

MASS MEDIA: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Sociologically, mass communication within Canada is unique. Canadians live next door to the largest exporter of mass media products in the world, and many are concerned about the effect these American products have on Canadian culture. In addition, Canada is officially multicultural and bilingual, which results in mass media that represent a variety of ethnic cultures and languages.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN CANADIAN MASS MEDIA

More often than not, Canadians choose American popular culture over Canadian popular culture. For example, Statistics Canada viewing data indicate that the majority of Canadians watch American television programming during prime time. With the exception of the CBC, chances are good that even if viewers are watching a Canadian television station, the programming is American. As American writer Barry Berlin wrote in 1990, this creates a "modern Trojan horse" for Canadian culture; while Canadians naturally might be attracted to American programs, by viewing them they are inadvertently exposing themselves to the American beliefs and values inherent in those programs. Just as the Trojans were defeated by the Greeks hiding inside the seemingly innocuous wooden horse, many fear that Canadian culture could be destroyed, or at least eroded, by the foreign values and beliefs contained in American programming. Because the mass media are important agents of socialization, this metaphor of the "Trojan horse" is of serious sociological concern.

Do American media shape Canadian culture? The Canadian government seems to think so, and treats the mass media as important *agents of socialization*. The "Trojan horse" of American popular culture has always been of concern to Canadian politicians; Canada's first Royal Commission on broadcasting, the Aird Commission in 1929, was conducted because Canadians were listening to more American than Canadian radio. The belief that American media shape Canadian culture has been instrumental in developing mass media into *social institutions* in Canada.

Canadian broadcast media operate in a single system, with both *private* and *public* broadcasters. Private broadcasters, such as television networks CTV and Global, operate with the express purpose of making a profit. Canada's public broadcaster, the CBC, relies on both advertising revenue and public (government) funding. One

reason for establishing a public broadcaster was the vast size of Canada. The mandate of the CBC is to ensure that all Canadians, no matter where they live, have access to Canadian programming in both official languages. Financing for Canadian movies also can come from the public sector; *Telefilm*, a federal government agency, provides loans and grants to Canadian filmmakers to help them to develop, produce, and distribute movies (and television programs) in Canada.

The regulatory body governing broadcast media is known as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or *CRTC*. Both radio and television stations in Canada must broadcast a certain amount of “Canadian” content, as defined by the CRTC. Generally speaking, Canadian radio stations must play 35 percent Canadian content, while television stations must broadcast between 60 and 100 percent Canadian content during prime time. This legislation is in place to promote the consumption of Canadian mass media products, thereby enhancing Canadian culture.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON MASS MEDIA

The Functionalist Perspective

Functionalists approach the study of mass media from the standpoint that the media contribute to the benefit of society as a whole. In his classic 1975 work, Charles Wright outlines four ways in which the mass media contribute to creating equilibrium in society:

- 1 The media *coordinate* and *correlate* information that is valuable to the culture.
- 2 The media are powerful *agents of socialization*. Through the media, cultural norms and values are communicated to the masses.
- 3 The media serve society through *social control*.
- 4 By providing *entertainment*, the media act as stress relievers for members of society, which keeps social conflicts to a minimum.

News reporting has been a focus of sociological research into the functions of the media. Both Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton argue that news essentially has two functions when it comes to transmitting social values and norms:

- 1 *Status conferral* refers to the importance given some social issues over others in the news media. The fact that certain issues receive attention raises their importance in the eyes of the culture. Important Canadian

issues that received a great deal of news media attention in the 1990s include the Constitutional “crisis,” Quebec’s referendums, and federal and provincial deficit-cutting measures. Meanwhile, other stories have gone largely unreported. According to Link Byfield, writing in *Western Report*, stories regarding publicly funded abortions in Canada, the rise in the chastity movement among young people, the failure of prisons to rehabilitate inmates, and husband abuse go largely unreported, and therefore are largely unnoticed by the public.

- 2 *The ethicizing effect* suggests that society's norms, values, and beliefs (ethics) are reinforced through media surveillance. By focusing on wrongdoings in society, the media act as a kind of "morality squad." By giving attention to the consequences of criminal and other behaviour, the media reinforce ideas of what is good and what is right. This is true not only when the media report facts about crime and deviance (murders, robberies, etc.), but also when they shed light on issues that were intended to remain private, particularly in the case of corporations and governments. President Clinton's encounters with Monica Lewinsky and Prime Minister Chrétien’s alleged involvement in the handling of the APEC protesters in 1997 are excellent examples of the media's ethicizing effect.

