreal Gazette wrote its own comprehensive story on the gala (Griffin, 1984). The small amount of coverage outside Quebec was based on a more limited story by the Canadian Press (1984). Dion was the biggest winner at the ADISQ gala during 1985, picking up a total of five Félix Awards. The headline on the story about the gala in the Montreal Gazette referred to Dion by name (Dupuis, 1985). Some headlines outside Quebec failed to address Dion by name or even mention her at all (Canadian Press, 1985a, 1985c). However, there were exceptions (“ADISQ: Celebrating Céline,” 1986; Canadian Press, 1985b). Beginning in 1986, Dion took a year and a half off so that she could make the transition from child star to adult performer. She re-emerged during 1987 with a sexy new image and another French-language album, Incognito. That album helped Dion win four Félix Awards at the ADISQ gala in 1988. The story on the gala in the Montreal Gazette was extensive, and the headline referred to Dion by name (Lepage, 1988). The Globe and Mail also mentioned Dion by name in the headline of a brief story from the Canadian Press (1988).

By the end of the decade, Dion was well established in Quebec. In her home province, she had sold a total of 900,000 copies of her nine French-language albums and won a record 15 trophies from ADISQ (Kelly, 1990). However, her ambitions went beyond Quebec and her native language; as several articles in the anglophone press noted at the time, Dion spent the late 1980s preparing to break into English Canada and the worldwide English-language market (Abramovitch, 1989; Blain, 1989; Fraser, 1988).

The beginning of the controversy
Dion’s first English-language album, Unison, came out in April 1990. Several anglophone newspapers, including major dailies in English Canada, featured stories about the release of the album (Canadian Press, 1990a; Godfrey, 1990a; Kelly, 1990). Unison was certified platinum in Canada by October 1990, with
almost 40% of the sales being outside Quebec (Barr, 1990). English Canada had finally discovered Dion.

Dion’s work on Unison earned her a nomination from ADISQ in September 1990. The francophone singer was named in the Anglophone Artist of the Year category. Both inside and outside Quebec, anglophone news stories on the ADISQ nominations explained Dion’s presence in the category by indicating that she had been cited for her English-language material (Canadian Press, 1990b; Lepage, 1990).

Dion won the Félix for Anglophone Artist of the Year at the ADISQ gala in October 1990, but she declined to accept it. Speaking live to a television audience across the country (via Société Radio-Canada), Dion explained why she did not want to accept the award. A translation of her remarks in the report which the Montreal Gazette prepared on the gala quoted her as saying: “I am not an anglophone artist and the public understands that. Everywhere I go in the world, I say that I’m proud to be Québécoise” (Delean, 1990, p. D5).

Dion’s actions generated a controversy. They were the focus of several reports on the ADISQ gala in the anglophone press across Canada. Following the long-standing practice of the Montreal Gazette, The Globe and Mail ran its own story on the gala (Godfrey, 1990b). A story by the Canadian Press was picked up by at least two newspapers, the Calgary Herald and The Toronto Star (Canadian Press, 1990d, 1990c). The Toronto Star had never bothered to report on the ADISQ gala before, which suggests that the newspaper only did so this time because its anglophone readership was potentially interested in Dion’s decision to not accept the anglophone artist award. In all of the stories on the gala, the incident involving Dion was taken to be the most important element; it was the subject of the headlines and the first several paragraphs of the stories.

The role of news sources provides the basis for understanding how the incident was constructed as a controversy. Knight (1988) identifies two major types of news sources: “primary definers” and “secondary sources.” Primary definers have the easiest access to the news media. They are officials or experts “whose authority and credibility enable them to set the fundamental terms of the news event or issue” (p. 19). As Knight indicates, secondary sources are also an important component of news stories:

If the primary definers set the terms of news discourse, they are by no means its sole occupants. A standard practice of news production is to accentuate and dramatise conflict and controversy as a means of hooking the viewer or reader. This allows for the incorporation of unofficial, nonexpert sources—ordinary voices—which react to the actions and views of officials and experts. These ordinary voices are secondary: they normally follow the primary definers; they speak less often; and they rarely speak as fully and autonomously. (p. 20)

Through this structuring of news sources, news coverage has an ideological component; it reflects different truth-claims about an event or issue (satisfying the need for “objectivity”), but it also privileges some truth-claims over others.
The various reports on the ADISQ gala illustrate the role of news sources with regard to the controversy. ADISQ officials quickly emerged as the primary definers of the incident involving Dion. In its story on the gala, the Montreal Gazette described the truth-claims of these officials:

Organizers of the awards show were stunned by Dion’s decision. They said she and her manager had several opportunities in recent months to withdraw from the category if it offended them. They noted that her own record company, CBS, nominated her in the anglophone division, and her manager provided the photo for the souvenir program where she appears alongside the other nominees: Corey Hart, Sass Jordan, Men Without Hats and Voivod. (Delean, 1990, p. D5)

The story in the Montreal Gazette did not utilize any secondary sources. The presence of only primary definers may have stemmed from the greater access of ADISQ officials to the news media and the time constraints involved with publishing a story for the morning after the Sunday evening gala. A Canadian Press (1990d) story that appeared two days after the gala introduced the missing conflict while privileging one side over the other; it outlined the position of ADISQ officials before noting the truth-claims made by Dion’s manager and future husband, René Angélil. Angélil contended that ADISQ (rather than her record company) had insulted Dion by placing her in the anglophone category, and he also indicated that he did not have any opportunities to withdraw her name. In its report on the ADISQ gala, The Globe and Mail reinforced the claims of ADISQ officials by undermining those of Angélil; the newspaper described how Angélil had given different stories to the press (Godfrey, 1990b).

