

# Is There Still an Evil Empire? The Role of the Mass Media in Depicting Stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans

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## Introduction

Enemy images have always been considered instrumental tools in the conduct of political propaganda and psychological warfare. Ordinarily, when two nations are at war, each considers the other its enemy. And traditionally, the wartime propaganda of each nation attempts to inculcate in its people and military personnel a similar image of the enemy as inherently hostile, filled with hatred and a rage to conquer and dominate others, treacherous, cruel, and—in a word—evil (White, 1949).

During the Cold War, the American people were told in many ways and by many spokespersons that they were engaged in a vital struggle with a wily and implacable enemy who was bent on conquering the world and whose basic values are the antithesis of everything that democratic countries believe (Holt & Silverstein, 1989). Moreover, numerous studies in the field of foreign policy had examined the role of enemy images and ideology to conclude that they played a significant role during the period of Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987, 1990; Hurwitz, Peffley, & Seligson, 1993). Overall, these historical circumstances were responsible for the unusual situation in which the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves—nominally at peace with what has become the only other superpower which nonetheless has been treated by the official administration as a potential enemy and widely stereotyped as the evil opponent.

Today, politically the Cold War is over and the terms “communist bloc” and “Soviets propaganda” remain in the history books. However, the same cannot be said with certainty about what the impact of the Cold War on the perceptions and attitudes towards people from the Soviet Bloc. In addition, it is important to note that although the world is undergoing tremendous changes in terms of the geopolitical configuration of global dominance today, images of allies and foes continue to affect contemporary political conflicts. Therefore, the examination of the stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans which are held by the American public in the present atmosphere of global cooperation and post-Cold War cultural exchange becomes of extreme scholarly importance.

For many scholars, the mass media are seen as playing a vital role in shaping the audience’s perceptions of social reality. They argue that we depend on the mass media as secondhand sources to provide us with information about the remote and abstract zones of the world that in most cases, are beyond our perceptual grasp. This observation is very important in the case of creating and transmitting stereotypical perceptions of foreign nationalities, particularly when the mass media are the primary source of information about remote cultures with opposing ideologies and social beliefs. Therefore, the concept of mediated reality and the role of the mass media as complementing the definition of reality, which individual members of the social environment have already built through observation and interaction, become instrumental in explaining the relationship between stereotypes and the mass media. In addition, because the moving vessels of global cooperation and awareness today are all means of mass communication, it becomes important to study the role of the mass media in creating and perpetuating stereotypes of foreign nationals. This paper examines the current stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans held by American public represented by college students to establish whether there is a significant departure in the way in which American students today tend to interpret images and characteristic traits of people from Eastern Europe. Moreover, this study explores the origin and the properties of these stereotypes to examine whether the roots of stereotypical descriptions could be linked

to ethnocentrism, attitudes towards Russians and Eastern Europeans and most importantly, the mass media.

## Literature Review

There is a large literature on national images and stereotypes though still relatively little methodological or terminological clarity with respect to these phenomena. Overall, national images and stereotypes are generalizations, broad conclusions on the features of both one's "own" group and that of the "other." They might sometimes be merely a projection of the characteristics of a prominent individual or the ruling elite of the "other" group as a whole, or the generalization on a national scale of private beliefs about this "other" group by opinion makers within one's "own" group (Gerrits & Adler, et. al, 1995).

The abundant literature in the psychology of the enemy images projected on the Soviet Union is indeed impressive and mostly influenced by the literature on prejudice, too vast to cite here, and the literature (mostly in political science) on the roles of cognition and misperception in international politics (e.g. Farrell & Smith, 1967; Jervis, 1976; Jonsson, 1982; Levy, 1983; Stein, 1988, White, 1970; Murray & Cowden, 1999). In a study of enemy images among American college students, Holt (1989) recorded that over 80 percent of the respondents thought the Soviet Union could harm Americans, but only 16 percent of the respondents believed that the Soviet Union had an actual intention to harm. Moreover, Holt discovered, the most frequent descriptors for the Russian people were, in order, hardworking, patriotic, decent, suspicious and aggressive. By using two lists of adjectives, one that described a public enemy and one that described a private enemy, Holt concluded that the very large majorities of subjects in the study correctly realized that the United States and the Soviet Union have the capacity to destroy one another completely and yet, the general belief seemed that a nation like the USSR "can be our enemy without having the intent to do us harm" (p. 48).

