The Nature of the Canadian Television Audience —
A Case Study

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Introduction

The Canadian television audience occupies a somewhat problematic position within the framework of mass communication theory. Its problematic character is related to the diverse theoretical perspectives by which it may be analyzed and interpreted. Many theorists of the mass media argue, that in order to understand the nature of the television audience in terms of its programming preferences, prejudices and overall viewing behaviour it is necessary to recognize the complex relationships which exist between the members of the audience and the mass society in which they live. Conversely, a second theory deals with effects which television and the information obtained from it, might have on the behaviour of television viewers. It points out that in examining the effects of television, one must consider the relationship between the audience members and the various social groups to which they might belong. According to this view, it is these primary and secondary groups which mediate the messages which the audience members receive from television and thus indirectly determine their effects. Finally, there are those communication theorists who are concerned with the role which television specifically plays in Canadian society. They maintain that the nature of the Canadian audience must be related to the unique problem of the quest for Canadian cultural identity, autonomy and national unity.

The very real and important question remains to be answered as to the suitability of all or any of these three theoretical perspectives in coming to terms with the nature of the Canadian television audience. This is to say, to what extent can it be demonstrated that the Canadian audience does in fact constitute a mass, or a group of individuals whose interpretation of televised information and entertainment is mediated by the various groups to which they belong or finally, an active public, caught up in the process of seeking out their cultural identity through the selective viewing of network programming?
Given the long term historical concern of Canadians which the role television has played and is expected to play in the future, it becomes imperative that a clear definition of the orientation of Canadian television viewers be outlined at an objective and empirical level of analysis. To this end, the purpose of this study shall be directed towards gaining a clearer understanding of the dynamic characteristics of the Canadian television audience. Survey data collected from interviews with a sample of residents from a western Canadian city constitutes the basis of this analysis and is used within the context of a case study in the measurement of audience attitudes and preferences. In this fashion, it will be possible to evaluate the relationship between the three theoretical views of the television audience and the extent to which this particular sample of Canadian television viewers conforms to all or any of these views.

The Theoretical Problematic of the Audience

The role which the mass audience has played in the promotion and concurrent development of television has been a major interest of media researchers and theorists since the popular inception of television in the early 1950's. It has been argued that the overwhelming popularity which television enjoys was only made possible by the needs, desires and aspirations of individuals living in a mass society situation. Television in turn, has been shown to have had a reciprocal effect on the audience and has been held responsible for the future promotion and development of the conditions of mass society—conditions which are seen as pervading all aspects of social life in North America (Smythe, 1974).

There is a considerable body of literature which has contributed to the relatively recent development of theories dealing with mass society (Halebsky, 1976: 248). Within the scope of this literature, the concept of mass society has been used to refer to an extremely wide variety of phenomena inclusive of the following:

1) populations manipulated by elite groups (Ortega y Gasset, 1940; Kornhauser, 1960).
2) societies characterized by national involvement in a centrally located and controlled ideological and institutional structure (Shils, 1963).
3) a condition of social powerlessness in the inability of individuals to communicate opinions and needs effectively and to comprehend the nature and source of their problems and frustrations (Mills, 1951).
4) the deteriorated quality of individual and societal life (Lederer, 1940).
5) a mindless uniformity in behaviour, beliefs and expectations (Arendt, 1951).
6) a condition in which basic traditional and cultural values have declined (Nisbet, 1953).

Together, all of these various theories and viewpoints indicate that mass society is a homogeneous entity in which social and political uniformity, rather than variety and diversity is the rule.

The concept of the mass and its particular behavioural characteristics has also been given serious attention by theorists of collective behaviour such as Herbert Blumer. He has emphasized that the mass is composed of anonymous individuals who are spatially separated from one another, in the sense that they all cannot interact together or exchange experience and information at the same time. Finally, it is argued that the mass has no definite leadership and a very informal and loose form of organization. (Blumer, 1946: 167-222).

Blumer has also noted that the members of the mass are characteristically concerned with ideas and events that lie outside their local experience (Freidson, 1954: 381). As a result, these events or ideas are not defined or explained “in terms of the understanding or rules of (the) local groups” to which the members of the mass belong (Blumer, 1946: 186). For this reason, the attention of the members of the mass is turned away from their “local cultures and spheres of life” and towards areas not structured by “rules, regulations or expectations.” According to Blumer, the mass is composed of “detached and alienated individuals who face objects or areas of life which are interesting, but which are also puzzling and not easy to understand and order...as a result the members of the mass are likely to be confused and uncertain in their actions” (Blumer, 1946: 186).