The conflict and controversy soon deepened through a reaction story. Tuchman (1978) describes this type of news item:

the "reaction story" encourages reformist statements by media-nominated leaders. When editors judge an occurrence to be unusually newsworthy, particularly if it might reasonably be expected to affect future occurrences, they seek to learn the "reactions" of public figures. . . . Gathered in a reaction story, these opinions may introduce issue-like elements (controlled conflict and controversy) to the coverage, especially if the reporters interview people who are known to disagree with one another. (p. 140)

The reaction story in the Montreal Gazette, which was published three days after the ADISQ gala, bore the headline “Parizeau Hails Dion’s Stand, Others Cool” (Authier, 1990). As this implies, the story marked the intervention of Parti Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau and several other politicians into the discussion of Dion’s actions.

The position of Parizeau was regarded to be crucial. This is indicated by the inclusion of his name in the headline of the reaction story. It is also signalled by the opening lines:

Parti Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau yesterday applauded Céline Dion’s decision to turn down a Félix award as anglophone artist of the year. “I thought she reacted very well,” Parizeau told The Gazette. “I thought it was, for a girl
like that, quite something to say. I was impressed and I wrote her a small note
to say so." (Authier, 1990, p. C7)

It was not clear exactly why Parizeau was impressed by Dion’s statement, but
the structure of the story seemed to impose a particular meaning on his words. After quoting Parizeau and making the first explicit reference to the ADISQ inci-
dent as a controversy, the story indicated that “some have interpreted Dion’s
remark as an insult to Quebec anglophones, implying that anglophones are less
Québécois than francophones” (Authier, 1990, p. C7). The meaning that was
attached to Dion’s words gave meaning to those of Parizeau.

Through the views of Parizeau and other politicians, the reaction story intro-
duced a new conflict and added another dimension to the controversy. The contro-
versy took on more of a political flavour as Parizeau and other government
officials became the primary definers and were pitted against each other; these
primary definers struggled over the secondary voice of Dion, reading it in ways
that supported their interests or orientations. The story built on Parizeau’s inter-
vention by presenting truth-claims from three other Members of the National
Assembly (MNAs) in Quebec. The point about some anglophones seeing Dion’s
remark as an insult was linked to paraphrased comments from Equality Party
leader Robert Libman. The story then noted that “other MNAs, however, said they
didn’t interpret Dion’s action as an insult” (p. C7). This was illustrated through a
quotation from Liza Frulla-Hébert, the Minister of Cultural Affairs: “She just said
that compared to Sass Jordan, for example, ‘I cannot qualify in that category
because I am a francophone singing in English’” (p. C7). Claude Ryan, one of
Frulla-Hébert’s colleagues in Quebec’s Liberal government and the Minister
Responsible for the Administration of the French Language Charter, was then
quoted as offering a different view: “I understand that from the standpoint of iden-
tity she wants to be known as a francophone Quebecker. But you can be a Québé-
cois while being anglophone as well as being francophone” (p. C7). The new
conflict clearly centred around whether or not Dion had insulted anglophones, but
it seemed to have split more along linguistic lines than party lines. Since the split
was between different primary definers (rather than between primary definers and
secondary sources), the reaction story signalled the importance of the new con-
flict and the truth-claims associated with it.

Two other aspects of this reaction story are also worth noting. First, due to the
importance accorded to the new conflict, the initial conflict (which concerned
whether or not ADISQ had insulted Dion) was relegated to the end of the reaction
story. Even so, it was still developed a bit more fully. ADISQ officials were given
a voice through the president of the association, André Ménard. The story pre-
sented a number of quotations and paraphrased remarks from Ménard as well as
Angélil. However, the claims of ADISQ remained dominant through their posi-
tioning and weight in the story relative to those of Dion’s manager. Second, the
Canadian Press (1990e) transformed the reaction story in the Montreal Gazette
into a story which appeared as a very short item in The Globe and Mail. The orig-
inal story was edited in a rather startling fashion. Under the headline “Parizeau
Praises Dion,” the new story led off in the same way and with the same wording as the story in the *Montreal Gazette*; Parizeau was quoted, and his words were followed by reference to the incident as a controversy. The article then noted the positions of Ryan and Ménard. The positions of Frulla-Hébert and Angélil, which presented a more favourable interpretation of what Dion had done, were completely edited out of the story. Structured in this fashion, the story did not clearly convey the two central conflicts and therefore did not capture the complexity of the controversy. Even more than the original story, it also privileged issues associated with the question of whether or not Dion had insulted anglophones. This question—and Dion’s definition of the word Québécois—became crucial components in the anglophone press coverage.

**Dion and the definition of Québécois**

During recent decades, francophones in Quebec have modified the way that they refer to themselves. They generally called themselves “Canadiens français” (French Canadians) until the early 1960s, but they have increasingly called themselves “Québécois” (Quebecers) since the Quiet Revolution (Hero & Balthazar, 1988, pp. 55, 80). Over the years, the meaning of the word Québécois has become more and more contentious; there has been debate, even among Quebec nationalists, about whether the word should be expanded beyond its traditional meaning of “pure laine” (pure wool) to incorporate people other than francophones (Balthazar, 1994, p. 108). The debate about extending the definition of Québécois to anglophones and allophones (the latter being immigrants whose first language is neither French nor English) spilled over into commentary about the statement that Dion made at the ADISQ gala in 1990.