Stephan, Stephan, Stefanenko, Ageyev, Abalakina and Shrider (1993) tested three measurement techniques—checklist, percentage and diagnostic ratio—to find out whether these methods would yield consistent results in measuring stereotypes over an American and a Russian sample. The study revealed that Russians were perceived by the American sample to be more disciplined, conservative, oppressed, hardworking, restrained, obedient, secretive, serious, orderly, rigid, and cold. Moreover, Stephan, Ageyev, Shrider, Stephan and Abalakina (1994) examined the emotional reaction of American and Russian subjects to Americans, Russians and Iraqis to discover that while stereotypes and the emotional responses that they produce were indeed related to prejudice as earlier psychological studies have demonstrated, they are also closely related to self-esteem, ethnocentrism and authoritarianism. Also, Yatani and Bramel (1989) reviewed studies of U.S. public opinion regarding the Soviet Union over the past four decades to conclude that attitudes towards Russians among Americans were primarily ideological reflecting hostility towards socialism and communism as a social system and that the source of the predominantly disapproving attitudes was "nationalism"—seeing the Soviets as "national rivals in competition for world dominance" (p. 15).

The influence of mass media content and its relationship to forming public opinion is a large area of inquiry, which has been among the top interests of media scholars in the past few decades and still requires more sophisticated and detailed examination. In studying stereotypes in the mass media, however, many media scholars have tended to operate with a classic view of stereotypes as rigid, simplistic, overgeneralized and erroneous. "Stereotypes have been viewed as necessarily deficient; they distort the ways in which social groups are characterized, and obscure actual group particularities and subjectivities" (Pickering, 1995. p. 692). Politically, they stand in the way of more tolerant, even-handed and differentiated responses to people who belong to social and ethnic categories beyond which are structurally dominant (Zawadsky, 1942).

The concept, which has indeed dominated media research of representation, is Walter Lippmann's definition of the term "stereotype" in *Public Opinion* (1922). In fact, this text is generally credited with the introduction of the term stereotype in the terminology of the social sciences. Lippmann defined

stereotypes as an inadequate and biased obstacle to rational assessment and as resistant to social change. On the other hand, he also regarded stereotyping as a necessary mode of processing information, especially in highly differentiated societies, an inescapable way of creating order. Moreover, Lippmann contended that if media representations were based on scientific truth, they would inform public opinion correctly. In this sense, it is important to note that Lippmann recognized the ideological importance of stereotypes and social propaganda in democratic as well as other political systems. In his definition, stereotypes are “the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own right (Lippmann, 1922, p. 64), and as such, they consensually support “particular definitions of reality . . . which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society” (Dyer, 1979, p. 17). Thus, we can conclude stereotypes are a part of the apparatus of social control and the mass media, as a reflective mirror of the social structure, are directly involved in the creation, perpetuation and crystallization of these stereotypical images and depiction.

Similarly, in a collection of essays, Lester (et. al, 1996) explores the verbal and pictorial stereotypes employed in the media representations of ethnic and cultural minorities as well as different marginal groups. The author assigns many of the existing stereotypes to problems inherent to the journalistic profession—in their strife to represent reality as close as possible, journalists are often forced into typifying facts, and illustrate only the major findings of their reports. Lester called this phenomena “selective perception,” a mediated process through which we allow new information into our perceptions, but more frequently, accept, reject, or reshape the new information into such a way as to preserve existing perceptions, “perceptions, that could be called world views or stereotypes” (p. 17).