A number of mass theorists are convinced that the historical emergence of mass society is directly related to the weakening and dislocation of traditional institutional ties—processes which clearly accompanied the development of urbanization and industrialization. (Simmel, 1964: 409-429). The disruption and decline of primary social relationships and the decline of community are viewed by many critics as having serious consequences. Ultimately these consequences are believed to have produced a modern society which is “atomistic”; that is to say a society in which the individual lacks secure group ties; is deprived of a sense of belongingness and is isolated from “the major ends and purposes of this culture” (Nisbet, 1953: 72). Such individuals share one common need—the need to identify with a group and gain a general sense of cultural integration (Nisbet, 1953). This basic need is attributed by theorists such as Sigmund Neumann as being one of the key, underlying motivations for the emergence of mass social movements (Neumann, 1956: 96-117).

The lack of group identity and the extreme estrangement and isolation from others are features of mass society which many theorists hold to be the chief factors responsible for the popular acceptance of the mass media (Adorno, 1945; Adorno and
Horkheimer, 1972). Mass media such as television provide the individual with a transient sense of cultural integration and identification with the world around him. However, owing to the fact that the mass individual has lost all traditional cultural beliefs and values, his interests in the information which television provides are typically sensationalistic ones as related to sex, violence and consumerism (Marcuse, 1964). Persons in the mass are reduced to the lowest common denominator of human nature in terms of being hedonistic and self-indulgent. Their behaviour is characterized "by the surging forth of impulses and feelings, which are usually suppressed" in more traditional and integrated cultural situations. (Blumer, 1946: 182).

It is further argued that television programming itself reinforces the tendency of members of the mass to be reduced to the lowest common denominator of human nature. The desire of the television networks to reach as large an audience as possible means that programming will be addressed to the most basic and commonly shared tastes and preferences of the television viewers (Bittner, 1977:52-53). Within this theoretical perspective, the popularity of television is attributed to the conditions and needs of the mass audience while at the same time, television is seen as a major factor in further promoting these conditions and needs.

The theory of the mass audience is complemented by the social interactionist theoretical model which focuses on the effects of the media and the processes by which such effects occur. An earlier form of this second theory maintained that television viewers were an anonymous collection of individuals who were "individually" affected by the messages which they watched. This view of the effects of the mass media, particularly television was termed "the hypodermic needle approach" (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955: Schramm and Roberts, 1971). Supporters of this theory indicated that each viewer was personally and directly "stuck" by the medium's message, along with the rest of the people in the audience.

More recent research in the sociology of communications has provided substantial grounds for the rejection of the "hypodermic needle" approach. Today, this new social interactionist theory gives more attention to the role and affects of various social subgroups which exist within the mass. As Charles Wright has observed, the individual is rarely found to be genuinely anonymous in his social environment. On the contrary, the individual in the audience is shown to be a member of a network of primary and secondary groupings inclusive of family, friendship groups and occupational circles. These various groups are said to affect manner in which the individual is exposed to mass communications, how the communication is interpreted and how the individual will modify his behaviour in reaction to the televised message (Wright, 1959: 51).
The most well-known research studies in this area have stressed the particularly important role of peer group influence in mediating the effects of television programming (Riley & Riley, 1951: 445-460).

The social interactionist argument that the audience's reception of television programming consists of a group experience is based on two important concepts—the two step flow of communication and opinion leaders. These concepts were outlined by Paul Lazarsfeld, in his study of the 1940 U.S. presidential campaign (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948). Both of these concepts in a general sense, refer to the dynamic process whereby the information disseminated by the mass media comes to the attention of the individual in the audience from people who relay their interpretation of it. Since the pioneering research on both concepts was completed almost three decades ago, the theory of the social nature of television viewing has undergone extensive testing and elaboration. At present, characteristics of the audience such as ego involvement, personal spheres of influence, demographics, psychographics, life style and selective exposure are also taken into consideration (Sears and Freedman, 1971; Monaghan, Plummer, Ravick and Williams, 1974).