The issue of how Dion used the term Québécois was first expanded on through a column which Don Macpherson (1990a) prepared for the *Montreal Gazette*. Macpherson situated Dion as representing most francophones in Quebec. He indicated that “Céline Dion is a nice young woman from a small Quebec town just outside Montreal” and “professionally as well as personally, she could not be more middle-of-the-road” (p. B3). Macpherson concluded that “when Céline Dion says what it means to be Québécoise, as she did on Sunday night before a live television audience at the annual ADISQ Quebec music awards gala, she is worth listening to because she is probably speaking for a lot of Quebecers. And what nice, normal Céline Dion from Charlemagne, P.Q., said is that one cannot be both anglophone and Québécois” (p. B3).

In a second and more extensive column that was published a few days later, Macpherson (1990b) elaborated on his interpretation of Dion’s statement as well as the problem which he saw with her remarks. He suggested that Dion had hit upon a crucial issue: “she raised a very important question that Quebec society is going to have to face pretty soon: just what, and who, is going to be accepted as a Québécois, anyway? To Dion and most of her francophone audience, the answer seems simple: a Québécois is someone who not only lives in Quebec, but is also francophone and of French-Canadian descent” (p. B3). Macpherson contended that this definition of the term was flawed:
The problem is that while the word Québécois may have replaced French-Canadian in common usage among francophone Quebecers, not all French-Canadians are Québécois—and not all Quebecers are francophones. Several anglophones told me this week, before I wrote a column on the subject, that they found Dion’s remarks offensive. To them, a Québécois is simply a Quebecker, someone who lives in Quebec and feels attached to it regardless of linguistic identity. . . . These anglophones were offended by Dion’s implicit refusal to accept them as fellow Quebecers, as well as by her apparent need to express indignation at being branded with the scarlet A. (p. B3)

Macpherson then presented two arguments which suggested that shifts in Quebec society necessitated an expanded definition of the term Québécois. His first argument contended that anglophones were increasingly coming to identify with Quebec and integrate into its culture. His second argument focused on the declining birth rate in Quebec and the changes which the immigration of allophones had made to the composition of the province’s population.

While discussing Dion’s statement at the ADISQ gala, Macpherson (1990b) mentioned a definition of Québécois which had recently been put forward by Bernard Landry. The vice-president of the Parti Québécois had suggested that the term should refer to “someone who lives in Quebec and who loves it enough to consider it his or her homeland” (p. B3). Macpherson contended that, as a result of the shifts in Quebec society, “the definition of Québécois understood by most francophones will have to change from the one implicit in Dion’s remarks to something closer to the one Landry proposes” (p. B3). As Macpherson (1990c) noted, Landry’s definition was among the issues then being addressed by a public commission. After the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in June 1990, Robert Bourassa’s Liberal government had asked Michel Bélanger and Jean Campeau to chair the Commission on the Political and Constitutional Future of Quebec. Landry discussed his definition of Québécois before the Bélanger-Campeau commission, and his definition was criticized during the commission’s proceedings by Equality Party leader Robert Libman.

Macpherson’s favourable assessment of Landry’s definition initiated some debate within the Montreal Gazette. In his own column, William Johnson (1990) responded to Macpherson and clearly opposed Landry’s definition: “I object to a definition that includes a test of loyalty, a proclamation of the right allegiance. That lays the basis for a discrimination between the good—who accept Quebec as their homeland—and all the others” (p. B3). This prompted another column from Macpherson:

Landry’s definition isn’t perfect, and can probably be improved upon. But it’s already a considerable improvement on the one accepted by most Quebecers, the one implied in Céline Dion’s recent refusal of an award for anglophone singers on the grounds that she is not anglophone, but Québécoise. . . . For Landry’s definition includes people who aren’t of French-Canadian stock—an important step in the right direction toward a definition with which we all might be able to live. (1990c, p. B3)
Addressing Macpherson’s latest column, one reader of the Montreal Gazette wrote a letter to the editor which questioned whether the definition of Québécois could actually be separated from language and ethnicity (Binder, 1990).

Apart from this letter, the Montreal Gazette reinforced the “inappropriateness” of the traditional definition. Macpherson (1990a, 1990b) noted that even some writers in Quebec’s francophone press—Jean V. Dufresne of Le Journal de Montréal and Lysiane Gagnon of La Presse—had “seen fit to tell Céline that one can be both anglophone and Québécois” (Macpherson, 1990a, p. B3). A weekly report on issues that were being addressed in Quebec’s French-language newspapers later offered a translation of some comments made by a third francophone columnist who took Dion to task. The report stated:

Those anglophones upset by singer Céline Dion’s refusal to accept a Félix award as best anglophone performer because she said she was a Quebecker but not an anglophone got support from Alain Dubuc of La Presse. They were right, he said, “in not accepting that the term Québécois should be reserved for native-born francophones.” Dion had opened a debate as to who was a real Quebecker, he added. “But this is more than a quarrel over words. Quebec has changed, its anglophones too; its ethnic composition has been modified. However, the definition of who is a Quebecker has not evolved at the same pace.” (Yorston, 1990, p. B3)

The traditional definition was also challenged through some of the letters to the editor which the Montreal Gazette published. Two letters clearly supported an understanding of the term which included anglophones. One of the newspaper’s readers wrote, for example, that “‘L’affaire Céline Dion’ has raised the question once again: pure laine or not, just what exactly is a Quebecker? . . . A Quebecker is someone who lives in Quebec and contributes to its economy, regardless of language or origin. Quebec’s pure wool will not survive without the help of other fibres” (de Bellefeuille, 1990, p. B2; see, also, Birnbaum, 1990).