In a similar line of thought, Ottosen (1995) examined the news coverage of four international conflicts in Norwegian media to establish whether enemy images and stereotypical descriptions are an intrinsic part of the journalistic process. In content analyzing the news coverage of the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the marital law in Romania in 1980 and the martial law in Poland in 1981 in the major Norwegian newspapers, Ottosen discovered that the enemy image of the Soviet Union and that of Islam were the rhetorical tool used by the news media, consciously or unconsciously, to get a given ideological message across to the receiving audience.

The bulk of the writing on the societal images to which adults are exposed has been done by journalists and experts in media and communications and has been anecdotal and impressionistic (Silverstein, 1989). In fact, most studies of media images that use a more rigorous methodology rely on quantitative content analyses and often use control groups (Kriesberg, 1946; Herman, 1982). Others, such as Silverstein (1989) and Silverstein and Flamenbaum (1989) used a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analyses of the print news to demonstrate parallels between the cognitive biases exhibited by individual Americans towards Russians and Eastern Europeans and the biases exhibited by the news media. As Silverstein and Flamenbaum demonstrated, the public received information about a nation’s actions primarily from reports in the mass media, which themselves are probably often affected by enemy images. It is also possible that reporters and editors assume the public to hold and to expect confirmation of more extreme and demonic enemy images of other nations that in fact it does hold. The images and assumptions of media workers may derive from those held by elites, which, in turn, exhibit their own biases (Chomsky, 1985; Wolfe, 1983). Therefore, the authors argued, there exists a relationship between the individual cognitive process and what might be conceived of as a societal or group cognitive process that lead to an item’s appearing in the news.

However complex the mediated nature of perceptions of other nations may be, the importance of the mass media as purveyors of these perceptions is recognized in academic research though at a significantly smaller scale. White (1984) contended that during the long period of the Cold War, our images of one another were shaped extensively (and negatively) by the mass media rather than by personal experience. Moreover, as Silverstein (1989) argued the media were prime suppliers of the pervasive images “that depict the Soviet as inhumane, vicious torturers who enjoy inflicting pain and murder children” (p. 904). His survey indicated that American children’s information about the Soviets came mostly from the media, with parents and school trailing far behind as information sources. Similarly, in an examination of American network television, Gerbner (1993) discovered that the “wholesaler” of

enemy image, as of all images, was television. "Prime time dramatic entertainment provides by far the most pervasive, frequent, and vivid images of all foreign nationalities" (p. 32). As the author pointed out, most Americans have never met a Soviet citizen, but they have encountered a Russian (always called a Russian, not a Soviet), in often intimate detail an average of at least once in every three weeks of prime time network dramatic television.

Finally, Kleinnijenhuis (1987) attempted to demonstrate a link between media portrayals and individual attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Using path analysis, Kleinnijenhuis related the newspapers read by people in the Netherlands, the images of the Eastern bloc portrayed in these newspapers and the attitudes towards the Eastern bloc held by the readers. The author concluded that the images portrayed in the newspapers had a significant effect on the attitudes of the people who read those newspapers.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is the contention of this paper that despite the improving post-Cold war relationships between the ex-Soviet bloc and the United States, considering individual perceptions of other nations as well as those created and supported by the mass media, stereotypes are most probably still going to be prevalent among Americans' perception of Russians and Eastern Europeans. This paper compares the intensity of the pre-Cold War and post-Cold War images of Russians and Eastern Europeans to examine whether positive and negative stereotypes of the ex-Soviet bloc have changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Moreover, this paper expects that ethnocentrism, attitudes towards Russians and Eastern Europeans and mass media use as source of information will be significant predictors of perceived positive and negative stereotypes of the countries and the people of the Eastern bloc.

