AMERICAN DOMINATION IN INFORMATION: 
CANADIAN STUDENT ORIENTATIONS

Thomas N. Trenton
University of Prince Edward Island

Canadian students, using Canadian information sources, apparently acquired American as well as Canadian factual knowledge ("central-colonial" media effect). However, American sources correlated with American facts (an "insular-metropolitan" media effect).

Canada's hinterland status to the American metropolis in economic, political, military, and cultural affairs has been well documented (e.g., Clement, 1971; Crean, 1976; Grant, 1965; Laxer,
Through central control over communications, the metropolis "can influence virtually every aspect of life in the hinterland to a greater or lesser degree" (Careless, 1966, 274; Kerr, 1971, 233) including such cultural areas as literature, history, science, arts, music, sports, entertainment, and education. "Cultural Imperialism" (Dexter, 1970) is often associated with a "colonial mentality" (inferiority complex) (Atwood, 1972, 36; Crean, 1976, 15; Steele and Mathews, 1970, 175) in which hinterland peoples view the metropolis as the major source of creativity, initiative, and excellence (Crean, 1976, 15, 18) and consider "U.S. information as 'universal,' 'non-nationalistic,' 'cosmopolitan'" (Steele and Mathews, 1970, 175). Although there is very little foreign ownership and control of the Canadian mass media, its content exhibits a high degree of American influence (Clement, 1975, 297-298). Many observers have lamented the loss of Canadian identity through the Americanization of schools, universities, and courses in academia, of radio and television broadcasting, and of newspapers, magazines, and books in the press (e.g., Commission on Canadian Studies, 1975; Crean, 1976, chaps 2, 6, & 7; Davey, 1970; Elkin, 1975; Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, 1982a, 1982b; Mathews and Steele, 1969; Peers, 1970; Rutherford, 1978, ch. 3; Singer, 1971; Warnock, 1970a; Wood and Wood, 1970).

This study concentrates on a very narrow psychological indicator of the strength of one's national identification -- a Canadian's knowledge of Canadian versus American historical, political, and cultural facts. In particular,
it measures a university student's ability to correctly identify certain key past events and personalities, contemporary politicians, and popular figures in arts, entertainment, and sports. This ability may be determined by the student's exposure to Canadian versus American sources of such information. In consequence, the amount of factual knowledge acquired may be: a) nationally balanced, b) skewed toward Canadian, or c) skewed toward American.

Figure One represents six possible orientational effects of informational sources operating in the hinterland on hinterland peoples based on the territorial scope of the acquired information. There are two "national" orientational possibilities. The "insular - parochial" effect concerns Canadian informational sources located in Canada. Here, a Canadian learns Canadian but not American facts. Learning is narrowly restricted to factual information predominantly concerning the hinterland. The "insular - metropolitan" effect refers to American informational sources also located in Canada. A Canadian learns American but not Canadian facts. Acquisition is also narrow but restricted to the concerns of the metropolis. In both cases, the insular effect suggests the media's ignorance of or indifference to the other nation's history, politics and culture reflected in nationally one-sided coverage. Likewise, there are two "continental" orientational possibilities. The "central - colonial" effect refers to Canadian informational sources located in Canada. A Canadian learns American as well as Canadian facts. The information acquired may be either equally or even one-sidedly weighted toward the metropolis (the "centre"). Hence, the pull is "central." Deferring in a subordinate manner
to the relevance and excellence of metropolitan concerns at the expense of hinterland concerns, the Canadian media source apparently exhibits a "colonial" mentality. The "decentral - peripheral" effect refers to American informational sources again located in Canada. A Canadian learns Canadian as well as American facts. The information acquired may be either equally or even one-sidedly weighted toward the hinterland (the "periphery"). In a "decentral" fashion, the American source would appear to be deferring to Canadian history, politics, and culture to some extent -- at the expense of American content. Finally, the "international" orientational possibilities are

**FIGURE ONE**

A TYPOLOGY OF POSSIBLE ORIENTATIONAL EFFECTS OF INFORMATIONAL SOURCES OPERATING IN THE HINTERLAND ON HINTERLAND PEOPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informational Source in Hinterland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Territorial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope of Information</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinterland (Canadian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolis (American)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>National</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insular - Parochial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insular - Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Continental</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central - Colonial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentral - Peripheral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>International</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68
included for theoretical completeness. A truly "cosmopolitan" or worldly effect should include knowledge of many countries or places. That is, it should be free of national or continental limitations. While both Canadian and American content would appear in either hinterland or metropolitan sources, it would not outweigh content from other nations.

Given the general thrust of the literature on American dominance, the following basic hypotheses are advanced:

- on the basis of factual information apparently acquired by Canadian students through the mass media and university courses, the Canadian sources will exhibit a "central-colonial" effect

and the American sources will show an "insular-metropolitan" effect.

