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Politics and Popular Culture: How Some Young Anglophone Canadians Perceive thePolitical Content of the Entertainment Media

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Résumé de l'article

Fondée sur des enquêtes réalisées auprès de 456 jeunes Canadiens inscrits dansdes universités où l'anglais est la principale langue d'enseignement,cette recherche vise à répondre à plusieurs questions cruciales soulevées dans lecadre de l'enquête relative à l'influence de la culture populaire surles convictions politiques des jeunes Canadiens anglophones. Nous examinons nonseulement si les jeunes Canadiens perçoivent réellement quelque message politiqueque ce soit dans la culture populaire et s'ils réfléchissent à ces thèmesd'une manière rigoureuse, mais aussi si des jeunes conservateurs ou libérauxsont plus susceptibles d'être d'accord ou en désaccord avec lapolitique de la culture populaire, et dans quelle mesure les attitudes des jeunesCanadiens à l'égard du contenu sociopolitique des médias de divertissementsont différentes de celles des jeunes Américains. Cette recherche sert également àlier les théories passives et actives de la socialisation, et contribue au débat surl'existence de l'impérialisme culturel américain.

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Abstract

This research, based on surveys of 456 young Canadians enrolled at universities where English is the primary language of instruction, seeks answers to several basic questions at the foundation of the inquiry into the impact of popular culture on young English-speaking Canadians' political beliefs. It investigates whether young Canadians actually perceive any political messages in popular culture, and whether they think about these themes in a rigorous way. We investigate whether conservative or liberal youths are more likely to agree or disagree with the politics of popular culture, and to what extent young Canadians' attitudes toward the socio-political content of the entertainment media are different from US youths' attitudes. This research also serves to link the passive and active theories of socialization, and to contribute to the debate over the existence of US cultural imperialism.

Résumé

Fondée sur des enquêtes réalisées auprès de 456 jeunes Canadiens inscrits dans des universités où l'anglais est la principale langue d'enseignement, cette recherche vise à répondre à plusieurs questions cruciales soulevées dans le cadre de l'enquête relative à l'influence de la culture populaire sur les convictions politiques des jeunes Canadiens anglophones. Nous examinons non seulement si les jeunes Canadiens perçoivent réellement quelque message politique que ce soit dans la culture populaire et s'ils réfléchissent à ces thèmes d'une manière rigoureuse, mais aussi si des jeunes conservateurs ou libéraux sont plus susceptibles d'être d'accord ou en désaccord avec la politique de la culture populaire, et dans quelle mesure les attitudes des jeunes Canadiens à l'égard du contenu sociopolitique des médias de divertissement sont différentes de celles des jeunes Américains. Cette recherche sert également à lier les théories passives et actives de la socialisation, et contribue au débat sur l'existence de l'impérialisme culturel américain.

This research examines the influence of the entertainment media as an agent of political socialization, as well as how young people utilize popular culture in their political development. In so doing it contributes to bridging

the theoretical divide in socialization research between the dominant sociological approach, which holds the individual as a passive recipient of political learning, and the psychological approach, which is more concerned with the active role individuals may play in their own socialization. This article also examines the role of the entertainment media through the lens of the theory of cultural imperialism, specifically how it developed over time to recognize the active roles audiences play in interpreting media products.

There are a number of specific questions this research aims to answer. Do young Anglophone Canadians perceive political messages in popular culture? Do they think about these messages in any rigorous way? Are conservative or liberal youths more likely to agree or disagree with the politics of popular culture? Are young Anglophone Canadians' attitudes toward the socio-political content of the entertainment media different from US youths' attitudes? Are there correlations between the kinds of entertainment media consumed and political beliefs? How do young English-speaking Canadians account for the massive US influence over the media milieu in which they operate?[1] By answering these and other basic questions, we will have laid the groundwork for further research about the impact of pop culture on young English-speaking Canadians' attitudes and behaviours, and the uses to which pop culture may be put by young Canadians.

Socialization and Cultural Imperialism Theory

Do young people need to understand the political content of entertainment media in order for that content to exercise a socializing impact upon them? The obvious answer is yes, but not all socialization scholars would agree. What may be true of political socialization at later stages of adolescence may not be true for younger children. For example, for teenagers to be influenced by the anti-George W. Bush statements made by *The Daily Show* host Jon Stewart, it is reasonable to assert that they would actually have to understand that the evaluations are negative. Children, on the other hand, might be influenced to mimic violent acts on television without any understanding of the anti-social nature of the acts they are committing.

Edgar and Edgar differentiated between two broad schools of socialization theory: passive and active. In passive socialization theory, the basic question is, "what do the media do to people?" while in the active model the question is, "what do people do with the media? (609)." Arguing further that "a basic mechanism by which people learn to accept values, attitudes, and forms of behavior is the imposition of sanctions, either rewards or punishments, usually by someone with superior power or someone who is respected," the authors set out the possibility that television programming may offer psychological rewards or punishments for behaviour, and if empirical research were able to demonstrate this to be the

case, then we would much more fully understand television's effects as an agent of socialization (610). We would argue the same is true for music and film. If songs and movies can be shown to reward or punish certain ideas, then we will more adequately understand them as agents of socialization as well.

Learning theory remains an important element of socialization research (Jackson, 2002; Rosenberg). Learning theory holds either that individuals are socialized through imitating models of behaviour (such as parents), or that their attitudes toward political objects are explained through their attitudes toward objects or individuals in their immediate environment (Rosenberg 721). The experiencing of certain images and ideas in the popular culture may positively or negatively reinforce the holding of those ideas among youths.