While these aspects of the mass media can be seen as functional, they also can be interpreted as *dysfunctional*. For example, the media's overreporting of crime and deviance may lead some to feel that the streets are not safe, when in fact the opposite may be true. As Katrina Onstad, writing in *Saturday Night* magazine, points out, Statistics Canada data seem to indicate that the youth crime rate in Canada has decreased over the last few years. Official data suggest that between 1991 and 1995, youth crime in Canada dropped by 6 percent. In addition, the percentage of teen crimes that are deemed “violent” has remained relatively stable for the last 20 years at around 10 percent. However, it’s argued that the media’s obsession with news stories and movies focusing on teen gangs and violence creates the impression that youth violence is increasing. Onstad cites headlines from *The Toronto Sun* (“Rapist is 11...and Cops Can’t Charge Him”) and *The Globe and Mail* (“Savvy Bad Kid Beats the System”) as proof of the news media’s obsession with teen crime. She also claims that movies such as *Kids* and *Little Criminals* perpetuate the myth of teen violence.

The Technological Perspective

The so-called "Canadian School" of communication embodies the ideas of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. Both were determinists, arguing that the physical form of communication would determine the psychological and

social outcomes. Innis was interested in the economics of communication while McLuhan examined how the form of the medium influenced our perception of the message.

Marshall McLuhan taught at Assumption College in Windsor (now known as the University of Windsor) and at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. While it has become somewhat of a cliché, McLuhan developed the theory that *the medium is the message*. He focused on how we perceive media messages by looking not only at the content of the message itself, but at how the message was delivered, or its form. Using the metaphor of a light-bulb to explain his idea, he argued that while everyone notices the content of the light-bulb (the light it provides), no one notices the form, or the bulb itself. The same holds true for the media; people notice the content of the media (a speech on radio, a comedy show on television, etc.), but not the media that transmit the messages. McLuhan believed that the medium itself influences how we perceive that medium's messages.

In his classic 1964 work, *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argued that media were either *hot* or *cool*. A cool medium, such as the telephone, allows for more participation by the receiver of information. The telephone offers only a small amount of information itself; it takes some interest on the part of the participants to make the communication process work. Radio, on the other hand, is a hot medium with lots of information packed into a single channel; therefore, it doesn't require the same attention or participation as a cool medium.

McLuhan developed many of his ideas based on the work of another Canadian, *Harold Innis*. A political economist at the University of Toronto, Innis was interested in communication as it applied to how people or groups remained in power. His communication model was based on what he referred to as "bias" in communication. This bias had effects in both *time* and *space*.

Time and space bias were examined in some detail in *Empire and Communication*, a book Innis published in 1950 that included a historical look at forms of communication that have contributed to the rise and fall of civilizations. He reported on life from ancient Egypt up to and including North American society in the 1940s, and believed that the organizational structure in each society was determined by the media that society used to communicate important information. In turn, these media were directly related to how those in power kept their powerful positions through "monopolies of knowledge."

According to Innis, communication bias is linked to the media of choice of each civilization during each historical period. For example, stone and clay have a bias for time; that is, they can last a long time due to their makeup, and therefore can be passed down from generation to generation. Societies using these "time-based" media were hierarchical, decentralized, and based on tradition. On the other hand, paper has a bias for space; it's

light and can be passed around from person to person. Cultures using these “space-based” media were less hierarchical, more centralized, and more commercial than earlier civilizations. In short, media that were light and fast favoured control over space, while heavy, slow, and face-to-face media were better suited to keeping cultures stable over time.

The works of Innis and McLuhan, while at times confusing for students, should not be overlooked. Both individuals were featured on "The 100 Most Important Canadians in History" list published by *Maclean's* in 1998.

The Political Economy Perspective

The political economy perspective on the mass media is a variation of the Marxist perspective on sociology. It considers ownership and control of resources to be important variables in the transmission of cultural values. Political economists question the role of the media in a society: Is their role to inform and entertain (as Wright would argue) or is the role of media outlets, particularly in capitalist countries such as Canada, to make a profit? For political economists, *concentration of ownership* is a serious issue in Canada. They point to the following as proof that control of the media is falling into fewer and fewer hands in Canada:

- 1 *Cross ownership* occurs where one large company controls, for example, both television and radio within a market. Canadian media giants Shaw and CanWest Global have interests in both radio and television.
- 2 *Mergers* create large companies out of two or more companies. The 1998 merger of Alliance, a film production company, and Atlantis, a producer of Canadian television, is a prime example.