The issue of how Dion used the word Québécois was not restricted to discussion in the anglophone press within her home province. It also received attention outside Quebec. There were, however, two important differences between the coverage in French Canada and English Canada. First, and not surprisingly, the discussion in English Canada was less extensive. Second, whereas columnists inside Quebec curiously ignored the implications of Parizeau’s remarks, at least one writer outside Quebec did not.

The remarks which Parizeau made about Dion’s actions at the ADISQ gala were discussed in a column which Stephen Godfrey (1990c) prepared for The Globe and Mail. As noted earlier, Parizeau told the Montreal Gazette that “I thought she reacted very well. I thought it was, for a girl like that, quite something to say. I was impressed and I wrote her a small note to say so.” Godfrey offered his assessment of Parizeau’s words: “Never mind for the moment the implicit condescension in the phrase ‘for a girl like that.’ Parizeau clearly agreed with Dion’s statement, and if he had been in her teetering high heels, it sounds as if he too
would have implied that ‘anglophone’ and ‘Québécois’ were contradictory terms” (p. D1).

Godfrey also discussed other remarks which Parizeau made. A few days after commenting on Dion’s statement, Parizeau gave a speech in Montreal at a meeting of the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors. During his speech, according to the Montreal Gazette, Parizeau said of anglophones in Quebec: “These people are in a very real sense as much real Quebecers as the so-called Québécois de souche, the home-grown Quebecers” (Wells, 1990, p. A1). Parizeau’s words prompted Godfrey (1990c) to write that “it is heartening to hear the Parti Québécois lay out a definition that contradicts Dion’s narrow view of Québécois” (p. D1).

The two sets of remarks from Parizeau provided the basis for Godfrey to utilize a particular journalistic technique in the column that he wrote about the ADISQ controversy. Mary Anne Comber & Robert Mayne (1986) describe “the accusation of flip-flop” technique. As they note, “a newspaper will juxtapose two seemingly contradictory quotes from a politician. The accusation is often flip-flop, either implied or stated” (pp. 147-148). In this case, the accusation was stated quite clearly. Godfrey (1990c) opened his column by indicating that “Quebec superstar Céline Dion’s melodramatic and manipulative refusal of a music award for best anglophone artist of the year has had some unexpectedly heartening repercussions for anglophones in Quebec—although it has sent Parti Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau into a dizzy flip-flop” (p. D1).

Godfrey was not alone in pointing to a flip-flop by Parizeau. The ambiguity of Parizeau’s position was also noted in a letter to the editor of the Montreal Gazette (Gray, 1990). In his own discussion of the flip-flop, Godfrey (1990c) drew a parallel between Parizeau and Dion. He argued that they had both been hypocritical. Godfrey was disturbed that Dion had aggressively sought success in the English-language market while refusing an award which recognized that success. In his view, “the unconscionable boundary—which Dion and her pal Parizeau were so willing to pass—occurs when you have your cake and then pretend you want nothing to do with it. That is no longer good fortune but, as they say in French, la hypocrisie [sic]” (p. D1).

The statement that Dion made at the ADISQ gala clearly received a great deal of negative attention in the anglophone press, and the singer eventually addressed the situation through a letter which René Angélil wrote to the editor of the Montreal Gazette. Angélil (1990) began by stating that, “as Céline Dion’s personal manager, I am duty-bound to comment upon various articles and letters you recently published” (p. B2). With regard to the discussion about her definition of Québécois, Angélil wrote: “As an artist and person, Ms. Dion is apolitical. . . . The press and other political opportunists have taken her words out of context at the ADISQ Awards night in an effort to sensationalize matters. She never meant that anglophones are not Quebecers and she is truly sorry if it has offended any of her anglophone or allophone fans” (p. B2). Since the meaning of her words had been
problematic through the claims of others, Dion had been put in the position of contesting these claims and trying to undo the damage that had been done.

What factors account for the emphasis which the anglophone press placed on Dion’s use of the term Québécois? To some degree, Angélil may have been correct in suggesting that it stemmed from an effort to sensationalize the incident at the ADISQ gala. English-language newspapers were possibly tempted to generate and fuel drama around Dion’s statement due to Dion’s high-profile status (especially in Quebec). Indeed, Todd Gitlin (1980) notes that the drama of news stories is more easily packaged when it involves celebrities. At a deeper level, however, the response to Dion’s statement could have been influenced by the impact of the Meech Lake Accord and its failure. A few studies have found that coverage of the Accord and other issues in the Montreal Gazette during the late 1980s reflected the concerns which anglophones had about the future of Quebec and their status within it (Felske, 1988; Hayford, 1992). These features of news coverage may have extended to the ADISQ controversy, which occurred four months after the failure of the Accord. At the time of the controversy, there was a great deal of anger, separatist sentiments were growing, and anglophones in Quebec faced a great deal of uncertainty. The impact of the historical-political context is suggested by the comparison that was made in the Montreal Gazette between Dion’s statement and the definition of Québécois which Landry discussed before the Bélanger-Campeau commission. It is also suggested by the emphasis which The Globe and Mail placed on Parizeau’s words and their implications for anglophones. The focus which the latter newspaper placed on such a Quebec-based matter perhaps reflected its national orientation.