Put simply, a young person may experience either rewards or punishments through experience with the popular culture. One could witness a behaviour in a movie, television program, or song that is the product of an ethical/moral system which the perceiver does not hold. This may be an unpleasant experience and thus constitute negative reinforcement. The individual may avoid repeating the unpleasant experience by avoiding the popular culture that produced it. On the other hand, should other components of the perceiver's social environment provide positive reinforcement for initially unpleasant experiences, an individual's ethical and moral beliefs might change over time. If, on the other hand, the message of the popular culture matches the young person's, this may be positive reinforcement of the individual's beliefs.

Of course, if the individual feels or thinks nothing of the experience with the popular culture and/or is a deeply politically uninvolved or uninterested individual, we are left wondering what socializing impact it might have had. For younger children, if they mimic a behaviour, we would say the experience did socialize them. But what about ideas, especially abstractly presented ones in the form of movies, TV shows or songs? It is possible the individual may adopt new ideas he has never heard of, after experiencing them in the popular culture through a song, movie or television program. How long-lasting these new attitudes would be remains problematic. This socializing of empty vessels is likely very uncommon, especially among older youths and those engaged in higher education, who likely have been pre-socialized by parents and parentally selected agents of socialization as well as through their own experimentation, and already hold some socio-political beliefs.

While learning theory is the dominant explanatory model in political socialization, it is, of course, not without its sharp critics. Rosenberg suggests learning theory is popular among scholars of political socialization because of the sociological bias inherent in socialization

research. He believes socialization scholarship fails because it ignores psychological explanations of political behaviour in favour of an explanation which holds that "any given act of an individual is determined (that is, it is both defined and caused) in the context of its relation to the action of others" (717). A psychological approach must be developed, "to characterize the meaning and direction individuals give to their political behavior" (725). An empirical program that would complement this theoretical development would account for the underlying logic of the political judgments individuals make (726). Rosenberg offers examples of such research, each of which shares the characteristic of involving collection of very in-depth information about how people make political decisions.

Cook suggests political socialization scholars would not be well served by accepting the dichotomy of social learning theory versus psychological development theory, nor would they be well served by shunning learning theory for a development theory such as those of Jean Piaget. He suggests that adopting Piaget's stages of development approach in political socialization would be a mistake because of the emphasis Piaget places on how children reach the ability to perform logical operations. Cook argues, "if we conceive of formal operational thought in the political realm to indicate going from the possible abstraction to concrete reality, it is a truism that formal thinking does not characterize the political understanding of most citizens" (1083). The public instead assemble their political thinking in a more intuitive way. Cook approvingly cites Vygotsky's theory of "pseudo-conceptual" thinking, which suggests that people think about politics, "based on horizontal sets of associations rather than a hierarchy of abstractions vertically running from general to specific" (1085). Cook argues that a research agenda for political socialization based on this psychological approach would account for why most people never go beyond an intuitive comprehension of politics, while at the same time recognizing the dialectical process individuals participate in as they either accommodate or assimilate new aspects of external reality.

We should, therefore, consider not just socialization agents' impact on individuals, but the active role individuals play in the political learning process. This will account for both strands of socialization theory, as well as cultural imperialism. The individuals whose attitudes we are examining—Anglophone Canadians—live in an entertainment media environment saturated with the cultural products of a foreign country. In its original formulation, cultural imperialism theory might cause us to expect this saturation to overwhelm young Canadians into an acceptance of American values (Schiller). As the theory developed, however, scholars came to recognize the important and active role played by audiences in constructing their own meanings from the raw materials provided by foreign cultures. For example, in a study of how Israeli audiences received the 1980s US TV

series *Dallas*, Liebes and Katz found major differences in interpretations among, for example, recent Russian immigrants (who focused on the show's politics) and Moroccan immigrants (who tended to focus on the show's morality). Similarly, Gray analyzed the reactions of non-Americans to the cartoon series *The Simpsons*, and found that the overwhelming majority interpreted the show as a parody of traditional suburban American family values.[2] In the analysis that follows, we will examine the image of the US presented to young Canadians in the US media they consume.

While they have not been studied to the same degree as news media, entertainment television, popular music, and films have received some scholarly attention. Analyses of the impact of the entertainment media on political socialization and public opinion have relied on both the sociological and psychological approaches, and have utilized diverse methods such as content analysis, surveys and experimental designs.

Regarding entertainment television, Morgan found that watching more of it correlates with a negative perception of the quality of one's life. High-use viewers are less likely than lower-use viewers to rate their life as "great." Meyer argued that the situation comedy *All in the Family* reinforced political attitudes among adults, but the moral/ethical lessons of the show had no impact on children. Ball-Rokeach et al. demonstrated that the miniseries *Roots II* had little impact on viewers' beliefs. Feldman and Sigelman showed that news coverage and discussion related to *The Day After*, a drama about a nuclear attack on the US, were more influential on viewers' beliefs about nuclear war than the actual program. Utilizing focus groups, Delli Carpini and Williams showed that entertainment television's coverage of issues related to toxic waste influenced public opinion as much as news coverage did. Lenart and McGraw demonstrated that those who watched a television miniseries depicting the consequences of a takeover of the United States by an enemy state were more hawk-like in their foreign policy attitudes than those who had not viewed the series.

In terms of music, Fox and Williams surveyed 730 University of Iowa students' ideology and music preference and found relationships between ideology, music preference, and listening to it on the radio, from one's own collection and at live performances. "Liberal students tend to attend rock and popular music concerts more frequently, buy more record albums and tapes, and spend more time listening to records and tapes than do their conservative peers," they report (370). Liberals are also more likely than conservatives to prefer the blues or protest music.