A third view of the television audience is one which is most often emphasized by Canadian sociologists, media theorists and critics. They point out that Canadian television viewers act as a committed group of individuals, intent on furthering the use of television for the construction and definition of Canadian cultural identity, autonomy and national unity. Pierre Juneau has insightfully observed that this belief in the public support of the goals of cultural identity and national unity presupposes “a public commitment to restructure the economic framework in which the entrepreneur and the creator must work together. It presupposes a concerned approach to identity and promote not only Canadian talent but also critical, analytical and managerial skills in the fields of cultural production and circulation” (Juneau, 1975: 21).

A number of theorists who support the view of the Canadian audience as an active and concerned public, emphasizes that the development of television in Canada was largely due to the desire of Canadians for a nationally representative television system. A recent example of this type of argument is found in The Tangled Net (1977), where it is argued that the original expansion of CBC television and the opening of T.V. production centers and stations in Toronto and Montreal “was clearly in response to pressure from Canadians for Canadian service” (Hindley, Martin and McNulty, 1977: 53). The desire of the Canadian audience to realize a sense of identity through Canadian content on television is also implied by official reports of the CBC. One report recently indicated that 63% of the program schedule of CBC owned television stations was Canadian and that such Canadian programs accounted for 64% of the CBC’s total
audience (CBC, 1978: 144).

The belief in the commitment of the television audience to the realization of Canadian cultural identity has been further reinforced by such notable personalities as Senator Keith Davey, Chairman of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media. According to Davey, “more people are becoming involved in the working of political and other processes in Canada...publishers, broadcasters and others who really care about the quality of the media...should accept the new politics of involvement, for we hope it will accentuate and renew public interest in the media” (Davey, 1975: 192). Davey’s opinions about the Canadian broadcasting audience in its support of the goals of achieving cultural identity and unity through television are shared by the Canadian Federal Government generally, the CRTC specifically. In fact, major pieces of communications legislation, inclusive of the Broadcasting Act of 1968, are solidly predicated on similar assumptions about the nature of Canadian television viewers (Petryszak, 1979).

The belief that the Canadian television audience is supportive of the promotion of Canadian cultural identity through selective television programming has also been strongly supported by those individuals involved in the “new wave of Canadian nationalism” as well as by the critics of Canada’s dependency of the American multinational corporate structure. Many Canadian nationalists are convinced of “the necessity of regulating the media to better serve the national interest in terms of content, geographical coverage, and information storage, retrieval and dissemination (McPherson, 1975: 104). Not only do they believe that the Canadian television audience is supportive of further Canadianization of television programming, but they also demand that Canadians become even further involved and more solidly committed to this goal. As Hallman has stated, “The Canadian public have much at stake in Canadian television. The ‘great debate’ about public and private broadcasters is a permanent debate. It would appear now that it will take on a more public and explicit form in the fairly near future. The public should not permit the outcome of this debate to be decided without its full participation” (Hallman, 1962: 149).

A similar conception of the Canadian television audience has been put forward by those sociologists concerned with the general question of Canadian identity. Many of these sociologists assume that their personal concern with establishing a strong sense of national identity and unity is shared by the Canadian public at large. Media theorists like Frank Peers for example, assert that the first priority of the Canadian public, especially with respect to their attitude towards television, is the survival of Canada as a nation and the promotion of national unity through Canadian programming. Like many other media theorists and critics, Peers assumes that the
Canadian public desires a television system which is designed “to assist Canadians to know the changing society around them, and to adapt successfully to it and that...the struggle to improve, even to maintain it, is greater today than ever before, and more crucial still to our survival as a nation” (Peers, 1975: 228).

Similar assumptions pervade other sociological discussions of the problem of Canadian identity and the role of the mass media in shaping that identity. According to the sociologist Frederick Elkin for example, the problem of identity formation is one of the leading social issues facing Canadians today. As he states, “The problem of identity formation and maintenance in Canada will be a concern for many years to come. In general, the greater the threat to a Canadian identity, the greater the concern among the wholly committed Canadians” (Elkin, 1975: 242).

Our choice of coming to terms with the nature of Canadian television audience is as diverse as it is problematic. We have the option of seeing it as a self-indulgent mass of individuals concerned only with entertainment and sensationalistic viewing. Conversely, we may believe the Canadian audience to consist of a constellation of intimate social groups, which selectively interpret the messages and information of television programming. Finally, we may adopt the perspective of Canadian sociologists, media critics and the Federal Government in assuming that Canadian television viewers are wholly committed to goals of cultural identity and national unity. The question remains—to what extent does the Canadian audience conform to any of these theoretical perspectives? This study is intended to provide some tentative empirical measurements of a sample portion of Canadian television viewers in coming to terms with this problem.