The classic Canadian example of concentration of ownership is the control and ownership of Canadian newspapers. In 1970, a special Senate committee on the status of the mass media in Canada, headed by Senator Keith Davey, released its report on the state of Canadian newspapers. The committee noted that "the media is passing into fewer and fewer hands, and that the experts agree that this trend is likely to continue." At the beginning of the twentieth century, 35 Canadian cities and towns had multiple (two or more) newspapers, but by 1970, there were only 15 such cities and towns. In addition, in 1970 there were only five cities and towns in Canada where "genuine" competition existed in terms of newspaper ownership; that is, while 15 cities and towns had more than one newspaper, in only five of those cities and towns were the newspapers owned by different media outlets. The Davey Report made many recommendations, including limiting the number of newspapers one person or company could own. The government's response to the recommendations was lukewarm at best, and such regulations weren't created.

A little more than 10 years later the situation had not improved. Ownership of Canada's newspapers, particularly in Quebec, had fallen into fewer and fewer hands. The 1981 Kent Commission into newspaper ownership in Canada, headed by Tom Kent, came about following an incident too convenient to be coincidental. On the same day in August 1980, the *Ottawa Journal*, which had been published for 94 years and was owned by Thomson, and the 90-year-old *Winnipeg Tribune*, owned by Southam, closed their doors and ceased publication, leaving Winnipeg and Ottawa as one-newspaper towns. Winnipeg still had *The Winnipeg Free Press*, owned by Thomson, and Ottawa had *The Ottawa Citizen*, owned by Southam. Within a week, the Kent Commission was born. Its mandate was to examine the state of newspapers in Canada and to propose a course of action for the government. Like the earlier Davey Report, the Kent Commission recommended that certain limitations be imposed on how many newspapers one person (or company) could own. Once again, the government did not act on any of the commission's recommendations.

Recent developments in the Canadian newspaper industry have revived concerns. In addition to the new *National Post*, Conrad Black and the Southam Corporation own approximately 60 percent of Canada's daily newspapers. This concerns many Canadians, including Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians, who says "there is a potential in that situation to have a homogeneity of news."

Why all the concern about concentration of ownership in Canada?

After all, in a capitalist society such as Canada, one should be able to venture into any enterprise he or she desires. Both the Davey and Kent commissions provided these points to consider when discussing the effects of concentration of ownership of Canadian newspapers:

- News is a product that needs a variety of voices to be produced. Without this variety, newspapers "become more alike, less individual, less distinctive." In short, concentration of ownership limits choice on the part of the reader.
- As newspapers become part of a large corporation, the people who run them likely won't have a background in journalism, but in business or management. Given this scenario, profits become more important than editorial content and the news-gathering and writing processes.
- Too much power in too few hands contradicts the role of the press in a democracy. Concentration of press ownership in Canada may mean power without accountability.
- While it's true that newspapers compete with radio and television, it is newspapers that traditionally have been used to record history.

The Linguistic Perspective

Some theorists view the media and their products as works of communication that are representational in nature. Media products are texts that primarily use words to communicate ideas. As symbols, words signify something other than themselves. They not only operate on a *denotative* level to label objects in our world, but also work on a *connotative* level to convey cultural beliefs and values. The *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis* claims that language, while not wholly determining our perceptions, does affect how we see the outside world. Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir were linguistic anthropologists who studied language use and patterns among several cultures. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has two versions: one implies that language determines how we see the world; the other suggests that language and thought are linked. Most theorists discard the first theory, deeming it to be too much like George Orwell's *1984*, in which citizens were taught to believe that being a slave is equal to being free.

The second version of the hypothesis, which says that language can guide our perception, can be illustrated by asking a skier how many different words for snow he or she knows. An experienced skier will see and label a wide variety: corn snow, champagne snow, packed powder, and loose granular, to name just a few. Most subcultures have their own way of talking and, as a result, their own way of interpreting the world around them. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis claims that language also works on a societal level to guide interpretations and understandings. An excellent example of this theory in action occurred during the 1990 Persian Gulf War: instead of being killed during bombings, people became "collateral damage," while American soldiers killed by American weapons were described as being killed by "friendly fire." By choosing words carefully, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis would say, the Pentagon was able to control public opinion.