Peterson and Christenson (in Christenson and Roberts) hypothesized that music preference and political beliefs would not be as strongly related during the 1980s due to the de-politicization of music and young people in general during the era. Instead they found liberal youths tended to prefer music performed by black musicians, or heavily political music such as

punk and new wave. Conservative youths tended to prefer 1970s and 1980s rock. Jackson (2002) found that alternative rock and rap fans are more likely to identify as liberal than classic rock and country fans. He also found that alternative and classic rock fans are much more likely than rap and country fans to hold political beliefs that are more liberal than their parents.

Denisoff pioneered lyrical analysis, examining the history of folk and protest music in the twentieth century. More recently, Pratt conducted a lyrical analysis of popular music. He argued that it afforded listeners a means of resisting the messages of the dominant culture. Conversely, Scheurer, utilizing lyrical analysis as well, reached the opposite conclusion. He argued that popular music in America served to reaffirm the belief in America as a land of good and plenty.

Of the various forms of music with political content to which young people listen, rap has been the most thoroughly studied. Zillmann et al. found that after exposure to radical political rap music, white high school students gave more support to a hypothetical African-American liberal candidate for public office than to a white and anti-affirmative action candidate. The radical rap had no detectable influence on the choices of African-American students, and the authors reported that, "rap—radical rap, in particular—appears to be a momentary, fleeting delight for African-American audiences" (21).

Johnson et al. found that African-American males aged between eleven and sixteen exposed to violent rap videos indicated a greater acceptance of violence compared to those exposed to non-violent videos. Moreover, the subjects exposed to the violent videos in a decision simulation expressed greater acceptance of violence toward women and were more likely to want to emulate a materialistic young man than one trying to get an education. Boyd analyzed the lyrics of rappers Public Enemy, Sister Souljah, Ice Cube, KRS-One, and Arrested Development. These rappers opposed misogyny, racism, and a lack of respect and control among some in the African-American community. They opposed police violence, and the tendency to place blame on the white community for problems in the African-American community.

Finally, regarding movies, one important study is Powers et al.'s 1996 work. Through a content analysis of 159 of the top grossing films from 1946 to 1990, they demonstrated that Hollywood moviemakers are more liberal than most Americans, and more critical of the military, business and religion. Also, Adams et al. demonstrated through surveys of moviegoers that viewing the astronaut film *The Right Stuff* reinforced positive images of former astronaut and then presidential candidate Senator John Glenn.

Method and Data

Between September 2004 and January 2005, we administered paper and pencil surveys to students enrolled in introductory political science classes at seven Canadian universities: Dalhousie in Nova Scotia; McGill University in Quebec; University of Windsor and University of Western Ontario in Ontario; University of Manitoba; and University of Calgary in Alberta. Because Western Canada was under-represented after the initial wave of campus visits, a set of surveys was sent to the University of British Columbia with return postage enclosed.[3] These were distributed by faculty members of UBC. Response rates for the surveys administered in classes by the researcher ran at nearly 100 percent, while those administered by faculty members on our behalf were returned at a substantially lower rate—about 25 percent. This produced an overall response rate of about 70 percent. While not a random national sample, the 456 completed questionnaires draw from all regions of English-speaking Canada and come from universities with varied academic reputations and admissions standards.[4] Moreover, while the use of only respondents enrolled in university is less than ideal, recent socialization and public opinion projects have done so, especially when testing new theories (Dolan; Huddy and Terkildsen).[5]

A positive argument, however, may also be made for examining the attitudes of university students. Political science scholarship demonstrates that the likelihood of voting increases with the attainment of higher levels of education (Blais et al.; Wolfinger and Rosenstone). Therefore, in examining the attitudes of young people enrolled at university we are learning about the beliefs of those most likely to vote, and therefore to influence the political process. Moreover, scholars have also found that elites, defined mainly as those who work full-time in politics or public affairs, such as the US President, governors, members of Congress and so on, but sometimes defined more broadly to include prominent members of communities such as corporate CEOs or community leaders, influence the opinions of others (Paul and Brown; Mondak). Those with a university education are more likely to be found among the elite, and therefore to influence the beliefs of others.

Spending Time with and Thinking about Entertainment

The most important questions asked for the purposes of this research include six questions concerning whether the respondent has ever agreed or disagreed with the socio-political message of a popular song, movie or entertainment television program.[6] Large majorities answered in the affirmative for each medium.

Table 1: Thinking about Pop Culture

Question	Response	n
Disagreed with the message of a SONG	79.1%	444
Agreed with the message of a SONG	91.1%	438
Disagreed with the message of a MOVIE	78.8%	425
Agreed with the message of a MOVIE	91.4%	432
Disagreed with the message of a TV program	79.0%	404
Agreed with the message of a TV program	83.8%	400

While strong majorities have ever agreed and disagreed with the political content of entertainment culture, the differences in Table 1 are important, and indicate that young people may use the various popular media in different ways. The largest majorities have ever agreed with the message of a song or movie. In fact, all three "agree" questions received greater majorities than the "disagree" questions. This is important, because it suggests that entertainment media may reinforce beliefs rather than change them. In other words, young people may ignore or avoid messages from the entertainment culture with which they believe they will disagree, and therefore are less likely to report ever having disagreed with a message. Evidence suggests agreers and disagreers may use the media in different quantities. While 34.7 percent of those who report ever having disagreed with the message of a TV program report watching less than an hour per day of entertainment TV, only 23.5 percent of non-disagreers report watching that little television. Also, while only 21.1 percent of disagreers report watching between two and three hours per day, 32.9 percent of agreers report watching that much. These differences are significant (Chi-square $(3) = 7.718$, sig. (two-tailed) = .052). Interestingly, disagreers and agreers with messages in songs listen to their own collections or to the radio about the same amounts, while disagreers actually own more pieces of recorded music (96 to 56, ($t = 3.927$, sig. (two-tailed) = .000). It makes sense that disagreers would shun television due to the more limited nature of the amount of programming available, while they may purchase as many recordings as they want which contain messages they prefer. Unfortunately, there is no measure of how frequently respondents attend movies.