## **Method**

This study conducted a cross-sectional non-experimental survey. The subjects consisted of convenience samples of 102 students from undergraduate journalism classes at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. All students participated voluntarily in the study. The instrument of the study was a self-administered questionnaire in four parts.

In order to examine the research questions and hypotheses posited earlier, this study identified one dependent and several independent variables. The dependent variable under observation was the stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans. Both positive and negative stereotypes were used. The independent variables included ethnocentrism, attitudes towards Russians and Eastern Europeans, and mass media as source of these stereotypical descriptions. The dependent variable as well as each independent variable was measured in a separate section of the questionnaire.

**Stereotypes.** First, to assess stereotypes, subjects were asked to indicate whether they believe certain adjectives are representative of Russians and Eastern Europeans once, before the end of the Cold War, and a second time, after the end of the Cold War. All subjects were instructed in details about the character of the Cold War confrontation as well as about the historical span of the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods. The adjectives were selected based on previously conducted studies of stereotypes of Russians (Stephan, et. al, 1993; Stephan, et. al, 1994) and also through a pretest. For the pretest, a separate sample of 38 subjects was asked to select from a list of 33 adjectives—16 positive and 17 negative—previously tested for association with Americans' stereotypes of Russians. Subjects were asked to rate the accuracy of each adjective on a scale from 1 to 5. The 16 top adjectives selected by the respondents were selected for use in the final study. The final list of adjectives included disciplined, efficient, tough, hard working, secretive, obedient, criminal, hard drinking, cunning, machinelike, insecure, vicious, aggressive, cold-blooded, belligerent, and hostile.

In the final version of the questionnaire, of the total number of 16 adjectives, 4 were positive in connotation and 8 were negative. In the first section of the questionnaire, subjects were asked to rate the accuracy of each representation on a 5-point scale running from very accurate to very inaccurate, once for the pre-Cold War period and a second time, for the post-Cold War period.

Ethnocentrism. In the second section of the questionnaire, the subjects' ethnocentrism was measured with an abridged version of an ethnocentrism scale developed by Hood (1998). The scale consists of 10 statements (e.g. "If everyone did things the American way, the world would be better off", "Most people in the world really wish they could become American citizens"). The response format was a 5-point Likert-scale running from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A lower score on the ethnocentrism scale indicate a lower degree of ethnocentrism. The original scale recorded Cronbach's alpha at .82. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was also .82.

Attitude. In the third section of the questionnaire, respondents' attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans was measured through a specially developed scale, which was designed to examine and record the respondents' attitude towards the people of the ex-Soviet bloc. The scale consisted of 10 Likert-type scale statements designed to capture whether the subjects express favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the countries and the people of Russia and Eastern Europe (e.g. "These countries are free of corruption", "The people of Russia and Eastern Europe are tolerant"). Attitude was measured on a 5-point scale where a lower number indicated a more unfavorable attitude while a higher number indicated a more favorable attitude. The Cronbach's alpha of the attitude scale was .75.

Mass media. Finally, to measure whether mass media serve as primary suppliers of stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans, the subjects were asked to indicate the sources that influenced their opinion of the people from the ex-Soviet bloc. On a 5-point scale running from very big influence to very little influence, respondents rated mass media, interpersonal sources, college and high school classes, visit and travel and other additionally specified sources to denote the origins of their personal information about these nationalities. For the purposes of this study and because of the psychical limitation of time and space in the construction of the questionnaire, the term mass media was meant to include a broad definition of media sources, including, but not limited to magazines, newspapers entertainment, books, movies, video games, the Internet, etc.

In the final section of the questionnaire, subjects were also asked to indicate their age, gender and nationality as a measure of the sample's demographic characteristics.

## Findings

The sample used in this study had a mean age of 21.86, ranging from 20 to 32. Forty nine of the respondents were females and 51 were males.

In order to illustrate the respondents' overall ethnocentrism, attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans, media use and perceived stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans, the mean of each of these variables was computed. Table 1 presents the mean of the dependent the independent variables.

