CORRELATIVE NATIONAL SELF-IDENTITY
OF POLISH IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA AND UNITED STATES

By

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Abstract

This paper is based on a three factor theory of national self-identity, elaborated in earlier works of this author (Boski, 1987, 1988, 1989a). Criterial, correlative and affective aspects of identity in Poles, and Polish immigrants to various countries have been studied. This presentation concentrates on comparisons between two samples: Polish immigrants living in Canada and the US. The paper discusses only a portion of findings which pertains to the correlative aspect of identity.

In the Canadian sample, the Self-prototype similarity has been significantly stronger for Polish than for Canadian side. Polish identity showed also stability across gender and generation groups. Significant increase in acquisition of Canadian identity, over time and generation, was observed in women only.

The American study applied Positive and Negative characters, rather than neutral Prototypes, as identity referents. Here also a strong gender effect was found: males and females have equal levels of positive Polish identity, but differ largely in the degree of American identity: the latter being lower for males, but higher for females. Identity scores in women are remarkably more positive than in men.

In both samples gender and Canadian/American identity are positively related to immigrant's happiness or life satisfaction. Here again women are on the brighter side.

The findings are discussed in terms of values underlying identity measures, and differences in gender roles.
As it has been proposed elsewhere (Boski, 1987; 1988; 1989a,b),
national self-identity can be conceptualized as a triad consisting of
three components: i) **Criterial**, that is knowledge and personal
relevance of cultural/national symbols; ii) **Correlative**, consisting
of similarity between one’s self description and construction of a
nation's prototypical person; iii) **Affective**, that is feelings
cathected to the country as an entity: see figure 1.

It has been also postulated that the three levels of identity are
interrelated: more knowledge or cognitive centrality of a country
representation (historical, cultural, political) should generate
stronger affects and also lead to higher rates of similarity with
positively evaluated national prototypes. Depending on specific
historical circumstances, the cognitive aspects of national
self-identity may be strongly polarized in their affective
components.

Immigration, but also living in a pluralistic, multinational
society, offers a unique opportunity to study national self-identity
dynamically, i.e. as a process of **retaining** original identity and/or
**acquiring** a new identity. Hypotheses that follow are based on
assumptions that criterial identity develops mainly through formal
education and personal participation in emotionally charged national
events. Correlated identity, on the other hand, is a product of
cognitively less elaborated, day-to-day shaping or practical
socialization.

With these assumptions it has been hypothesized that in the first
generation of immigrants retention of the original criterial identity
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prevails over acquisition of a new one for the host country (language can serve here as the best example): acquisition of correlated identity occurs faster (is being learned in practical ways, as an adaptation requirement), although not without conflicts. All in all, self-identity of the first generation immigrants should be more attached to the country of origin.

In the second generation, criterial identity with the new country develops as a product of formal school education and cumulative personal experience, while that with the old country barely leaves the ground. Because of that, retention should be seen more in terms of correlative identity, as a component of "different" lifestyle modeled after immigrant parents.

To illustrate, a first generation immigrant will be detected by the locals because of his "accent" and lack of knowledge or involvement in their typical cultural events. The same person may be seen after years by his/her old compatriots as say "Americanized" because of actions, expectations or evaluations unusual to their ways of doing. A second generation person of such parents should culturally fit to the new country, and yet retain some personality profile traceable to the country of origin.

The above predictions are summarized in table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Problems here mentioned have been a subject of a continuous research program for a couple of years. For the purpose of this presentation further discussion will be limited to a comparative analysis of correlative self-identity among Polish immigrants in Canada and the US. By so doing the fundamental issue in Cross-cultural psychology: specificity vs generality of phenomena
studied in at least two countries, will be addressed.

**Canadian study**

Subjects. The study was carried out in 1986 and its participants were 66 Polish immigrants living in Kingston, a medium size city of about 100,000 inhabitants in Canadian province of Ontario; rich in historical traditions and a "capital" of Canadian cross-cultural psychology. They were females and males belonging to three distinct cohorts: 1) NEW, or recent immigrants from the early 1980-s, none of whose lived in Canada for more than 5 years; 2) OLD, or the WW II veterans and prisoners, who landed in Canada in late 1940-s, and were predominantly retired; 3) SECond generation, young adults in their 20-30s, who were born in Canada as children of OLD.