Agreeing with the Pop Culture

The content of the messages agreed or disagreed with may tell us much about how young people use the entertainment media as well. Respondents were asked after each agree/disagree question to name the movie, TV program or song they disagreed with, and why. The results were then coded into distinct categories.[7] Not surprisingly, the most common response was not to answer, and the second most frequent response was to answer by

naming the element of the entertainment media with which the respondent disagreed, or offering a reason so vague that it cannot be classified.[8] Nonetheless, the clear responses form an interesting pattern worth investigating.

Table 2: Media and Messages With Which Respondents Agreed

Medium	Message
Movies	Anti-US (11.7%)
	Anti-Violence (7.8%)
	Anti-Capitalism (5.8%)
	(n=154)
Songs	Anti-War (24.8%)
	Anti-US (5.1%)
	General Tolerance (5.1%)
	(n=157)
TV Programs	General Tolerance (7.0%)
	Anti-US (5.8%)
	General Morality (6.0%)
	(n=86)

In terms of movies agreed with, there were a total of 184 mentions of specific films. Among those mentioned most often are Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9-11* (27 percent of mentions) and *Bowling for Columbine* (20 percent), and *The Corporation* (3 percent). Almost all of the films mentioned are US-made blockbusters and only two are Canadian: *The Corporation*, which was mentioned six times, and *Jesus of Montreal*, a Quebec film which was mentioned just once. When the young Canadians in this sample think about the political content of movies, they are thinking about US-made films, and predominantly the films of one controversial US filmmaker.

In terms of movie messages agreed with, anti-US messages were most popular, being offered by about 11.7% of respondents who offered an answer. A typical response that fits the category of anti-US messages shows both the depth of the sentiment, as well as the complexity of responses to these questions. A respondent wrote he/she agreed with Michael Moore's movie *Fahrenheit 9-11* because, "he illustrates how the Bush Administration wanted to distract the American public from their interest in money, and lack of concern for both troops and Iraqi civilians." We code this as anti-US because we included in that category both general anti-US sentiments, as well as specific disagreements with particular contemporary

or historical administration policies. An example of a more general anti-US sentiment from a movie with which a respondent agreed is the respondent who concurred with Michael Moore's films *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9-11* because they are, "anti-Bush, anti-American and anti-war."

Scholars have long noted the existence of Anti-Americanism in English-Canada's identity and nationalism (Brooks; Millard, Riegel and Wright; Edwardson; Mackey; Granatstein; Gibbins; Wright). Brooks is very direct when he writes, "no serious discussion of a distinctive Canadian identity in English-speaking Canada...can ignore the crucial role that anti-Americanism has played in its construction and maintenance" (140). This is not surprising, given Canada's counter-revolutionary tradition as well as its uncomfortable location next to a political and cultural hegemon.

But, while broad agreement exists among scholars that anti-Americanism has played a role in the origins and maintenance of the identity of English-speaking Canadians, the extent and significance of its existence in Canada remains an open question. Doran and Sewell argue that no latent anti-Americanism exists among Canadians, but their definition of the concept is quite strict and includes two dimensions. First, anti-Americanism includes "perceptual distortion such that a caricature of some aspect of behavior is raised to the level of general belief. In addition, based on that perception, it involves hostility directed toward the government, society, or individuals of that society" (106). So, disliking the policies of President George W. Bush would not constitute anti-Americanism per se, but believing all Americans are war-mongering fools, and therefore opposing Bush and hating Americans would. Doran and Sewell suggest that anti-American rhetoric flares up from time to time, but that Canadian governments who too strongly play on it are soon removed from office.

This debate is unlikely ever to be completely resolved, but what is most fascinating here is the evidence that some Canadian anti-Americanism is being fuelled by the contents of films made by a US filmmaker. Canadian youths are watching US films almost exclusively, yet the content of these films is not necessarily positive for the United States. This supports Gray's 2007 conclusions about the interpretation of the *The Simpsons* by non-Americans.

The second most common message agreed with in a movie involved pictures the respondents perceived of as "anti-violence." An example of this is the respondent who agreed with the message of *Bowling for Columbine* because "there is too much violence, Americans live in fear and therefore consume, keeping the economy going." The preference for the message of this film also demonstrates another important point about how

young people utilize movies in the formation or maintenance of their beliefs. Popular films from controversial filmmakers immediately come to respondents' minds when filling out surveys, but may fade in relevance as time passes. In other words, respondents utilize the entertainment most available to them.

The third most frequently mentioned category, attracting 5.8 percent of responses, was "anti-capitalist" messages. Again, this often revolved around Michael Moore's films, this time referring to Moore's first film *Roger and Me,* a documentary about General Motors' abandonment of Flint, Michigan.

In terms of song messages agreed with, there were 157 total mentions of a specific band or performer. Mentioned more often than anyone else was former Beatle John Lennon, with 10 percent of the total mentions. Next most frequently mentioned was Rage Against the Machine, with just over four percent, and U2 and Black Eyed Peas, with just under four percent each. In terms of nationalities, 65 percent of the mentions went to US bands or singers, 15 percent to British acts, 13 percent to Canadian artists, and 5 percent to the Irish. When they are thinking about the political content of pop music with which they agree, the young Canadians in this sample are predominantly thinking of US music, but are more likely to think of Canadian content than was the case with films.