The conflicts involving Dion and ADISQ
A different reaction to Dion’s statement at the ADISQ gala was played down in the anglophone press coverage of the controversy. In his first column, Macpherson (1990a) noted that “Céline has been widely applauded for saying what she did, on phone-in programs and in-street interviews the day after the ADISQ gala, and the following evening, by the audience at the opening of her already sold-out stand at the Théâtre St. Denis” (p. B3). Macpherson acknowledged that the controversy took another form for most francophones. As he pointed out in his second column, “the question that dominated the phone-in programs the day after the awards gala was not whether Dion had insulted anglophones, but whether ADISQ had insulted her by categorizing her as an anglophone” (Macpherson, 1990b, p. B3). The role of ADISQ was initially a dominant issue in the anglophone discussion as well. However, as shown earlier, it quickly assumed a subordinate position as the dominant issue became focused on the meaning of Dion’s words.

To some degree at least, both of these issues were addressed in two letters which the Montreal Gazette published on the ADISQ controversy. One reader took offence at Dion’s statement while clearly adopting the truth-claims of ADISQ officials:
After reading the articles and watching the news concerning Céline Dion's rejection of the 1990 Félix Award for Quebec's anglophone artist of the year, I was insulted. . . . She had plenty of time to refuse the award prior to the award night, yet waited to do so on live TV only so she could make a pathetic linguistic statement on TV to boost her own image. Just one last piece of advice for Céline Dion: don't bite the hand that feeds you. Or you might find yourself without any "English money" to feed you in the future. (Oberman, 1990, p. B2)

Another reader was not upset by Dion's words and instead took ADISQ officials to task:

As a Quebec anglophone, I am not at all insulted by Céline Dion's rejection of the "Best Anglophone Artist" Award. In fact, I commend her. Whoever named the award was insensitive to its chauvinistic overtones. . . . Why should Ms. Dion be expected to accept something that not only ignores her own linguistic/cultural identity, but implies that only anglophones need apply? Music is the universal language. Why make a distinction between "English" and other languages when honoring talent? But if one insists upon doing so, make it clear that the distinction applies to the recording, not the artist. The award should have been dubbed "Best recording conducted in the English language." (Hirschorn, 1990, p. B3)

These were the only letters in which readers of the Montreal Gazette discussed whether or not they felt insulted by Dion. Through the letters, the newspaper evenly represented different views regarding the dominant conflict (over the meaning of Dion's words) as well as the subordinate conflict (involving the role of ADISQ).

In contrast, one side of these two conflicts was clearly emphasized and favoured in columns on the ADISQ controversy. Macpherson and Godfrey concentrated on the conflict over Dion's statement, arguing that Dion had implied anglophones are not Québécois. To the extent that they addressed the conflict involving ADISQ, they unquestioningly accepted and reinforced the truth-claims of the latter. Macpherson (1990a) wrote that Dion had turned down an award "for which her own record company had nominated her several months before without her or her manager ever complaining" (p. B3). Godfrey (1990c) also reflected ADISQ's claims, stating that "she and her manager had known they were in the running weeks before the nominations were announced and had done nothing to withdraw from the process" (p. D1).

The claims of ADISQ were also reinforced in the anglophone press through a statement which the association issued. As Mark Fishman (1980) notes, preformulated accounts of events (such as press releases) contribute to the ideological character of news; journalists sometimes rewrite easily accessible bureaucratic accounts as news items. The Globe and Mail provided a striking example of this when it turned a press release from ADISQ into a story with the headline "Dion Target of Rebuke: ADISQ Hits Back" (Godfrey, 1990d). As the story indicated, ADISQ had decided to deal with the criticism levelled against it over the Dion incident by putting out a statement that was signed by its 11-member board of
directors. The bulk of the story simply paraphrased and quoted the points in the statement regarding Dion. The statement outlined in more detail many of the claims which ADISQ officials had already made about the role of her record company in the nomination process and the various opportunities she had to withdraw her name if she was offended by the nomination. The final quotation from the press release indicated ADISQ's disappointment in Dion: “By refusing the trophy, Dion has refused the encouragement of those who have witnessed her career from its beginnings and who have always supported it” (Godfrey, 1990d, p. C3). Establishing some balance in a story which clearly privileged the claims of ADISQ, the last paragraph put forth one of the quotations that Angélil had previously given to the press.

Angélil (1990) had a better opportunity to make his own claims about this aspect of the ADISQ controversy through the letter that he wrote to the editor of the Montreal Gazette. He reiterated a number of his previous arguments before concluding his letter with the following point: “The controversy at the ADISQ Awards was nothing more than a tempest in a teapot, created by a cotery [sic] of producers and managers who form its nominating committee and [who] relished the thought of embarrassment a great Quebec francophone artist about to conquer the anglophone song market in particular, and the international one in general” (p. B2).