METHOD AND FINDINGS

The hypotheses were tested with a stratified random sample taken in 1973 of 1518 full-time regular University of Toronto Arts and Science undergraduates who were Canadian citizens with Canadian home addresses (Trenton, 1976). A mailed questionnaire, dealing with a wide range of Canadian issues, was returned by 667 students (44%). The sample is representative of the larger student population in terms of sex, academic year and college. The sampling error for these variables was within the ninety-five percent confidence level. The only excep-
tion was Victoria College which was very slightly overrepresented. No attempt was made to generalize to other students in other faculties or universities, to the larger Canadian population, or even to the present since conditions may have changed over the years. Certain sampling biases may have appeared due to varied interest and/or willingness to cooperate because of the questionnaire length (14 pages), its timing, format, subject content, etc.

Twelve dependent variables were constructed out of a series of items concerning factual information. Respondents were asked to identify in the blank space provided each of twenty-four short items concerning twelve Canadian and twelve American events and personalities. For the historical items, students were instructed to "Briefly, give a short explanation of or give the circumstances associated with the following names or events in Canadian or American history: The Charlottetown Conference, The Emancipation Proclamation, Boston Tea Party, Plains of Abraham, Dieppe, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, Family Compact, and Marshall Plan." For the political figures, they were asked to "Name each of the following: First President of the United States, First Prime Minister of Canada, Governor of California, Premier of Quebec, United States Secretary of State, Canadian Minister of External Affairs, Mayor of Montreal, Mayor of New York City." For the contemporary cultural personalities, respondents were requested to "Briefly, identify the field for which the following persons are noted or say what they do or did, e.g., singer, novelist, golfer: Paul Henderson, Leonard Cohen, Donald Creighton, Hugh MacLennan, Mark Spitz, John Kenneth Galbraith, Rod McKuen, and Norman Mailer." Many of these
items, including their format, were originally suggested by Gordon Laxer (1968). Although the items were buried in the lengthy questionnaire and students were asked not to guess or seek assistance and to leave the space blank if they were not sure of the answer, such a mail survey method of data collection could produce response biases. In addition, although the items were pretested, they were not systematically selected from a very large pool of items. One cannot generalize beyond students' knowledge of the specific factual items used to their knowledge of other related factual items. Nor can one determine whether they know history, politics, and culture in any encompassing, systematic, or critical way.

From these factual items, each respondent was given three scores, ranging from zero to eight, for total correct responses for knowledge of North American (i.e., simply Canadian plus American) history, political figures, and cultural personalities. Three scores, ranging from zero to four, were given for one's total correct responses for knowledge of Canadian history, political figures, and cultural personalities. Three counterpart scores described American knowledge. Three additional scores measured how much more Canadian than American information a respondent had in each of the historical, political and cultural areas. Here, American correct responses were simply subtracted from Canadian correct responses for each area with values ranging from +4 to -4.

The independent variables concerned self-reported behavioural participation in various informational sources. Measures included the number of Canadian Studies courses taken (e.g.,
Canadian Literature, Canadian History, Canadian Social Problems, Canadian Economics, Canadian Politics, etc.), mass media exposure (e.g., magazines read, Canadian evening television news viewing, American evening television news viewing, watching Canadian documentary programs, watching United States documentary programs, radio news listening, etc.). Since self-reported behaviour is not identical with actual behaviour limitations do exist in the data.

Table One summarizes the simple Pearson Product Moment Correlations between the independent and dependent variables. Although many relationships were weak or non-existent, some consistent trends emerged. First-order partial correlations did not alter these basic patterns.

The strongest overall predictor of a respondents' knowledge in all but one area was the reading of the newspaper's news section. The vast majority of respondents probably read only Canadian publications. The poorest overall predictors were listening to the radio news broadcasts and watching Canadian TV specials.

Canadian informational sources, including taking Canadian content courses, watching Canadian TV news, reading Canadian magazines as well as reading the newspaper news section, all universally showed correlations for American as well as Canadian history, politics, and culture. The absence of any statistically significant associations with the Canadian-American indices indicated relatively equal factual knowledge in both national contexts in eight of the twelve areas. Of the remaining four indices, three showed American and only one Canadian dominance. Clearly, Canadian informational
TABLE ONE

PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEDIA PREDICTOR VARIABLES AND FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE AREAS, AND, MULTIPLE REGRESSION CORRELATIONS BETWEEN NINE MEDIA PREDICTOR VARIABLES TAKEN TOGETHER AND EACH FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North American</th>
<th>Canadian</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Can-Am Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Canadian Content Courses</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Newspaper News Section</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Canadian TV News</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Canadian TV Specials</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching American TV News</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching American TV Specials</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading American Magazines</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple R</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2 (N = 637)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For r ≥ .10, p ≤ .01; for r ≤ .10, .05 ≥ p > .01.
sources did not produce an apparent insular - parochial effect. On the contrary, they were associated with widely informed students.