Messages agreed with in songs follow a similar pattern as with movies. By far the most frequently mentioned theme agreed with is "anti-war." Young Canadians in the sample responded favourably to songs they perceived as being anti-war (with 24.8 percent selecting this as the theme with which they agreed)—both in general and as against the current war in Iraq. Typical of a general anti-war belief is the respondent who reported agreeing with the song "What's Going On?" by Motown legend Marvin Gaye because it "emphasizes the uselessness of war." This song choice is also important because it was almost certainly released before the respondent was born (the average age of respondents is 20.24 years, while "What's Going On?" was released in 1971, about 34 years before the surveys were administered). This indicates that while popular music is an important generational marker, music from generations past may still be relevant for contemporary young people, especially if they perceive older music to have something important to say about situations similar to the ones in which they are living. Thus an anti-war song from the Vietnam era may still resonate with young people thinking about the war in Iraq. Also, music preference among young people today is notoriously eclectic. Among respondents who answered the question concerning their favourite musical style, 19.2 percent reported preferring "classic rock", which made it the second most popular musical style, behind only "alternative rock".

The second most frequently mentioned theme agreed with in songs, but only attracting 5.1 percent of respondents, include "anti-US" messages. An example of a song with an anti-American message with which a student agreed is "No News Is Good News" by the group Newfound Glory, which the respondent describes as, "about American politics and Bush and how he's ruining everything." The category of "general tolerance" also attracted 5.1 percent of respondents and included such comments as a respondent who approved of Jewel's song "Pieces of You," because "we are all alike in some way, so why would we hate and abuse those around us?" Again, young Canadians are observed agreeing with large amounts of US-produced popular culture, but not necessarily having pro-US beliefs reinforced. Importantly, we see more Canadian acts present in the consciousness of the young people in the sample than we saw with movies, which could be interpreted as a success of Canadian cultural policy. We will return to this possibility in the conclusion.

In terms of messages agreed with in a TV program, respondents offered 83 total mentions of a specific show, including news and entertainment programs (most of the references were to entertainment programs). Just under 16 percent of these mentions went to the hybrid *The Daily Show*, while just over 7 percent went to *The West Wing*, just over 6 percent went to *Oprah* and 5 percent went to *The Simpsons*. Just over 18 percent of mentions went to Canadian productions, while 80 percent went to US-made programming (French and Norwegian programs received a single mention each).

The distribution of themes agreed with in a television program covered the widest range of concerns, and therefore no category stood far above the others in terms of popularity. Both "general tolerance" and "anti-US" messages received strong support, as did beliefs we categorized as supportive of "general morality." A good example of the belief in tolerance is the respondent who liked the message of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, because it "dealt with a lot of teenage issues and always promoted tolerance and acceptance." A good example of agreement with the theme of general morality is the respondent who wrote he/she agrees with the "usually good messages about family values and moral values," in programs such as *The Simpsons*, *Smallville*, and *CSI*. It is interesting to note that respondents saw *The Simpsons* as promoting family values and morality, since when the show first began airing in 1989, conservatives decried it for lacking family values, and then-President George H.W. Bush decried it, saying the US needs more families like The Waltons, and fewer like The Simpsons (Jackson, 1). However, more recent commentary on the show has argued that it does promote traditional values (Cantor).

Finally, if the claim of conservatives that there is much liberal content in the entertainment media is accurate, we might expect liberals to be more

likely to have agreed with the messages of a song, TV show or movie. Those who have ever agreed with a message in a song are more liberal than those who have not (4.95 v. 4.31 on a seven-point scale where extremely liberal = 7, sig. (two-tailed) = .018). The same relationship does not hold with regard to having agreed with a movie or television program. This mixed evidence suggests conservatives may have something to fear from popular culture, but since the arrow of causality is notoriously difficult to point in socialization research, it must be admitted that young liberals may find more to agree with in popular music because they are looking for it more than are young conservatives.

Disagreeing with the Pop Culture

In terms of movies disagreed with, respondents mentioned a specific film 74 times. Among the films receiving significant numbers of mentions were *Fahrenheit 9-11*, with 26 percent of mentions, and *Black Hawk Down* and *Bowling for Columbine* with 8 percent each. None of these is a Canadian-made film. In fact, only one of the films disagreed with is Canadian-made: the documentary *The Corporation*, and it was mentioned only one time. When the young Canadians in this sample are disagreeing with the message of a film, they are disagreeing with US productions.

Table 3: Media and Messages with which Respondents Disagreed

Medium	Message
Movies	Pro-US (12.9%)
	Pro-Violence (7.9%)
	(n=101)
Songs	Against Women's Rights (11.2%)
	Pro-violence (10.3%)
	Pro-US (8.6%)
	(n=116)
TV Programs	Pro-US (14.7%)
	Against Women's Rights (7.4%)
	Pro-Homosexuality (6.3%)
	General Immorality (6.3%)
	(n=95)

Despite the fact that *Fahrenheit 9-11* was the film most often mentioned as having been disagreed with, "pro-US" bias is the most frequently mentioned theme, at 12.9 percent. A clear example of this is the respondent

who wrote, "I disagreed with the movie *The Patriot* because it was a false indication of what actually happened and was a piece of American propaganda." The second most frequently mentioned theme respondents disagreed with was "pro-violence," at 7.9 percent. A comment which demonstrates the complexity of young people's relationship with the entertainment media comes from a respondent who disagreed with the violence in the *Kill Bill* movies. The respondent wrote, "I disagree with the message of vigilantism, the notion of violence solving problems. However, I still liked watching the movie for the cinematic experimentation by (director Quentin) Tarantino." These kinds of comments demonstrate young people may find much both to agree with and disagree with in the same popular culture production. Young people are not empty vessels into which the entertainment media pour their ideas, and they do attempt to balance the positive and negative aspects of the media they experience in forming their reaction to it.