Sample Design

This study examined the chief characteristics and attitudes of a segment of the Canadian television audience. It uses survey data collected from interviews of a sample of residents of a western Canadian city as derived from data provided by the Edmonton Area Study (1979a). The sampling form of this study utilized a computerized list of addresses, compiled by the City of Edmonton from its annual civic census (1978). A simple random sample of 584 addresses was selected from the computer tapes. The household was therefore the primary sampling unit. (Population Research Laboratory, 1979b: 1).

Eligible respondents were those individuals residing in selected households who were 18 years of age and over. In a family household, respondents were usually the husband or wife, while in a non-family household any resident over 18 could qualify. Attempts were made to obtain an approximately equal number of male and
female respondents. The final sample size was 440, giving a response rate of 75.3%.

Measurement Criteria

All interview questions were formulated with respect to analyzing the relationship between the attitude and behaviour of the respondents and the three theoretical perspectives of the audience previously discussed. For this reason, the interview questions were organized around three leading aspects of the respondents' attitudes and behaviour towards television viewing.

The first set of questions focused on the respondents' "ideology of viewing"; that is to say, their likes and dislikes about television programming. The extent to which they felt T.V. was responsive to what they believed to be their community needs and whether or not they thought there was too much American content on television were asked as separate questions. In turn, the respondents were given three open-ended questions and asked to name those community needs to which they felt T.V. programming should be responsive, as well as their first and second dislike about T.V. programming.

The second set of questions dealt with the actual television viewing behaviour of the respondents in terms of:

a) the types of programming they watched
b) the specific channels they watched
c) the social context within which they watched T.V.

The third set of questions was intended to relate to the problem of the relationship between the respondents' ideology of viewing and their actual viewing behaviour. As a consequence, these questions focused specifically on:

a) the relationship between the respondents' view of whether or not T.V. programming was fulfilling community needs and the degree to which they watched local and regionally oriented shows as opposed to American network programming.
b) the relationship between what the respondents disliked about television programming and the extent to which they watched T.V. programs, which reflected the characteristics of which they were critical.

The set of questions dealing with the respondents' dislikes about television programming was further specified to deal with the following issues as related to the orientation of television programming and the respondents' appraisal of it:

1) T.V. programming being responsive to local Canadian community interests
2) T.V. programming providing information about local Canadian political events
3) T.V. portrayal of crime, violence and sex by T.V. programming
4) The presentation of commercials by T.V. programming
5) T.V. programming providing English Canadian content
6) The quality and educational level of T.V. programming
7) T.V. programming and the presentation of American content.

The data was analyzed using correlation, multiple regression and frequency breakdown techniques (Costner, 1971).

**Data Analysis**

The mass society theorists explicitly assume that the television audience is a homogenous and passive grouping of individuals with respect to their orientation towards television, especially in terms of their desire for sensationalism and commercialism. The data utilized for the evaluation of this leading assumption about the mass television audience may be found in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Television Programming</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Respondents Watching 1-10 Hours Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Movies</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedies-Variety</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Affairs</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Shows</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detective Series</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk Shows</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Programs</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Series</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap Operas</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartoons</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Shows</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Programs</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on sample of 440, and excludes non-responses.

Sources: *Edmonton Area Study*, 1979.
On the basis of the data indicated by Table 1, it is evident that the viewing habits of the respondents are characterized by a significant orientation towards news and current affairs. As the data shows, 73.4% of the sample watches 1-10 hours of news per week and 44.5% watches 1-10 hours of current affairs per week. Their desire for information may be critically compared with their interest in the more sensationalistic aspects of television viewing. The most violent and sensationalistic types of programming in the form of detective series receives only 29.7% of the viewers' attention within a viewing period of 1-10 hours per week. Other sensationalistic types of shows, inclusive of "soaps" (daytime drama) and cartoons are watched from 1-10 hours per week by 19.9% and 14.2% of the total sample respectively. Game shows, which tend to have the largest number of commercial advertising spots and which emphasize commodity consumption as related to the prizes and gifts offered to participants of these shows, are watched from 1-10 hours per week by only 34.2% of the respondents.

Apart from news and current affairs, those type of shows in which the respondents demonstrated a marked interest, were T.V. movies, sports and comedy-variety programs. These three types of programming contain elements of sensationalism insofar as they are watched for their entertainment value rather than for information. Specifically, these three categories of programming received up to 10 hours of viewing time by 72.5%, 47.2% and 59.9% of the respondents respectively.