The year after the controversy
In the anglophone press, coverage of the ADISQ controversy spanned almost five weeks between October and November 1990. Many newspapers stopped addressing the controversy after the first several days, but The Globe and Mail—and particularly the Montreal Gazette—continued their coverage for quite some time. Discussion of the controversy did not end there, however. Over the following year, the controversy was mentioned in news coverage of other events involving Dion. Some of this coverage addressed issues in the central conflicts.

The ADISQ controversy became a hook for journalists in English Canada when they referred to Dion in their coverage of the Juno Awards. The Juno Awards are the trophies for the Canadian music industry which are distributed by the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (CARAS). Kate Taylor (1991) of The Globe and Mail mentioned the controversy in her report on the press conference that was held to announce the Juno nominations in February 1991. During the awards ceremony in March 1991, Dion received her first two Junos; she won in the categories of Female Vocalist of the Year and Album of the Year. When addressing Dion and her awards, several reports on the ceremony referred to the ADISQ controversy. It was briefly mentioned in the Montreal Gazette (Bernard, 1991). Outside Quebec, newspapers gave the controversy a bit more weight; a story by the Canadian Press (1991a) was among a few reports which indicated that journalists made an issue out of the controversy at a press conference following the awards ceremony. According to Stephen Ostick (1991a) of the Winnipeg Free Press, “she was almost moved to tears backstage when
asked about the controversy that resulted in Quebec last fall when she turned down a Félix—Quebec’s equivalent of the Junos—for best anglophone” (p. 12).

The exact nature of the questions that apparently upset Dion are not clear from these reports about the Juno Awards. However, the questions may have been informed by two conditions. The questions could have reflected the efforts of journalists to generate some drama (or at least some interesting quotations) about a situation in which Dion had rejected a Félix but accepted two Junos for the same piece of work. The questions could also have reflected the cultural divisions between English Canada and French Canada. This is suggested by some remarks which Angélil later made about the controversy: “Unfortunately, English-speaking people outside Quebec didn’t understand what happened. She did an English record and then refused the award; it made no sense” (quoted in Ostick, 1991b, p. 33).

Dion embarked on her first cross-Canada concert tour after the Juno Awards, and several anglophone newspapers published articles about the singer as the tour progressed. It is interesting to note that these articles, which offered profiles of Dion, ran counter to much of the anglophone press coverage inside and outside Quebec at the time of the ADISQ controversy. Since they were unencumbered by the need for balance and “objectivity” in conventional news stories, the articles did not set up truth-claims from different news sources. Dion and Angélil were interviewed for the profiles, and they presented the only claims about the initial conflict in the controversy (involving ADISQ and its treatment of Dion). The claims of ADISQ officials were not mentioned in the profiles (see Metella, 1991; Ostick, 1991b; Semenak, 1991; Slotek, 1991).

In May 1991, ADISQ announced that it had redefined the category which was linked to the controversy. The category for anglophone artists would become a category for Quebec artists who perform in a language other than French. This change was the focus of a story which appeared in the Montreal Gazette under the headline “Awards Show Drops Category for ‘Anglos’” (Delean, 1991). The story dealt almost entirely with the category change, the ADISQ controversy, and Dion. Only one sentence near the end of the story acknowledged that ADISQ had also announced changes pertaining to several other categories. In some ways, this story reflected characteristics of the press coverage during the controversy. The story alluded to the conflict over whether or not Dion had insulted anglophones while reinforcing the dominant status of this conflict through its placement in the story; echoing Macpherson’s remark about “her apparent need to express indignation at being branded with the scarlet A,” the opening line indicated that “pop singer Céline Dion won’t have to worry about being branded an anglophone this year” (p. C1). Furthermore, in stark contrast to the various profile articles, the story also later addressed the other conflict by focusing exclusively on ADISQ’s claims; with regard to Dion’s inclusion in the anglophone artist category, the story specified that “she’d been nominated by her record company” (p. C1).

During June 1991, attention once again centred on Dion and ADISQ. Mark Lepage, a pop/rock music critic for the Montreal Gazette, commented on the new
situation. While doing so, he made an interesting observation about news coverage as well as a belated intervention into the discussion about Dion’s statement at the ADISQ gala:

Somehow, Céline Dion manages to be news even when she isn't, as in the latest illusory "conflict" between her manager, René Angélil, and ADISQ. . . . The less-occupied of you will recall last year's publicity stunt, Dion seizing the ADISQ gala spotlight to denounce her nomination in the anglophone artist category. Something about being Québécoise, not anglophone. Hmmmm. Are those mutually exclusive? This year, Angélil is burned up over ADISQ's refusal to admit Dion to the Artist of the Year and Show of the Year categories. (Lepage, 1991a, p. D11)

ADISQ had maintained for several years that a minimum 80% French-language content requirement must be satisfied to qualify for nominations in several categories, including the Artist of the Year and Show of the Year. It was hardly surprising, then, that Dion received no nominations in these categories for the upcoming ADISQ gala; she did not qualify due to her English-language album *Unison*. Despite this, her exclusion from the nominations became the subject of news coverage. The Canadian Press (1991b) prepared a story which appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press* under the headline “Dion Fails French Content Rule.”