In terms of messages disagreed with in songs, there were 79 discrete mentions of bands. Eminem received the highest number of mentions at 20 percent, while Britney Spears, Green Day and Toby Keith received 8 percent each. Just over 86 percent of the artists mentioned as having been disagreed with are US musicians, while 8 percent are British and just 4 percent are Canadian. Young Canadians are more likely to disagree with a US song and more likely to agree with a Canadian one.

Messages disagreed with in songs were more widely dispersed than with movies. Both messages against women's rights or that degrade women, and those that are pro-violence attracted 11.2 percent of disagreers. A comment that clearly indicates what respondents mean when they disagree with a song based on its opposition to or degradation of women comes from the respondent who opposed rapper Eminem, because "he sings of men against women and children. This angers me – often the message is about spousal abuse."

In songs, too, respondents saw a pro-US bias (8.6 percent). Many respondents, for example, mentioned disagreeing with what they perceived to be the excessive and violent patriotism of country and western star Toby Keith's post-9-11 song "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue".

In terms of messages disagreed with in television, 61 total mentions of a program name resulted. Three shows attracted just over eight percent of the mentions: *Law and Order*, *The Swan*, and *Will and Grace*. *Oprah* and *The Bachelor/Bachelorette* attracted just under seven percent each. Just under seven percent of the mentions went to Canadian programs, the rest to US productions.

The "pro-US" bias category attracted 14.7 percent of disagreers. No other category attracted as many responses, but programs that degraded women raised the ire of 7.4 percent of respondents, while concerns with programs' "general immorality" and pro-homosexuality or gay rights attracted 6.3 percent each. Most of the concerns over homosexuality centered around the television programs *Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. These concerns reflect the increased prevalence of shows with gay characters, or a focus on gay issues. They also mirror concerns from earlier survey research on the themes disagreed with by US youths in movies, songs and television.

In this previous survey, conducted among US university students in 1997 and 1998,[9] the most frequently disagreed with message in entertainment television was pro-homosexual rights. Then the program of concern was *Ellen* wherein the main character, played by comedian Ellen DeGerenes "came out" as a lesbian, creating a major controversy. It seems there is a cadre of conservative youths in both countries who do not like the presentation of homosexuality on mainstream television, and may not have their opposition weakened by its continuation.

No respondents in the US survey considered programming that was pro- or anti-US as a problem, yet for television among Canadians in the sample a pro-US bias was the most frequently mentioned concern. Perhaps if 70 percent of the television programs in the US originated in another country, Americans too would be concerned about getting too rosy a picture of that country through watching its TV shows.

The message most frequently disagreed with in movies among the US respondents involved excessive violence. While that was the second most popular category with Canadians, pro-US bias eclipsed violence as the number one category of concern. Again the US dominance of the Canadian film market (about 95 percent of feature films shown in Canada are foreign) likely explains this difference in the distribution of concerns.

Opposition to pro-violence and anti-religious themes dominated US respondents' concerns with the socio-political content of songs. For Canadians, violence and opposition to women's rights or endorsement of violence against women finished nearly tied for first as the major concern. Concerns over opposition to religion did not figure in any Canadian response. Pro-US bias finished second.

The differences in the distribution of concerns among US and Canadian respondents tell us much about differences in media use habits and political beliefs of young people in each country. Canadians disagree with what they perceive to be overly pro-US sentiments in much of the entertainment media, while such issues did not attract the attention of US youths in 1997-1998. To be fair, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 may have

led to an increase in pro-American messages in US entertainment media products, and there may be US youths who are opposed to them as much as Canadian youths are. On the other hand, Canadians are likely to be more sensitive to pro-US themes with or without the events of 9-11, given the predominance of US media in Canada and the history of anti-Americanism. As to religion, it is not surprising that Canadians did not perceive anti-religious themes as a problem in pop culture because religion plays a larger role in life in the US than it does in Canada. For example, while 33 percent of Americans classify themselves as Protestant Evangelical Christians, only 12 percent of Canadians do (*Canadian Religious Beliefs and Practices — Part 1*"), and there is nothing approaching the size and power of the US Christian right political movement in Canada.

Finally, if the popular culture is filled with "liberal" messages encouraging youths to participate in risky sexual behaviour, drug use, violence and other socially unacceptable behaviours, we might expect those English-speaking Canadian youths who have ever disagreed with a message in an element of the popular culture to be more conservative than other youths. This does not appear to be the case as there are only very small and statistically insignificant differences in mean ideology scores between those who have disagreed and those who have not.

Canadian Identity and Pop Culture

The discussion above demonstrates some interesting patterns about how the young English-speaking Canadians in the sample think about the political content of popular music, television and film. Most importantly, many respondents demonstrated themselves not to be passive consumers of popular culture and its political themes, but instead to be actively engaged with the entertainment media. Significantly, it also appears that while the young Canadians in this sample are utilizing large amounts of US popular culture, they are not necessarily embracing pro-US attitudes because of it; in fact, in many cases, the contrary is true.

Beyond the results of the open-ended questions, a number of other closed-ended questions were asked in the survey, the analysis of which might offer some further insight on the relationships between entertainment use and political beliefs. Here we participate in the difficult challenge of using results from non-longitudinal surveys to impute causality between entertainment preferences and political beliefs. While the causal arrow may be difficult to point in the following relationships, they are important nonetheless, and likely support at least a reinforcement hypothesis about the relationship between popular culture and political beliefs.