It is clear that this sample of respondents are neither homogenous nor uniform in their desire as a "mass" for sensationalistic T.V. entertainment. Their interest in sensationalistic programming is notably mediated by their quest for news and general information about their immediate life circumstance.

Further insights into the mass character and orientation of the respondents may also be obtained from Table 2.

The data presented in Table 2, indicates that significant segments of the sample are critically concerned in a negative sense, with the sensationalistic aspects of television viewing. For example, 17.5% of the respondents articulated the need to improve the educational and informational role of television, as they felt that the television programming available to them was of poor quality and of a low educational level. Their desire to utilize T.V. to facilitate the development of the audience as an informed public rather than a mass passively oriented towards sensationalistic entertainment, is further accentuated by the fact that 14.5% of the sample felt that there was too much crime, violence and sex presented by T.V. programming. The total segment of the respondents which was either critical of television's low educational worth or its emphasis on sensationalism, particularly violence and sex (32%) may be
meaningful compared with 14.3% of the sample who felt that there was nothing wrong with the quality of television programming or who simply remained indifferent to these issues.

There always exists the distinct possibility that the respondents’ criticisms of television, that is their “ideology of viewing,” may not necessarily correspond to their actual viewing behaviour. Keeping this possibility in mind, those individuals who criticized the low educational level of T.V. and those who felt it portrayed too much crime, violence and sex were examined in terms of their actual viewing habits. It was found that of the 17.5% of the total sample who spoke out against the low educational level of T.V. programming, only 13% of them watched educational shows of various types. Conversely, of the 14.5% of respondents who were critical of the amount of crime, violence and sex on television, 78% did not watch any detective series programming which usually portrays the most amount of crime, violence and sex as compared to other forms of programs.

Those individuals concerned with the low educational level of T.V. nevertheless failed for the most part, to watch educational T.V. themselves. Thus their ideology of viewing is quite inconsistent with their actual viewing behaviour. This level of inconsistency could be

Table 2
First Dislike About T.V. Programs as
Ranked Percentages of Total Sample=

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criticism of Television Programming</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor Quality-Low Educational Level</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Much Crime, Violence and Sex</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing — Don’t Care</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Many Commercials</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Canadian Shows</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Quality of Commercials</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Much Sports</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Enough English-Canadian Content</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Much American Influence</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on sample of 440,d and excludes non-responses
due to the low quality of educational programs available at present or to other contingent factors for which measurement was unavailable within the scope of the present study. Alternatively, there exists a high level of consistency between those whose ideology of viewing maintained a critical view of the level of crime, violence and sex presented by television and the fact that a significant number of these individuals did not watch any programming characterized by these sensationalistic features.

Despite the relative inconsistency between the ideology of viewing and the actual viewing behaviour of a certain portion of the overall sample, it is clear that there is a statistically significant trend among the respondents to be critical to some degree of the sensationalistic qualities of television programming content. It is in this sense that it may be tentatively argued that this specific sample of Canadian television viewers, fails to conform in a general fashion to the theoretical assumptions about the nature of the mass television audience.

In referring to Table 3, we find yet another reason to question the applicability of the theory of mass society. The data from Table 3 points to the possibility that there is an underlying concern on the part of a significant portion of the sample with regional events, issues and personalities, as opposed to interests outside their immediate life situation. According to the explicit assumptions of the mass theorists, the mass audience is expected to be concerned with issues and events outside of their local life experiences and circumstances.

When the respondents were asked what they considered to be the single most important community need to which local television stations should be responsive, 29.3% of the sample replied they would like to see more information presented on T.V., dealing with the history and development of their city and province. In addition, 14.1% replied they would like more information and coverage of local cultural events, while 13.4% desired more coverage of local personalities. Thus, when all the data on this issue is considered, 86.9% of the sample seem concerned about the portrayal of local community events and issues, while only 13.1% of the total sample were either indifferent or simply didn’t have an opinion. Contrary to the theoretical assumptions of the mass audience theorists, this particular sample demonstrates a notable orientation towards local and community information. This orientation justifies to some extent, the labelling of these respondents as a group intent on becoming an informed public, concerned about their local life circumstances, rather a passive mass audience, only interested in events lying outside of their immediate situational context.