A Q-sort test. For the purpose of measuring self-reports and prototype construction, a Q-sort test was designed. Its content consisted of 60 statements on personal beliefs, behavioral patterns, and value-judgments. E.g.:

- I can debate hot political issues for hours;
- I am happy with myself and with life when I see my bank account growing;
- The law is the law, I observe it rigorously and without making any exceptions;
- I feel at ease when given opportunity to call people by their first names upon first meeting them;

Two assumptions stood behind selection of these items: i) that they
may be answered with any degree of acceptance by individuals living in any country, i.e. they are not criterial; ii) the likelihood of their incidence should be, however, culture specific. So, for instance, it is conceivable in Poland to call others by their names upon the first encounter, but much less likely than in North America (and not all Americans do it as well).

The Q-sort test was used in the first part of the procedure for the purpose of self-description.

**National prototypes.** Twelve brief descriptions of potentially prototypical Canadians, and twelve of Poles were constructed in equivalent female and male forms. Eg.:

**Freddie Taylor**
Service Manager
"Western Star Trucking"
Sales and Repairs
Red Deer, Alberta

**Virginia Taylor**
Registered Nurse
Red Deer Hospital

**Zbigniew Strzelecki**
Design Engineer
Electronic Research Center ELWRO
Wroclaw, Poland

**Ludmila Strzelecka**

For each country, these twelve plus Self as thirteenth, were sorted by Ss into categories based on their perceived similarities. Next, Ss were asked to choose "the most representative or the most typical
example of a Canadian (Polish) man (woman). The same Q-sort procedure was then repeated for Canadian and Polish prototypes.

**Results.**

Measures of correlative self-identity have been operationalized as SELF * CAN and SELF * POL correlations (transformed into z-scores). Figure 2 illustrates the findings in a 3 (cohorts) * 2 (gender) design.

[Figure 2 about here]

Two important results can be seen. First, SELF POL identity is generally higher than SELFCAN. \( F(1,57) = 8.34, p<.01. \)

Polish identity is also remarkably stable across the compared groups. Secondly, for SELFCAN all three effects: gender, generation, and interaction are significant: for the latter \( F(2,57) = 4.37, p<.05. \)

Hence, Canadian identity is on the rise from NEW, to OLD, to SEC generation women, while no such tendency has been observed in the three groups of men. Second generation is of a particular interest, because of women having a dominant Canadian identity, and men scoring extremely low on this measure.

The broader context of these findings will be discussed later, at this point it is sufficient to say that stability of Polish correlative identity supports our theoretical thinking, particularly when contrasted with a dramatic loss of Polish criterial identity in the second generation (see Boski, 1988, 1989b).

**American study**

**Subjects.** Participants in this study were residents of Passaic and Bergen counties in northern New Jersey, just at the door
step of New York City. By contrast to Kingston, this area is a home of a very large Polish community, with numerous churches, schools, cultural centers, commercial businesses and services. Reported here is an ongoing research program. So far thirty Ss. have been tested. They are males and females, first generation immigrants, but with years of American experience ranging from 5 to 37 (the mean is 15 years of residence in the US). Most of these individuals had come to America as young adults, but some had been teenagers who finished high school in the US. Ss were contacted through Polish school where they send their children on Saturdays. This could be seen as a self-selection factor, and will have to be counterbalanced in the future. On the other hand, it gave me access to people relatively well settled in the new country, raising their families there. Their life and status are in a sharp contrast to the so called "vacation workers" (Gastarbeiter) who come individually with the goal of earning a certain amount of dollars, and plan to return to Poland.

Method and procedure.

One important modification in comparison to the Canadian study concerned the way prototypes were operationalized. Instead of choosing "the most typical or representative American or Pole", Ss. were requested to imagine an "Ideal, most positively valued"; and an "Anti-ideal, the most negatively valued" exemplar of a Polish or American person. Then the positive and negative prototypes were selected from the lists of 12 characters, similar to those in the Canadian study.

The reason for this research modification (and a time consuming complication) was the fact that in the first study Ss often asked:
"should it be a 'good' typical or a 'bad' one". Human prototypes definitely are not just pure cognitive representations. Altogether, Ss. performed 5 Q-sort exercises: Self, POSitive and NEGative POLish and USA prototypes.

**Results**

Indices of correlative identity were analysed in a 2 (gender) • 2 (countries) • 2 (evaluation) design, with the last two being repeated measures factors. The findings are illustrated in Fig. 3.