Respondents were asked to rate Canada and the US on a 100 degree scale, their attitudes toward the quality of Canadian music and television, as well as the percentage of their own music collections they would define as

Canadian. A number of interesting correlations result. For example, as the percentage of a young person's collection that he or she defines as Canadian increases, his or her temperature rating of the US declines (-.091, two-tailed sig. = .063) and their temperature rating of Canada increases slightly (.094, two-tailed sig. = .054). It is possible that those who like the US more buy less Canadian music because of it, while those who like Canada more buy more Canadian music. On the other hand, it is equally possible that those who buy more Canadian music then feel better about Canada, and perhaps worse about the United States. From the Guess Who's "American Woman" to Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World" to Blue Rodeo's "It Could Happen to You," there is a long and continuing tradition of anti-American sentiment in Canadian popular song, which scholars have noticed (Jackson, 2005; Edwardson). Scholars have also noted the ability of Canadian music to tell Canadian stories and validate Canada as a relevant and important country (Jackson, 2005). It is not impossible that young Canadians may be influenced in their attitudes toward the US and Canada from experience with Canadian music.

Recently, relations between the two nations have become more strained as the US border closed to Canadian beef, the softwood lumber dispute simmered, and the repercussions that resulted from Canada's refusal to join the war in Iraq and the Bush administration's national missile defense plan. Canadian musicians, especially those from the "alternative rock" genre, have had much to say about strained relations with the US, and in defense of Canada's right to "opt out" of US plans with which it disagrees. For example, Deryck Whibley of the band Sum 41 said, "George W. Bush is probably one of the worst presidents we'll ever have, or have had. ... I just don't know how, so far, he's gotten away with everything he's done." If pop music preference influences beliefs, we would expect fans of alternative rock to have higher temperature ratings of Canada and lower ratings of the US. The data confirm one of these hypotheses. Fans of alternative rock have slightly warmer ratings of Canada (89 degrees compared with 86) and the difference is significant (t = 2.050, sig. (two-tailed) = .041). There was no difference, however, on US temperature rating.

Discussion and Conclusion

The examination of entertainment media in the context of political socialization theory allows us to clarify what is best with two competing sets of ideas about socialization, as well as bridge the two schools of thought. The psychological approach encourages us to consider the individual as an active participant in his own socialization process, while the learning theory approach rightly directs us to look for links and patterns between the themes put forth in the pop culture and the beliefs of youths, and to try then to draw a causal arrow pointing in the right direction.

Young English-speaking Canadians' responses to questions about themes they have agreed and disagreed with in songs, TV shows and movies indicate they are not passive recipients of propaganda when they experience the popular culture. This is not surprising, given that the average respondent is over 20 years old. However, the complexity of some respondents' thoughts about the messages in the entertainment media indicates that some young people are doing much with pop culture, and not just having things done unto them. The lack of ideological consistency among those who have ever agreed or disagreed suggests that Cook is correct in his argument that citizens assemble their political thinking in a horizontal and intuitive way rather than hierarchically from abstract principle to application to concrete reality. Some youths may think ideologically and apply their ideological predisposition to their assessment of the entertainment media, but it appears most youths build their beliefs in a less ordered way.

Just as interestingly, the evidence reported above suggests insights from learning theory are valuable as well. We have limited the scope of our investigation of the relationship between attitudes toward Canada and the United States and respondents' reliance on Canadian productions. Canadians who own more Canadian music feel more warmly toward Canada and less warmly toward the US. While the causal arrow is difficult to point, these correlations may imply that Canadian youths who rely more heavily on Canadian-produced television and music have a better image of Canada and a worse one of the US.

This research may contribute to the reconsideration of cultural imperialism theory as well. Gray begins his review of the history of the theory with the startling claim, "cultural imperialism was supposed to be dead," before explaining its rise in the 1970s and death at the hands of "audience researchers and theorists who balked at its assumptions of cultural weakness, cultural authenticity, and audience passivity" (129-130). This research indicates young Canadians may live in a media milieu dominated by US productions, but the messages they take from them run a mighty wide range, including plenty of anti-Americanism, which has long been considered an element of the English-speaking Canadian identity. Parts of the audience, at least, are not passive. On the other hand, we must not be too sanguine about the situation. While many of the young English-speaking Canadians in our sample are not coming away from the experiencing of huge amounts of American culture with uniformly positive attitudes toward the US, they are still spending much time with US media and ideas, which means they are not spending that time with Canadian productions and Canadian ideas.[10]

This research has policy implications as well, especially regarding Canada's content restrictions for television and radio. The Canadian

government mandates that 60 percent of television content and 30 percent of radio content be "Canadian" as defined by the nationality of the key creative personnel who created the work. The results above suggest the consequences of increased listening to Canadian music and watching of Canadian television may be to increase affection for Canada and dislike for the United States. The goals of Canadian broadcast policy, as outlined in the Broadcasting Act, include, "safeguard[ing], enrich[ing], and strengthen[ing] the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada" (Broadcasting Act, Part 1, Chapter 3). The evidence presented above suggests content restrictions may be succeeding in achieving this objective. Moreover, according to the same section of the Act quoted above, the broadcasting system should "reflect Canadian attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity." Turning Canadians into anti-Americans is not the goal of broadcast policy, but in reflecting anti-Americanism, Canadian music especially may reinforce this attitude.