Attention was also given to the question of the social context within which the respondents watched television. When the respondents were asked with whom they watched T.V., it was found
that 69.1% watched television in a group context while only 27.3% watched television alone. It was discovered that there exists a major difference in the composition of these groups which comprised the audience. While 56.1% of the sample, watches T.V. usually with their family, only 6.6% of the respondents watch T.V. with friends and 6.4% watch it with family and friends.

These findings lend support to the social interactionist assumption that the effects of television programming may be mediated by the social environment of the individual viewer. Given the intimacy of the family situation, the dependency and authority relationships which may exist between parents and children or between children themselves and the fact that a significant percentage of T.V. viewing occurs within the family milieu, there seems to be some grounds in supporting the interactionist argument that the effects of television could occur within the context of the processes of the two-step flow of communication. More simply, there exists at least the structural prerequisites by which these processes could effectively operate.

Research in persuasion theory suggests whatever information the audience receives first from television, may have a greater tendency to influence their attitudes and behaviour than subsequent information. This is especially true, if the television viewer believes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Needs To Television’s Responsiveness To Community Needs=</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Programs About History of City and Province</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Programs About Local Cultural Events</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Programs About Local Personalities</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Programs About Local Sports Events</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Programs Presenting Moral and Religious Values</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Advertizing of Local Businesses</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on sample of 440, includes non-responses
the first information received to be credible (Bittner, 1977: 248). The
family context of viewing and the dependency-authority
relationships which may exist in the family, together support the
possibility that not only is the information received first from
television most likely to affect the audience but also the extent of such
effects will be dependent on the degree to which the information is
accepted as credible by the opinion leaders in the family. This
possibility suggests that the theory of the two-step flow of
communication may in fact be a much more complex process than
has been originally assumed. It is this very real possibility, while
beyond the scope of this particular study to verify, nevertheless
warrants careful empirical consideration and measurement in the
future.

The research findings presented here also constitute an empirical
basis for the critical reevaluation of such classical studies of
television effects on the audience as that initiated by John and
Matilda Riley in 1951. They demonstrated that an individual’s
membership or non-membership to a peer group was one of the most
significant factors in determining the interpretation and subsequent
effects of television or radio messages. What might be considered is
that while peer group membership is an important factor mediating
the audience’s response to the televised information, peer group
influence could in turn be mediated by the authority relationships of
the family and the opinion leaders who are the first to receive the
message. Again, while no specific measurement of this possibility is
indicated here, we can at least recognize the possible direction which
future-analyses of television and audiences effects might take in the
future, in the reevaluation and redefinition of the existing social
interactionist approach.

This study was also evaluated in terms of its relevance for gaining an
insight into the extent to which the sample conformed to the specific
theoretical assumptions about Canadian television viewers. When the
respondents were asked if they felt there was too much American
content on television, 41.6% felt that there was 49.3% felt there wasn’t,
while 8.1% didn’t know. A notable segment of the respondents seemed
interested in having television programming which would reflect
distinctive Canadian orientations and interests. However, when we
combine the “Don’t Know” responses (8.1%) with those who felt that
there wasn’t too much American programming presented to
Canadians (49.3%), we find that 57.4% of the total sample would be
content with, or indifferent to the whole issue of American content for
television programs in Canada.

It could be argued that it is a distinct exaggeration to say, as many
Canadian television theorists, critics and sociologists have done, that
the Canadian television audience is wholly committed to the issue of
the realization of Canadian cultural identity. This criticism is further
accentuated by the fact that of the 41.6% of the total sample who said that there was too much American content on television, 52.6% nevertheless watched more than 30 hours per week of the American network station, ABC. Thus, the ideology of viewing of the particular segment of the sample which is concerned with the question of Canadian cultural identity as related to television is not necessarily consistent with their actual viewing behaviour.

The lack of commitment of Canadian television viewers to the issue of the further Canadianization of television content is also reflected in the data obtained from Table 2. When asked about their first dislike about T.V. programs, only 1.4% of the respondents rated the issue of there being too much American content as being significant enough to constitute their first dislike about television programming. In addition, only 0.5% of the sample felt that this issue comprised their second dislike about television. Of the 1.8% who felt there was not enough English-Canadian content on television, 62.5% never watch the CBC English television station. Again there appears to be an inconsistency between the ideology of viewing of these respondents and their actual viewing behaviour in terms of this specific programming feature.