[Figure 3 about here]

Obvious as it might be, there is a strong effect of evaluation, \( F(1,28)= 63.06, \ p<.0001 \), showing much stronger self-identification with positively than with negatively evaluated prototypes. [In the whole sample there were only three "paradoxical" exceptions from that powerful effect.] The same result may also be seen as indicative for positivity asymmetry in person perception and identification: in absolute terms positive self-identity scores are higher than the negative self-identity indices are. This occurs even if one realizes that consensus in picking up negative prototypes was higher than for choosing positive ones; eg. for 60% Sa it was a communist party official in Poland.

Next significant result is the main effect of gender, \( F(1,28)= 8.45, \ p<.01 \), indicating that females have higher, more positive identity scores than males do. This effect is however qualified by a gender • country interaction \( F(1,28)= 6.10, \ p<.05 \), showing that the gender effect is limited to American self-identity. As it can be seen on the left side of Fig.3, indices of positive Polish self-identity are equal for males and females; it is the American
component of identity which prevails among women, and is lower than
the Polish one in men. It should be added that no other
socio-demographic variable (years spent in America, percentage of
life span in the US, education, or income) had any significant effect
on our identity measures; gender is the only predictor.

**Canadian and American results: Comparison and interpretation**

Results on correlative self-identity from the two reported
studies have some distinct features, as well as common elements to
support generalized conclusions. The ongoing American study is not a
direct replication of the earlier investigation in Canada. They
differ in the way prototypes were operationalized. In this respect,
"the most typical" from study I is not the same as "the most
positive" in study II. Yet, it may be argued that the two approaches
were similar enough: the list of Polish characters provided for
prototype selection was the same, the range and frequency of choices
were similar again: eg. neither in Canadian nor in American study was
a communist party official at least once chosen as "typical" or
"ideal". Assuming this broad equivalence, one is justified to
conclude that **Polish correlative self-identity was relatively more
pronounced in Canadian than in American study. The dominance of
Canadian identity reached by second generation women was obtained by
female immigrants of first generation in America. Men, on the other
hand retained dominant Polish identity in both studies.**

Both studies give empirical evidence to the thesis that ideology
and practice of American "Melting Pot" results in more
assimilationist effects than "Multicultural Mosaic" of Canada (Berry,
1984).
With this correction for American "acceleration", gender differences have been perfectly replicated: **women undergo more effective personality acculturation in America than men do.** What is also interesting to note is the fact, that by increasing their Canadian/American identity components, these women do not become less Polish: in absolute terms, they simply have stronger social identity ties with other females, than men have with other males.

Correlative self-identity has important consequences for psychological adaptation of immigrants, and their life satisfaction. Figure 4 (Canadian study) shows that the three components of self-identity: criterial, correlative, and affective form a triarchic syndrom, and that the SEC generation women who score the highest in SELFCAN identity, also have the most positive/healthy affects to Canada.

[Figure 4 about here]

Similarly, women in the American study not only have higher levels of American self-identity, but also report significantly higher levels of happiness than their male counterparts; see Fig. 5.

[Figure 5 about here]

With all this evidence, gender and individual differences in correlative self-identity remain an intriguing puzzle. Why women, and why some individuals acquire self-identity with the new home country much faster than others? - As was already said, other socio-demographic variables do not account for these differences. The best explanation, so far, comes from the Canadian study where factorial analyses were performed on the Q-sort data, and SELFCAN
identity was interpreted in terms of these factors (analogous analysis on American data has not been performed yet). As figure 6 shows, two factors are highly predictive of the SELFCAN identity level: The lower is the Canadian prototype loaded with Materialism (Factor I), and the more is s/he Family/Social oriented (reverse of Factor III), the higher SELFCAN identity.

In other words, more identified with Canada are those immigrants who perceive Canadians in more humane, and less "capitalist" value-terms. That tendency was clearly visible SEC generation immigrant women, and will be most likely found among women from the American sample. Traditional as it might be, Polish immigrant women have their life priorities centered around children and family wellbeing. With these values they may find easily common ground with American women. Polish immigrant men, on the other hand, emphasize more the importance of social-political issues which can not be equally fulfilled with and among Canadian/American men whom they perceive (right or wrong) as greedy capitalists.
References


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A THEORETICAL MODEL: THREE COMPONENTS OF NATIONAL/ETHNIC SELF-IDENTITY

- Component 1: Symbols
  - National Prototypes
  - Perceived Simillarity to
  - Ethnic Identity
- Component 2: Personal Identity and
- Component 3: Object of Feelings for
  - Ethnic Identity
Figure 3:

Self-identities of Polish Male and Female Immigrants to the United States (n=30)

Positive vs Negative Polish and American