**Table 1. Mean Ethnocentrism, Attitude, Media Use and Positive and Negative Stereotypes for the Cold War and Post Cold War Periods.**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean Value</b>
Cold War positive stereotypes	2.18
Cold War negative stereotypes	2.38
Post-Cold War positive stereotypes	2.46
Post-Cold War negative stereotypes	2.70
Ethnocentrism	2.65

Attitude	2.48
Media Use	2.14

*Lower number indicates on a scale from 1 to 5 a higher accuracy of stereotype, lower ethnocentrism, higher media use and more unfavorable attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans.*

As Table 1 indicates, the average attitude of the respondents toward Russians and Eastern Europeans was somewhat unfavorable, while the average respondent recorded a high measure of ethnocentrism. Moreover, as the table demonstrates, the average respondent used the mass media as the primary source of information about these nationalities.

In order to examine further the change of stereotypes after the end of the Cold War, the mean of each adjective believed to describe Russians and Eastern Europeans before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall was recorded. Table 2 presents in a ranking order, beginning with the most accurate and ending with the least accurate one, the mean of each adjective as reported by the respondents for the two periods.

**Table 2. Mean Accuracy of Stereotypes before and After the End of the Cold War**

Stereotype	Mean Accuracy in <b>Cold War</b> <b>Period</b>	Stereotype	Mean Accuracy in <b>Post-Cold War</b> <b>Period</b>
Secretive	1.87	Hard working	2.37
Tough	1.97	Tough	2.46
Hard working	2.06	Disciplined	2.47
Aggressive	2.09	Efficient	2.53
Hostile	2.12	Insecure	2.54
Disciplined	2.20	Aggressive	2.59
Machinelike	2.33	Hard drinking	2.62
Vicious	2.35	Obedient	2.64
Obedient	2.36	Machinelike	2.66
Cold-blooded	2.41	Criminal	2.67
Insecure	2.48	Secretive	2.70
Efficient	2.50	Hostile	2.76
Belligerent	2.52	Cold-blooded	2.77
Criminal	2.57	Cunning	2.82
Hard drinking	2.72	Belligerent	2.82
Cunning	2.76	Vicious	2.83

*Lower number indicates a higher accuracy of stereotype on a scale from 1 to 5.*

Table 2 indicates respondents overall believed that the most accurate adjectives in describing Russians and Eastern Europeans during the Cold War were, in ranking order, secretive, tough, hard working and aggressive. In the post-Cold War period, however, the most accurate adjectives in describing Russians

and Eastern Europeans were hard working, tough, disciplined and efficient which also constitute the positive stereotypes variable. Overall, the adjectives describing Russians and Eastern Europeans were rated by the respondents mostly as very accurate and accurate, rather than inaccurate or very inaccurate.

To answer the research question this paper posited and establish whether there has been a statistically significant change in the stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans before and after the end of the Cold War, a t-test was conducted for positive and negative stereotypes the results of which are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Mean Scores\* of Positive and Negative Stereotypes by Period**

Stereotypes	Cold War Period	Post-Cold War Period	T-value	Sig.
Positive	2.18	2.45	-4.30	.000
Negative	2.38	2.70	-5.85	.000

*\*A lower score indicates higher accuracy of the stereotype*

The results in Table 3 clearly indicate that there is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between Cold War and post-Cold War positive and negative stereotypes. Overall, both negative and positive stereotypes are perceived to be less accurate in the post-Cold war period than in the Cold War period.