This story departed from the conventional structuring of news sources that was featured in news items on the ADISQ controversy. ADISQ officials were no longer the primary definers; it was Angélil who set the terms of the news event and provided the basis for constructing another conflict. The story began by quoting Angélil’s complaint about the exclusion of Dion from the nominations. Organizational officials became the secondary sources, and comments from them responded to the issue which Angélil had raised. The new president of ADISQ, Michel Sabourin, defended the association’s French-language content requirements. The president of CARAS, Peter Steinmetz, then challenged the use of language restrictions by noting that there were none at the Juno Awards. The story ended by describing the ADISQ controversy of the previous year and focusing more explicitly on the conflict involving Angélil and ADISQ; it noted that “Angélil brought Dion’s case before ADISQ’s membership once again” (Canadian Press, 1991b, p. 39).

Several factors probably account for the Canadian Press story and its characteristics. The switch between traditional primary definers and secondary sources likely had much to do with Angélil. His position as a major player in the Quebec music industry gave him some access to the press, and that access had probably increased due to the ADISQ controversy. Angélil apparently utilized his connections to the press in order to advance his complaint. Dion herself likely played a significant role in the emergence of the story since her celebrity status made her newsworthy. Furthermore, due to interest in the controversy involving Dion, it is perhaps not surprising that a relatively insignificant issue pertaining to both Dion and ADISQ was addressed by the anglophone press. Indeed, the key to the observation which Lepage made about Dion’s ability to generate news might be found
in the words of Gitlin (1980): “Once an individual has been certified as newsworthy, he or she has been empowered, within limits, to make news” (p. 146).

Although conflict gives news stories their drama, it is interesting to note that a lack of conflict involving Dion was taken to be the most important element in stories about the ADISQ gala during October 1991. The report in the Montreal Gazette bore the headline “Scandal Skips ’91 ADISQs.” It described “a 13th annual gala that was notable for its lack of scandal or star turns” (Lepage, 1991b, p. E1). This was an apparent allusion to Dion, who was only briefly mentioned near the end of the story. While the report in the Montreal Gazette paid little specific attention to Dion, the report in The Globe and Mail focused on her. The story featured the headline “Dion Accepts Industry’s Apologies.” The first few paragraphs described the controversy of the previous year before indicating how ADISQ’s apologies were given when Dion won (and accepted) the award in the renamed category for the Quebec Artist Most Illustrious in a Language Other than French (Conlogue, 1991). Dion and the ADISQ controversy may have received more attention in The Globe and Mail than the Montreal Gazette for a couple of reasons; since people in English Canada were less familiar with the controversy, and since The Globe and Mail had apparently provided fewer stories over the previous year which mentioned the incident involving Dion, there was a greater need to provide some context for addressing Dion in relation to the 1991 ADISQ gala.

Further references to the controversy
After the first anniversary of the ADISQ controversy, there were fewer references to it in the anglophone press. The subsequent references to the controversy usually did not mention the central conflicts. The controversy was still linked to various events, but the references to it became more general. They also became focused on two particular themes.

The first theme tied Dion’s actions at the ADISQ gala to her later English-language career. This element in references to the controversy emerged when the singer’s second English-language album, Celine Dion, was released during March 1992. Two writers for the Montreal Gazette made an issue out of the fact that the accent had been removed from Dion’s first name on the cover of the self-titled album (even though there had been no accent on the cover of her first English-language album either). Macpherson (1992) connected the absence of the accent to his previous arguments about Dion and the definition of Québécois:

You may recall that pop diva Céline Dion refused a Quebec music award for anglophone artist two years ago on the grounds she was not an anglophone but Québécoise, as though one cannot be both. Well, by her own terms, Dion must be a bit less of a Québécoise this week. On the cover of her latest album, her second in English, Dion’s name has been anglicized by dropping the acute accent in Céline. Apparently, that little accent was excess baggage on her ascent to superstardom in English-speaking North America. (p. B3)

Similarly, Lepage (1992) wrote: “Tongues will wag in both official languages over the cover of Céline Dion’s new self-titled album. The disc is getting a massive
push from Sony to capitalize on Dion’s higher-than-ever profile in the U.S. Part of that push apparently means dropping the accent in Céline’s name. Maybe she’ll take that Anglophone Artist of the Year award from ADISQ now” (p. E5). In the caustic view of both commentators, Dion’s attempt to distance herself from an anglophone identity had been undermined by the removal of the accent on her first name.

Dion’s refusal to accept her Félix Award was also addressed in relation to her English-language career on one other occasion. In October 1993, the singer had another disagreement with ADISQ. She had been invited to perform during ADISQ’s 15th annual gala. Dion wanted to perform a song from her upcoming third English-language album, *The Colour of My Love*. However, presumably because ADISQ focuses on promoting French-language music, ADISQ officials would not permit her to perform an English-language song. A story on the ADISQ gala in the *Montreal Gazette* described the disagreement:

> They gave her two Félix Awards for her international success in English, but Céline Dion was not allowed to sing in English last night at the ADISQ Awards gala. . . . “Don't ask me why; ask ADISQ,” Dion, 25, told reporters after collecting the second of her trophies, which raised her career total to 20. “I would have loved to sing for Quebecers tonight.” This from the woman who four [sic] years ago refused a Félix because it was titled Anglophone Artist of the Year. (Delean, 1993, p. C5)

Once again, it was rather sarcastically suggested that Dion’s intention in turning down the Félix was at odds with later circumstances—in this case, her desire to sing an English-language song at a French-language awards show.