Because of this hypothesis, many sociologists are worried that concentrating media ownership in fewer and fewer hands means that a wide assortment of connotations and interpretations won't be reported. Based on the ideas of French semiotician Roland Barthes, they fear that only the connotations of the dominant ideology will be communicated by newspapers. However, many would argue that the recent explosion in counter-culture, ethnic, and gay newspapers, referred to as *fragmentation* of the media, offers the various subcultures within Canada a chance for their voices to be heard.

MEDIA EFFECTS

There is little doubt that the media affect individuals in society. There are almost as many theories regarding the effects of the mass media on individuals and groups as there are media choices available. One of the earliest studies on the effects of the media came from Walter Lippman in 1922. Lippmann's theory suggested that people's knowledge of the world didn't come from experiencing the world themselves, but from experiencing it through the eyes of the media. In 1948, Harold Lasswell developed a model to study the effects of Second World War propaganda: *Who, Says what, In which channel, To whom, With what effect?* These kinds of theories began to be known as *effects theory* or the *hypodermic model*. The metaphor of a hypodermic needle was used often, the media injecting information and rules about behaviour into a mass audience who would react in the appropriate manner.

Other theories give more credit to members of the audience. One that emerged from this perspective was the *two step flow model* of media effects. This theory argues that the media's influence on individuals is greater when peers and family members support the media messages.

Violence in the Media

One of the more controversial aspects of media effects is what effect media violence has on society. Given that the average Canadian child spends about the same amount of time watching television as he or she does attending school, some concerns may be justified. Here are some recent facts on television violence and Canadian children:

- 1 By the time a Canadian child reaches 12 years of age, he or she has seen 12 000 violent deaths on television.
- 2 According to the University of Laval, children's programming contains 68 percent more violence than programming for adults.
- 3 After watching the movie *Warlock* 10 times, 14-year-old Sandy Charles of Saskatchewan killed an eight-year-old boy by stabbing him with a knife and then beating him with a beer bottle and a rock. After killing the boy, Charles cut strips of skin from his victim and boiled them down. *Warlock* claimed that if you drank boiled-down fat from a virgin, it would give you the power to fly. Charles wanted to fly.

Violence and its effects on children have been important political issues for Canadians in the 1990s. In 1990, a group of school-age children presented a petition with over 150 000 names to the federal minister of communications urging the government to "enact rules to eliminate violent and war programming for children on television." The issue became more meaningful in 1992 when Virginie Lariviere presented Prime Minister Mulroney with a petition with 1.3 million names asking him to initiate legislation that would require broadcasters to reduce the level of violent programming on television and calling for Canadians to boycott violent TV shows.

Lariviere's sister, Marie-Eve, had been robbed, sexually assaulted, and murdered, and Virginie believed that violence on television influenced her sister's murderer.

Canadian broadcasters had had a violence code since 1987. However, with the social and political developments brought about by Lariviere's petition in 1992, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters and the Canadian Television-Telecommunication Commission took a hard look at the issue. In 1993, Lariviere's petition was the subject of a Standing Committee on Communications and Culture. This, in combination with two conferences on the effects of media violence on children, led to the creation of the Action Group on Violence on Television (AGVOT). Members included the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, the CBC, the Canadian Cable Television Association, the Association of Canadian Advertisers, and the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association.

A new violence code was introduced by AGVOT in late 1993. Elements of the code's rules for children's programming (targetted at children under 12 years of age) include:

- 1 Only violence essential to the plot is allowed.
- 2 Violence cannot be the central theme in cartoons.
- 3 Violence cannot be seen as the only solution to conflict resolution.
- 4 There cannot be any realistic scenes of violence that downgrade the effects of violent behaviour.
- 5 Programming cannot invite imitation of violent or perilous acts.

For children over 12 years of age, 9 p.m. has become what AGVOT refers to as the "watershed" hour; programming can become more "risqué" after 9 p.m., as it is assumed that most younger children are in bed. Any program with violence, nudity, or strong language must be accompanied by a viewer advisory.

It didn't take long for the new code to be put into action. In 1994, after receiving complaints regarding *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, AGVOT ordered Global to air an edited version of the program. However, an unforeseen problem arose. While Global's version of the Power Rangers was a sanitized one, viewers with cable or those living in border towns with antennas could simply switch to an American station running the unedited version. The CRTC felt this was unfair to Global and came to the conclusion that regulations and codes weren't the only answer. While the code for children's programming is still in effect, the CRTC decided that the solution to the problem was in the hands of parents, not broadcasters. It felt that Canadian and American broadcasters, working together, could develop an international ratings system to assess levels of violence in their programming. The other piece of the puzzle was technology developed in Canada that came to be known as the V-chip.