The regional and community interests of the respondents were also considered. When they were directly asked whether television was fulfilling what they considered to be important community needs, 38.9% of the sample replied affirmatively, 35.5% replied in the negative, 25.5% didn’t know and 0.5% didn’t reply at all. The belief maintained by 35.5% of the sample that television could be more responsive to community needs is complemented by the data from Table 3 which indicates that 82.9% of the respondents were concerned enough about this issue to be able to clearly indicate what specific community needs were deserving of more media attention.

It seems reasonable to argue that this sample is characterized by somewhat of a regional orientation to the issue of the Canadianizing of television programming content. Their support of Canadian regional interests is further exemplified by the fact that of the 35.5% who were critical of the lack of community orientation of T.V. programs, 71.8% nevertheless watched more than 21 hours per week of programming provided by community oriented channels. Within this context, their ideology of viewing is quite consistent with their viewing behaviour.

Discussion and Conclusion

The sample of Canadian television viewers examined in this case study is characterized by a dynamic and complex aggregate of attitudes and behaviours, many of which are incongruous with one another. The essential question to which this analysis is addressed, of determining to what extent this segment of Canadian T.V. viewers conforms to the assumptions and expectations as outlined in the mass
theory of the audience, the social interactionist theory and the Canadian cultural identity model must be directly related to these dynamic characteristics.

The degree to which we may view this sample as having the assumed qualities of a mass remains questionable. Contrary to the passive, sensationalistic and homogenous characteristics intimated by the mass theorists, the audience of this case study remains notably divided in terms of its orientation towards sensationalism, consumerism and low-level variety entertainment. In fact, a significant portion of the respondents demonstrated a critical attitude towards these programming qualities. This is not to say that their criticisms of the mass characteristics of television were consistent with their actual viewing behaviour. The level of congruency between their ideology of viewing and their actual viewing behaviour was a function of the specific type and character of T.V. programming which they criticized. There exists a recognizable degree of consistency between their ideology of viewing and actual viewing behaviour as related to the moralistic issue of the presentation of crime, violence and sex on television. While there exists some degree of a formal concern with the issue of the educational quality of television, at the level of the ideology of viewing, this concern is nevertheless not reflected in the respondents' actual viewing behaviour. When their level commitment to this issue is compared to their level of concern with the problem of the presentation of crime, violence and sex on television, there seems some grounds for arguing that the more abstract and intellectual the issue, the more the audience's ideology of viewing remains inconsistent with their viewing behaviour.

Apart from providing insights into the complexities of the mass character and qualities of Canadian television viewers, the data also suggests some tentative insights about the extent to which this audience conforms to the assumptions of the social interactionist theoretical framework. Not only is the viewing of television a highly social affair. It is also a leading aspect of family organization. These research findings further indicate that the social relationship which may take place within the context of family viewing might very well play an important role within the processes of the two-step flow of communication. However, the data does not demonstrate the specific role of family viewing in mediating these dynamic processes, in terms of the influence of opinion leaders and peer groups. In this sense, the findings of this study constitute guidelines for future research in terms of the social interactionist theory of the audience rather than complete and substantial conclusions in themselves.

The final theory of the audience which emphasizes the concern of Canadian television viewers with the issues of cultural identity, autonomy and unity must be understood within the context of the dynamic qualities of the audience's attitudes and behaviour outlined
here. Respondents in this case study were not noticeably concerned with those issues which many critics and theorists have assumed to be of outstanding public interest. These issues include the amount of English-Canadian content and American content available to Canadian television viewers. The concurrent ideology of viewing of these individuals who considered the above concerns to be of some importance, was nevertheless inconsistent with their actual viewing behaviour. Such inconsistency is demonstrative of a generally low degree of commitment to the resolution of these issues.

Where we do find a significant level of concern with Canadian issues is in terms of regional information, events and personalities. Equally as important to this, a high degree of consistency was observed with respect to their ideology of viewing towards these Canadian regional concerns and their actual viewing behaviour. The respondents seem to identify and define the problems of Canadian identity and culture within a highly regionalized framework. At the same time, there exists only a minimal tendency among the respondents to view the official issues of Canadian content and American content as being issues which they consider relevant to the Canadian situation.

The dynamic qualities of this segment of the Canadian audience are not unique and coincide with the essential features of television audiences in other modern post-industrial societies. For example, the interests of the Canadian audience in local civic culture is shared to some extent by the British television audience (P.E.P., 1965). Moreover, the divided interest of this sample in news and current affairs on the one hand and sensationalistic entertainment on the other, has also been found to be a leading characteristic of the American audience's attitude and behaviour towards television (Steiner, 1963: 126). Apart from these qualities existing on a cross-societal basis, we find that they are also shared by Canadian radio listeners (Dunn, 1966).