To further decipher the changes in stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans, a t-test was conducted individually for each adjective believed to represent images of Russians and Eastern Europeans. The results of the t-test are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Mean Scores for Stereotypical Adjectives by Period**

Stereotype*	Cold War Period	Post-Cold War Period	T-value	Sig.
Disciplined	2.19	2.47	-2.52	.013*
Efficient	2.50	2.52	-.29	.769
Tough	1.97	2.47	-4.34	.000*
Hard working	2.05	2.37	-3.29	.001*
Secretive	1.87	2.70	-6.36	.000*
Obedient	2.36	2.64	-2.32	.022*
Criminal	2.57	2.67	-.85	.397
Hard drinking	2.72	2.62	1.13	.260
Cunning	2.76	2.82	-.47	.638
Machinelike	2.33	2.66	-2.59	.011*
Insecure	2.48	2.54	-.50	.617
Vicious	2.35	2.83	-4.19	.000*
Aggressive	2.09	2.59	-4.24	.000*
Cold-blooded	2.41	2.77	-2.86	.005*
Belligerent	2.52	2.82	-3.03	.003*

Hostile            2.12                    2.77                    -5.44    .000\*

\* Significant difference at  $p < .05$ .

Table 4 clearly demonstrates that of all 16 adjectives, believed to represent Russians and Eastern Europeans, 11 showed significant difference in accuracy when compared before and after the end of the Cold War. Among the positive stereotypes, three out of four recorded significant differences and among the negative stereotypes, eight out of 12 established significant difference when compared for the two time periods. Overall there was significant support to conclude that stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans have changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Hypothesis one posited that ethnocentrism, attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans and mass media use will be significant predictors of positive and negative stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans. To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was conducted for both the positive and negative stereotypes. The results of the multiple regression are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Multiple Regression of Stereotypes by Ethnocentrism, Attitude and Media Use\***

Stereotypes	Cold War Period	R <sup>2</sup>	Unique	Shared	F/T	p
Positive	n.s.					
Negative	sig.,	.17	.11 Attitude (p=.000) (sr <sup>2</sup> =.11)	.06	6.69256 3.548	.000
Stereotypes	Post Cold War Period	R <sup>2</sup>	Unique	Shared	F/T	p
Positive	n.s.					
Negative	Sig.,	.10	.01 Media (p=.02) (sr <sup>2</sup> =.01)	.09 Use	3.5538 2.3558	.017

\*Only independent variables, which made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable, are listed in the table.

As Table 5 demonstrates, hypothesis one was rejected. Only the independent variables attitude and media use contributed significantly to explaining the negative stereotypes variable. Ethnocentrism on the other hand, did not contribute significantly to explaining the dependent variables either before or after the end of the Cold War.

## Discussion

Using t-test, this study found that stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans have changed over the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and using multiple regression, the study discovered that attitude towards the people of the ex-Soviet bloc and media as source of information about these countries were significant predictors of the negative stereotypes before and after end of the Cold War.

Interestingly, the pilot study conducted at the onset of this examination to select adjectives to describe stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans yielded only four positive adjectives to represent images of Eastern bloc people. The remaining twelve stereotypes, which were included in the final version of the questionnaire, were predominantly negative in connotation. Moreover, as the comparison of means between the positive and the negative stereotypes demonstrated, during the Cold War both the positive and the negative stereotypes were rated as somewhat accurate to neutral ( $2 < \text{mean accuracy} < 3$ ) but



rarely as somewhat inaccurate or very inaccurate ( $4 < \text{mean accuracy} < 5$ ). Similarly, in the post-Cold War period, both the negative and the positive stereotypes registered significant departure from their initial value during the Cold War period. Specifically, stereotypes with the highest accuracy in the current period coincide completely with the positive stereotypes selected to represent images of Russians and Eastern Europeans. However, even though overall stereotypes currently indicate a more positive image of Russians and Eastern Europeans compared to the Cold War period, negative stereotypes of people from the ex-Soviet bloc still prevail among young Americans.