The second theme among later references to the controversy dealt with connections between Dion’s actions at the ADISQ gala and her position in the national unity debate. During July 1992, Dion publicly announced that she was against Quebec’s separation from the rest of Canada. Her declaration received some coverage in the anglophone press. The brief report which appeared in the news magazine *Maclean’s* is particularly noteworthy:

> When the Quebec music industry honoured Céline Dion as best anglophone artist in 1990, the lavender-lunged singer snubbed the award, proclaiming: “I am not an anglophone, I am proud to be Québécois” [sic]. But now, Dion is singing the praises of a united Canada. Last week, at Canada’s Expo 92 pavilion in Seville, Spain, 24-year-old Dion said, ”I'm against any form of separation, and if there's anything I can do to help, I'll do it.” (“A Vocal Appeal for Unity,” 1992, p. 23)

This report does more than simply juxtapose Dion’s two declarations; the phrase “but now” suggests a contrary situation and therefore establishes an opposition between her remarks. It is important to note, however, that no such opposition was implied in some subsequent articles about Dion which also mentioned both of her statements (see Howell, 1992; Kelly, 1993).

The implied political opposition between Dion’s statements was expressed much more directly when her two comments were again associated several years
later. In one segment of an interesting analytical article about Dion that was prepared for *The Globe and Mail*, Konrad Yakabuski (1997) discussed her 1990 and 1992 declarations. Drawing some ideas from political scientist Christian Dufour, Yakabuski argued that most francophones in Quebec are “fiercely proud and defensive of their francophone heritage yet fundamentally attached to their Canadian identity” (p. D3). Consequently, “most Quebeckers identify instinctively with the internal turmoil that generated both of her declarations. It is the turmoil that has torn families apart in Quebec during two referendum campaigns and countless elections” (p. D3).

Dion’s decision to turn down her Félix Award was later linked to her political position in another way. During March 1998, it was announced that the governments of Quebec and Canada would recognize Dion for her achievements; she would receive the National Order of Quebec (from Premier Lucien Bouchard) and, one day later, she would receive the Order of Canada (from Governor-General Roméo LeBlanc). In a report on the announced honours, Doug Saunders of *The Globe and Mail* wrote:

> Quebec nationalists and federalists have long played tug-of-war over Dion, who is, without question, Canada’s first true global superstar and the best-selling French-language artist in the history of recordings. Dion for her part has carefully avoided declaring herself a supporter of either federalism or sovereignty. In the early 1990s she refused to accept a “best anglophone artist” award and turned down offers to perform at July 1 ceremonies in Ottawa. At the same time, she has been equally reticent to embrace separatist causes, steering around the subject in interviews. (Saunders, 1998, p. D1)

This passage of the report contains an error since, as noted earlier, Dion did once indicate that she was against separation. However, the crucial aspect of the passage is the way that it deals with Dion’s 1990 statement; her statement is no longer set in opposition to her 1992 declaration (since the latter is not even acknowledged), yet it is still set in opposition to federalism.

In the anglophone press, the statement that Dion made during the ADISQ gala has clearly been attached to multiple meanings. At the time of the controversy, her statement was primarily interpreted as an insult to anglophones; it was seen as an assertion that only francophones could be Québécois. This meaning persisted, as indicated by news commentary that was published one or two years after the controversy, but her words also took on a new meaning; ever since Dion made her intervention into the national unity debate during 1992, her remarks at the ADISQ gala have occasionally been represented as being against federalism. Although different meanings have been attached to Dion’s statement over the years, the anglophone press has largely viewed it in ways that are both negative and political.

**Conclusion**

This paper has examined how the anglophone press in Canada dealt with the ADISQ controversy involving Celine Dion. It made two arguments. The first argument contended that there were two conflicts around truth-claims in the
anglophone press coverage of the controversy, and one of these conflicts became dominant. The second argument maintained that subsequent anglophone press coverage linked the ADISQ controversy to other events and particular themes while sometimes raising issues associated with the central conflicts.

The paper made several points about news coverage of controversy. It confirmed that news sources and a reaction story are crucial in shaping the relevant conflicts. However, the analysis pointed to difficulties with ideas about news sources; the distinction between primary definers (officials or experts) and secondary sources (ordinary voices) is sometimes blurred. Dion and Angélil were usually secondary sources, but their prominent status in Quebec occasionally gave them the same power as primary definers to set the terms of a news event and put others in the position of responding to their claims. The analysis also drew attention to the potential complexity of news coverage which addresses controversy; the ADISQ controversy was split between two conflicts, and the significance accorded to these conflicts in turn seems to have been split between the anglophone and francophone media. Finally, the possible fruitfulness of following-up the coverage of a controversy was demonstrated by tracing references to the ADISQ controversy in later news stories.

The paper also made several points about news coverage of Dion. Anglophone press coverage of the singer has been affected by the cultural divisions in Canada as well as the linguistic and political tensions in Quebec. At first, the coverage was shaped by the fact that Dion was known in French Canada but virtually unheard of throughout English Canada. After she developed parallel careers in French and English, after she became a francophone performer who had managed to enjoy success in the anglophone market, the coverage intersected with the tensions which were then deepening in Quebec and Canada. Through her own actions as well as those of the press, Dion has become closely associated with these tensions. As coverage of the ADISQ controversy illustrates, societal dualities have become bound up with what Lepage (1995) calls “all the dualities that are Dion” (p. C1).

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