The fact that certain qualities of the Canadian audience may be shared cross-culturally and that these characteristics are not restricted to television viewers alone, noticeably contradicts the arguments put forward by Wilbur Schramm (1964) and Marshall McLuhan (1964). Schramm had argued for the use of a relativistic approach in analyzing the nature of television audiences in that he feels audiences of different societies have widely divergent opinions about television. McLuhan on the other hand has maintained that the technological organization of a mass medium determines the effects it will have on its listeners and/or viewers. Contrary to the theories and Schramm and McLuhan we find that the orientations and attitudes of Canadian T.V. viewers transcend both national boundaries as well as the inherent limitations established by the technological organization of television. This itself is a testimony to the fundamental importance of these audience characteristics and indicates the need for their recognition by the
proponents theories as well as the Canadian cultural identity.

This study also may provide a new framework within which relevant guidelines for the future development of television programming in Canada might be suggested. To some extent, the interests of the Canadian audience as indicated in this analysis coincide with the recommendations by the 1965 Fowler Committee Report that Canadian television should be addressed to the regional orientations of television viewers. As was stated in the 1965 Report, television in Canada, especially the CBC should provide "balanced service...of factual and interpretative reports from the regions of Canada to increase mutual understanding and promote national unity," (CRTC, 1974a: 23).

The suggestion by the Fowler Commission that Canadian unity should be promoted by the expression of regional cultures through television programming, rather than imposing a national culture on these regions from the outside is a view of cultural development which assumes, as T.S. Eliot has explained, that "a national culture, if it is to flourish should be a constellation of cultures, the constituents of which, benefiting each other, benefit the whole" (Eliot, 1958:58). This view of the role television might play in promoting Canadian cultural identity through its provision of regional information contradicts the belief that Canadian television viewers constitute a mass audience who "are so conditioned to the T.V. set as a purveyor of passive entertainment exclusively that they cannot quite make the psychological leap required to perceive the T.V. set also a potential information machine" (CRTC, 1974b: 18). As this study has clearly demonstrated, it is both incorrect and misleading to assume that the Canadian audience is a passive mass concerned only with sensationalistic entertainment.

The recognition of the need to promote regional television programming in Canada constitutes a direct answer of E.S. Hallman's question of whether or not Canadian television "should be more specialized in its programming as more and more Canadians receive the popular American networks...on cable?" (Hallman, 1977: 75). The need for Canadian television to emphasize regional interests is predicated not only on the regional orientation of Canadian television viewers. It is also founded on the fact that any policy designed to create a sense of national unity by communicating and imposing an abstract theorem of Canadian cultural identity must compete with the sense of community already offered by American T.V. programming which serves at present, as a common source of identity for many Canadians. As Paul Rutherford has described, "the triumph of the multi-media not only strengthened American influences in English Canada, but extended their sphere into French Canada. Indeed this very Americanization fostered a common social ethos which acts as a national word. More and more people in every generation have shared
the slang, the heroes, the myths, the values, the ambitions of an American design sufficient to maintain a sense of community amongst Canadians” (Rutherford, 1978: 102).

It could be argued that the cultural role which American T.V. programming plays in Canada is in fact a reflection of the dynamics of cultural domination (Schiller, 1976). Whether or not this is the case is a separate question entirely. The point is that an indigenous Canadian policy for cultural identity and national unity must be competitive with American T.V. programming influence. If such a policy is to be effective, rather than ignoring or criticizing the sense of community derived externally from American programming, it would seem more pragmatically realistic to attempt to develop cultural identity and unity from within; that is based on the interests, preferences and orientations of the Canadian television audience itself. The imposition of a sense of community and cultural identity among Canadians has already been achieved by American programming. If television is to play an important cultural role in Canada then it must be based on the reality of the Canadian audience itself. This is a reality where there exists “an ephemeral ideal of social unity as a significant ultimate goal” (Hiller, 1976: 39). Also, this is a reality where Canadian television viewers understand their interests as Canadians to exist within a regional context. These two features of the Canadian television audience are not mutually exclusive of one another. Rather, they are the primary constituents of Canadian cultural identity which effective media policy must recognize in the future.

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