American media sources presented a different picture. Watching United States TV news, United States TV specials, and reading American magazines were all consistently related to knowledge of United States history, politics, and culture. However, conspicuously for all three American media sources, no correlations appeared with Canadian factual knowledge in virtually all areas. This imbalance was also reflected in seven of the nine Canadian - American indices. In sum, the American informational sources had an insular - metropolitan effect. Students exposed to primarily these sources were narrowly informed.

Multiple correlations between the nine independent variables taken together and each of the twelve dependent variables taken singly were very weak -- the strongest one (American politics) explained only twenty percent of the total variance. Therefore, other informational sources -- such as learning through the family, informal groups, recreational book reading, secondary and elementary school, films, theatre, etc. -- should be considered. In particular, the especially low $R^2$ for Canadian and American history suggests that elementary and secondary schools might be crucial.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The data unfortunately do not permit the discovery of a direct cause - effect relationship between students' viewing or reading habits
and their factual knowledge of certain subject matter. Nor do they consist of a direct content analysis of Canadian and American mass media or courses. This study cannot resolve whether students' exposure to certain informational sources leads to their acquisition of information or whether their knowledge and interest in certain areas lead to their selection of or self-exposure to certain sources. In sum, due to various methodological limitations, this pilot study's findings remain exploratory and heuristic.

Generally students who used Canadian informational sources such as the newspaper news section, Canadian courses, Canadian television news, and magazines, but not current events television specials, tended to be better informed and more widely informed, i.e., they knew more Canadian and more American historical, political, and cultural facts. With only a few exceptions, generally, there was a balance between the amount of Canadian and American information -- a balance which in itself denotes the dominance of American information in the Canadian context. However, students who used American informational sources such as television news, current events television specials, and magazines were poorly informed of Canadian facts but were well informed of American facts. In general, American rather than Canadian informational sources had an "insular" orientational effect. Instead of being "parochial," Canadian sources appeared to have a "central - colonial" effect. That is, the factual information acquired by students had considerable American content, apparently in response to the central pull of metropolitan "relevance" and "excellence." American sources, on the other hand, de-
monstrated a clear consistent "insular - metropolitan" effect. The acquired information was very strongly American in content since the media reflected its dominant metropolitan origins and role.

Since Canadian informational sources exhibited a stronger "central - colonial" effect than others interesting policy implications follow. For example, newspaper news and Canadian television news were especially correlated with identification of American politicians -- possibly reflecting the greater coverage of United States political affairs on Canadian television and in Canadian newspapers. However, since Canadian content courses and Canadian magazines were especially related to Canadian culture a distinctive Canadian culture might be more successfully promoted through university courses and indigenous magazines rather than television. Ironically, among Canadian informational sources respondents used magazines and university courses least frequently. Thus, a campaign promoting Canadian culture might have to persuade people first to utilize these sources. Elementary and secondary schools, on the other hand, might be more effective vehicles for the transmission of Canadian historical information.

Why certain hinterland media are better, or worse, vehicles than others for the dissemination of particular kinds of indigenous, or foreign, information remains a complex open question which deserves future study. Perhaps the extent of foreign ownership and control of the media in conjunction with the metropolitan-centred patterns of availability, distribution, and acquisition of informational material could
systematically explain the differential effectiveness of hinterland sources. Hinterland sources which are foreign owned or controlled and which also have ready access to metropolitan information, e.g., syndicated news, packaged radio or television, are expected to be the weakest transmitters of indigenous information.

Through media sources, hinterland people acquire relational as well as factual knowledge. It is one thing to learn names and events. It is another to acquire more encompassing, systematic, and critical knowledge. While people may learn Canadian facts, they may have an American view of them. University courses may have Canadian factual material but American theoretical or ideological interpretative models.

The various possibilities become more complex if future research attempts to determine which sources exert "cosmopolitan" or "international" orientational effects concerning factual and to relational knowledge. Would Canadian sources show higher or lower correlations with knowledge of historical, political and cultural affairs of other nations throughout the world than American sources? Why? Is there a Canadian or American or international slant to this acquired knowledge? As a result of media effects do hinterland peoples see other countries through metropolitan eyes? Is there one international factual eye and another American relational eye?
FOOTNOTE

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the Atlantic Association of Sociologists and Anthropologists, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, 26 - 28 March 1981.

REFERENCES


Warnock, John W. All the News It Pays to Print, in Ian Lumsden (Editor). Close the 49th Parallel, etc: The Americanization of Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970a, pp. 117 - 134.


Thomas N. Trenton (Ph.D. University of Toronto, 1976) is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Prince Edward Island. He has conducted research on Canadian nationalism and the New Left movement and is currently studying ethnic persistence among Canadian immigrant peoples.