The results were illuminating for yet another reason. While both positive and negative stereotypes have diminished in intensity, attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans was generally rather unfavorable. On the other hand, respondents recorded a low degree of ethnocentrism, which suggests a more positive outlook to foreigners, and outside groups in general. To further explain this seeming contradiction, this study examined the relationship between ethnocentrism and attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans. The regression results demonstrated a significant negative correlation between the two ( $r = -.368, p = .000$ ). The correlation coefficient indicates that an increase in ethnocentrism is linked to a decrease in favorable attitude towards people from the ex-Soviet bloc and vice versa. Moreover, the questionnaire, through which this study measured ethnocentrism and attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans, was designed to measure ethnocentrism and attitude regardless of the time frame. In fact, all three of the independent variables that were tested for significant contribution to explaining the variance in the stereotypes were measured without discrimination between the Cold War and the post-Cold War period which might partially account for the difference between the regression results in the two time periods.

The study also established that ethnocentrism, attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans and media use overall did not contribute significantly to explaining the stereotypes which Americans hold of people from Russia and Eastern Europe before and after the end of the Cold War. However, attitude towards Russians and Eastern Europeans was a significant predictor of the variance in the negative stereotypes before the end of the Cold War. Moreover, for the post-Soviet period, media use contributed significantly to explaining the variance in the negative stereotypes variable. Media use reported a significant contribution to explaining the variance in the negative stereotypes from the fall of the Berlin Wall to present times. These findings bear an even more engaging relation to the changes in the negative stereotypes which the t-tests manifested. Negative stereotypes, as the t-test indicated, have diminished in intensity and shifted from accurate and somewhat accurate to being somewhat accurate and mostly neutral. The findings of the multiple regression allow us to stipulate that the mass media as the major source of information about the people of Russia and Eastern Europe among the respondents (mean media use was 2.14 on a 1 to 5 scale) have contributed to perhaps providing more detailed and less biased information about the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc in the post-Cold War era. While to some extent this stipulation runs contrary to the initial assumption of this paper, it provides a plausible explanation to the changes in the mostly negative stereotypes after the end of the Cold War confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the United States.

## **Conclusions**

This study examined stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans as well as the role of the mass media, ethnocentrism and attitude towards people from the ex-Soviet bloc in creating and maintaining these stereotypes. Even though the results of this study allow us to make certain assumptions about the role of the mass media as one of the primary supplier of images and stereotypes depicting Russians and Eastern Europeans, they do not offer a consistent explanation of the peculiar relationship between attitudes towards Russians and Eastern Europeans and ethnocentrism. The results of the multiple regression analysis suggest that only attitude contributes significantly to explaining changes in the negative stereotypes of people from the ex-Soviet bloc. Therefore, future studies of stereotypes can examine the relationship among personality traits, interpersonal sources and attitudes towards Russians and Eastern Europeans. Since ethnocentrism failed to explain changes in stereotypes before and after the end of the Cold War and yet attitude towards Russian and Eastern Europeans predicted negative

stereotypes before the end of the Cold War, perhaps other personality measures will better explain the relation between stereotypes and other factors which impact the formation of these stereotypes.

Moreover, while this study demonstrated the important role of the mass media in creating and changing stereotypes, future studies can elaborate the design of the mass media use variable to examine in greater details the exact mechanism in which mass media use construct or deconstruct stereotypes of foreign nationalities, and Russians and Eastern Europeans in particular. One of the limitations of this study was the rather abstract definition, which was applied to the variable mass media. Future studies can examine the role of specific types of media, such as film, news media, entertainment television.

In the present study several important implications are evident. First, there seems to be an important link between negative stereotypes, attitudes and media use which requires further inquiry. Moreover, this study can serve as a starting point for a future evaluation of international, cross-cultural stereotypes in an American sample and a Russian sample. Additionally, negative and positive stereotypes can be examined by gender and compared to establish difference in perception held by female Americans and male Americans. Finally, a study of the stereotypes of Russians and Eastern Europeans held by Americans can be combined with a quantitative and qualitative examination of these stereotypes in the mass media to refine and further illuminate the modifying relationship between public and individual perceptions of foreigners and the images used to depict them in the mass media.

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