Tim Collings, who teaches engineering at Simon Fraser University, offered a simple solution to the problem of violence on television with the violence-chip, or V-chip. Installed inside the television, the V-chip allows parents to predetermine what level of violence is acceptable. Shows are rated on their level of violence: from zero for family fare to five for graphic sex and violence. This rating is embedded in the television signal in much the same way that closed captioning works. Using the remote control, parents and caregivers simply enter the violence level that is appropriate, depending on the time of day and who's watching. The V-chip then blocks reception of any shows with a violence rating higher than the level indicated. The Canadian Cable Television Association worked with American broadcasters to develop a standard code for international use. Both Canadian and American television sets eventually will have to be sold with the V-chip already installed.

The V-chip does have its critics, however. For example, artists and producers want to know who will decide on a show's rating. Some producers feel that the V-chip functions as a kind of unspoken censorship because the content of their shows will now have a label (rating) attached to it. Others worry that a show's rating might cause it to lose advertising revenue: Will a high violence rating affect viewership and revenues? Will advertisers avoid sponsoring programs that have been rated four or five? Will some groups in society boycott companies who sponsor violent shows? Other critics feel that the V-chip merely addresses a symptom, and not the cause, of the problem of violence in society. Lynn Porteous, president of Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment (C-CAVE), says the V-chip is "like an industry polluting a town and saying here's a gas mask, put it on or move." Paul Attallah of Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication says simpler technology than the V-chip exists to help parents to use television wisely: it's known as the "off" button on the television.

Challenging Assumptions About Media Violence

A media researcher from the University of Winnipeg, Wendy Josephson challenges some of the most common criticisms of the links between violence on television and increased levels of aggression in children. For example, while some say there's no conclusive proof that watching violence on television causes violent behaviour in children, Josephson points to recent research studies. The vast majority of reports (including studies conducted by the CRTC, the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, and the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry) claim there is a link between television viewing and violence. Josephson argues that although earlier studies from the 1950s and 1960s might have been methodologically flawed, recent studies have improved research designs and, as a result, more reliable data.

Some of the other criticisms tackled by Josephson include:

- 1 The effect is too small to make a difference. While television is only one agent of socialization that will affect how aggressive a child is, it probably is equally as important as other variables such as social class and gender, but is easier to control.
- 2 There is no clear definition of violence in the research. While different researchers have used different definitions of violent behaviour, the various definitions all involve one person deliberately hurting another. When Canadians talk about violence, we speak from a set of shared experiences and examples.
- 3 Violence on television only reflects the violent society in which we live. This is not even close to being true, says Josephson. Content analysis suggests that television crime occurs about 10 times more often than it does in real life. Saturday morning cartoons are particularly guilty of this exaggeration. The average cartoon has 20 to 25 violent acts per hour; in prime time, there are about five violent acts per hour.
- 4 Violence is on TV because that's what people want to watch. Some research indicates that while violence may be a selling feature for both children's and adult programming, there are other television conventions, such as fast-paced editing, that make programs popular among children. Josephson says that producers of television use violence to their advantage. The story lines for many children's shows are similar: simple conflict that can be communicated visually, fast-paced action, building of suspense, and action that is easy to break up by commercials. In short, producers use violence as a hook to keep people tuned to their program.

Josephson also challenges Canadian television producers to make a difference. She urges producers of children's programming to reduce the amount of violence in their products and to contextualize the violence that remains. Violence should not be used as comic relief or as a simple way to solve problems. The consequences of violent acts especially need to be addressed in programming for older children and teens. As for networks and television stations, Josephson suggests they should be careful when scheduling programs early in the day or late in the afternoon, which is prime time for many Canadian children, especially for the so-called latch-key kids who get home from school before their parents return from work.

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN CANADIAN MEDIA

A long-standing concern for sociologists has been the representation of women in the mass media. This concern has been significant due to *gender stereotypes* perpetuated by the media. CRTC reports on gender role representations indicate that, even in the 1990s, both women and men tend to be cast in traditional ways: women

are shown working in the home, or the *private sphere*, more often than men, while men are shown working in the *public sphere* more often than women.