Political socialization ought to remain a vital area of inquiry for political scientists. After all, what question could be more important for a political system than how it may be successfully transmitted from one generation to the next? Also, the two broad approaches to political socialization should not be thought of as competitors, because they are not incompatible. Each offers helpful insight into how the socialization process works, as demonstrated by the analysis of young Canadians' use of the entertainment media and its potential impact on their political beliefs. Future research ought to rely on longitudinal data to test the influence of pop culture as an agent of socialization, as well as on focus groups to examine in more depth how young people think about the pop culture.

Appendix
Question Wording

Sometimes artists say things about politics, ethics, morality and so on in their songs. Have you ever DISAGREED with the message of a song? (please circle one response):

    2. Yes   1. No

If you have ever DISAGREED with the message of a song and can remember the title of the song and the artist, please name them and briefly explain why you disagreed with the song in the space provided.

Sometimes artists say things about politics, ethics, morality and so on in their songs. Have you ever AGREED with the message of a song? (please circle one response):

    2. Yes   1. No

If you have ever AGREED with the message of a song and can remember the title of the song and the artist, please name them and briefly explain why you disagreed with the song in the space provided.

Sometimes actors and writers say things about politics, ethics, morality and so on in their movies. Have you ever DISAGREED with the message of a movie? (Please circle one response.):

    2. Yes   1. No

If you have ever DISAGREED with the message of a movie and can remember the title of the movie, please write it in the space provided and briefly explain why you disagreed with the message.

Sometimes actors and writers say things about politics, ethics, morality and so on in their movies. Have you ever AGREED with the message of a movie? (Please circle one response.):

    2. Yes   1. No

If you have ever AGREED with the message of a movie and can remember the title of the movie, please write it in the space provided and briefly explain why you disagreed with the message.

Sometimes actors and writers say things about politics, ethics, morality and so on in their television programs. Have you ever DISAGREED with the message of a television program? (please circle one response):

    2. Yes   1. No

If you have ever DISAGREED with the message of a television program and can remember the name of the program, please write it in the space provided and briefly explain why you disagreed with the message.

Sometimes actors and writers say things about politics, ethics, morality and so on in their television programs. Have you ever AGREED with the message of a television program? (please circle one response):

    2. Yes   1. No

If you have ever AGREED with the message of a television program and can remember the name of the program, please write it in the space provided and briefly explain why you disagreed with the message.

Canadian music and television is not as good as American music and television

    1. strongly agree   3. somewhat agree

    5. somewhat disagree 7. strongly disagree

Do you watch Canadian stations all of the time, most of the time, some of the time or none of the time? (please circle one response)

    1. all of the time   3. most of the time

    5. some of the time 7. none of the time   9. don't know

We'd like to get your feelings on some countries in the news these days. We'd like you to rate them using what is known as the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm towards that country. Ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable towards that country. If you rate the country at the midpoint, 50 degree mark, that means that you don't have any particular feelings towards that country.

    A. Great Britain _____   B. France _____

    C. The United States _____   D. Canada _____

    E. China _____   F. Quebec _____

About what percentage of the recordings in your collection would you say are Canadian? _____

Notes

1. The linguistic barrier means French Canadians operate in a very different media environment than exists in the rest of Canada. As such, our analysis is confined to English-speaking young Canadians, and whatever generalizations we draw are appropriately circumspect.

2. Gray's article is also noteworthy for its presentation of a brief history of the rise, fall, and rise again of cultural imperialism theory, especially pp. 129-134.

3. The purpose of this research project is to determine the influence of popular culture on the political beliefs of young English-speaking Canadians. To get a sample of English speakers, we visited universities where the language of instruction is English. It is possible, therefore, that some of the respondents speak English as a second language, but they are clearly sufficiently skilled in the language to pursue university study in it. We leave it to other scholars to investigate these relationships in French-speaking Canada.

4. Here are some basic demographic characteristics of the sample. First, the survey is almost exclusively Anglophone as only English-language universities were visited. Atlantic Canada consists of the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The Prairies include Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Based on figures from the most recent Canadian census, Atlantic Canada is slightly over-represented in the sample (8.7% to 7.4%). Quebec is slightly under-represented in the sample (12.7% to 24%). This is not a problem because Quebec's percentage of Anglophone Canadians, who form the basis of this study, is lower than their proportion of the entire country. Ontario is slightly over-represented (43.5% to 39%). The Prairies are slightly over-represented (15.4% to 7%) and the West (Alberta and British Columbia) is under-represented too (19.7% to 23%). We do not believe these minor misdistributions are a problem because each region is represented by enough respondents to influence the results.
   The average age of the respondents is 20.24 years (s=2.24). In terms of gender, 54.6 per cent of the sample is male.

5. This was already said on p. 10 Response rates for the surveys administered in classes by the researchers ran at nearly 100 percent, while those administered by faculty members on our behalf (this includes only those administered at the University of British Columbia) were returned at a substantially lower rate–about 25 percent. This produced an overall response rate of about 70 percent.

6. Specific question wording appears in the appendix.

7. The authors coded the responses simultaneously, so while we do not report rigorous measures of inter-coder reliability the major categories presented here are exclusive and representative of the data.

8. Regrettably, this is the price to be paid for self-administered paper and pencil surveys where no interviewer is present to prompt responses from reluctant participants (see Fowler 1993 for the advantages and disadvantages of various survey methods). While the level of non-response is unfortunate, we believe it says more about the self-administered paper and pencil survey method than it does about political socialization. We are almost certain we would have had more responses with a telephone survey that included prompting.

9. Results of this survey were published in Jackson (2002) and the demographic characteristics roughly parallel the survey of Canadian students, with the exception that the U.S. survey was not a national one, but was confined to students enrolled in two universities in Ohio and Michigan.

10. The respondents on average describe about 18 percent of their music collections as "Canadian," while only 26 percent report watching Canadian TV stations "most" or "all" of the time.

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