MediaWatch, a Canadian volunteer network, keeps an eye on sexism in the media. While the image of women has improved over the decades, it has only improved slightly. MediaWatch lists four emerging patterns concerning the images of women in the mass media. First, women are increasingly objectified in the media, particularly in advertising. They are being equated with commodities that can be bought, sold, and disposed of easily and quickly. Second, female sexuality is often used to sell products. MediaWatch refers to this as *irrelevant sexuality*. Using women in sexual poses and various forms of undress perpetuates a negative stereotype that women are always ready and willing to engage in sexual activity. Third, a disturbing trend towards *infanticization* of women also seems to be emerging. This includes representations of woman as passive, insecure, and dependent on men. Finally, women still tend to be defined by what their husbands do, not by personal attributes or achievements. MediaWatch refers to this as *domestication*.

MediaWatch studies have also uncovered the following examples of sexism in Canadian news media:

- 1 Seventy percent of bylines in Canadian newspapers belong to men; only 30 percent belong to women. *The Globe and Mail* was singled out as the worst offender; 87 percent of its bylines were male, and 13 percent were female.
- 2 Eighty-five percent of people interviewed on TV news are male; 15 percent are female.

MINORITIES AND THE MEDIA

The ethnic press has always been an important tool in maintaining ethnic boundaries. Robert Park conducted one of the earliest studies on the role of the ethnic press in the early 1920s. Park examined the ethnic press and its role in the process of assimilation. Some researchers felt that ethnic social institutions, such as churches and the press, slowed down the process of assimilation into the dominant culture. However, Park felt that the ethnic press might help the process of assimilation by making immigrants, many of whom couldn't read English, feel part of the wider community.

On the other hand, in their study of the Portuguese community in Quebec, Alpalhao and Da Rosa (1990) found that in some areas of Quebec, the existence of an ethnic means of mass communication, as well as other ethnic institutions (social services, churches, etc.), "...permit a large percentage of the community to live as if they were still in the milieu of origin..." Therefore, ethnic media may hinder assimilation into the broader, dominant culture.

Given Canada's official status as a multicultural country, it's not surprising that many different foreign-language newspapers are published. According to recent data, many different voices are heard in Canadian ethnic newspapers. For example, Canada's Italian community publishes almost 30 newspapers, while the Jewish and native communities each publish 20 newspapers. According to recent data, other ethnic groups that publish their own newspapers in Canada include the Spanish, Ukrainian, Greek, German, Urdu, and Middle Eastern cultures.

SUMMARY

- There is concern over the influence of the American media on the Canadian public. This “Trojan horse” has been the subject of many Royal Commissions on the Canadian media.
- As a social institution, Canadian media are made up of both public (CBC) and private (CTV, Global) broadcasters. To protect Canadian culture, Canadian media are required by law to broadcast a certain amount of Canadian programming.
- Functionalists view the media as contributing to the equilibrium of society through their role as agents of socialization. They also feel the media coordinate and correlate information, which is important to society.
- Some issues receive more media attention than others do. This makes them more important in the eyes of society. Lazarsfeld and Merton refer to this as status conferral.
- The media also may be dysfunctional. By overreporting certain stories, such as those involving youth crime, the media may create an impression that is not accurate.
- Canadians Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis were determinists. Both felt that the form of communication affected how its message would be interpreted.
- Political economists worry about the growing trend of concentration of media ownership, including cross ownership and mergers, in Canada. They believe that in a democracy this amounts to power without accountability.
- The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that words can shape the way a person “sees” the world. This has important media implications, as the media are a culture's windows on the world.
- Violence in the media is a concern for parents and sociologists. Television broadcasters, in conjunction with parents, have begun to develop ways to protect younger viewers from questionable content. For example, the V-chip allows parents to program their television to show only those programs that have acceptable violence ratings.

- The issue of gender stereotypes is still a controversial one in Canada. According to MediaWatch, despite gains by women in society, their media image hasn't changed much and they are still exploited by the mass media.
- Robert Park believed that ethnic media helped assimilation by making immigrants, many of whom couldn't read English, feel part of the wider community. However, other studies have shown that ethnic media allow immigrants to live as if they were still in their country of origin, thereby hindering assimilation.

SUGGESTED WEB SITES

For information on Canadian government policies regarding the media, check out the CRTC Web site at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/>.

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters Web site has information regarding AGVOT and the V-chip at <http://www.cab-acr.ca/>.

Information regarding the theories of Marshall McLuhan may be found at <http://www.mcluhan.utoronto.ca/>.

Information regarding the theories of Harold Innis may be found at <http://www.regent.edu/acad/schcom/rojc/mdic/innis3.html>.

The MediaWatch Web site has information regarding their critical studies of the mass media at <http://www.mediawatch.com>.

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