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American Journal of Media Psychology (ISSN 1940-929X print; 1940-9303 online) is a peer-reviewed scientific journal that seeks theoretical and empirical manuscripts and book reviews that advance an understanding of media effects and processes on individuals in society. Submissions should have a psychological focus, which means the level of analysis should focus on individuals and their interaction with or relationship to mass media content and institutions. All theoretical and methodological perspectives are welcomed. All manuscripts undergo blind peer review. AJMP is published online and in hard copy form. The online version is open access, which means it is available at no charge to the public. Visit www.MarquetteJournals.org to view the contents of this journal and others. Subscriptions are available for hard copy versions.

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   Multiple Parasocial Relationships Scale
New media technologies provide people with enhanced opportunities for information sharing and public interaction, but the effect of these opportunities on political socialization is unknown. The Social Influence model predicts that the interactivity of new media will complement traditional media and encourage voters to more actively engage in politics. Others predict that the ability to select from an ever-increasing content menu will result in a displaced effect of new media, causing segmentation and disengagement from politics. This study reports the results of a survey of how college students use both new and traditional media, and the effect of this use on political involvement. The results show that political involvement increases with use of individualistic media and decreases with use of social media. In turn, political involvement leads to more conversations about politics and more following of the Presidential campaign. More closely following the Presidential campaign increases political knowledge. Overall, the results provide qualified support for the social influence perspective and disconfirmation of the displaced effects perspective, supporting the examination of political socialization effects derived from media use.

Keywords: political involvement, media access, attitudes, college students
Young people are actively using the Internet and other new technologies to meet a variety of needs (Pearce & Rubin, 1998; Papachrissi & Rubin, 2000) and it is widely believed that this use is influencing their political involvement. As the first Internet generation, contemporary college students play video games, download files, carry on cell phone conversations, text message, and view interactive television—sometimes simultaneously (Jones, 2002). However, there is no consensus about how emerging media channels influence political socialization, and there are two contrasting perspectives, the optimistic social influence perspective and the more pessimistic displaced effects perspective. The present study employs a purposive sample of college students—arguably our most technology-literate cohort (Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000) to examine the influence of media consumption on political participation (see, Flanagin & Metzger, 2001).

From a social influence perspective, new media are seen as complementing the use of more traditional media and specific uses of media can encourage young people to acquire political information and develop a more positive orientation toward politics (Barlow, 1996; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Dahlberg, 1998; Salwen, Garrison, & Driscoll, 2005). This framework offers a more optimistic perspective, predicting the use of new media correlates positively with use of traditional media because both are a function of receiver motives (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008).

At the same time, the information present in traditional media has also adapted to changes in technology. For example, the Internet may allow people to use traditional media more actively (Eighmey, 1997; Lin, 1999) in that they can vote on outcomes of programs and record them digitally to watch at their convenience. The interactive nature of new media allows users the ability to not only select stories of interest to them, but also to engage in interactive interpersonal discussions about the information encountered with others. Additionally, political campaign messages now appear in entertainment venues, many of which are tailored to younger audiences (e.g., Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007). These range in scope from late night television to talk radio and cable entertainment, to new communication channels such as the Internet, which may support the more positive media involvement predictions.

The social influence model predicts that these emerging interactive capabilities and adaptations of traditional media offer the potential to revolutionize democracy with online political discussions and information sharing (e.g., Barlow, 1996; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Dahlberg, 1998; Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003). This makes it possible for Internet use to enhance news diffusion and engagement with political processes and information (e.g., Donsbach & Traugott, 2007; Miller & Krosnick, 2004; Salwen, et al., 2005; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Alternatively the displaced effects perspective sees the interactive capabilities of new media and active audiences as a monolithic threat to traditional media that can remove people from exposure to political information. This view is characterized by an inherent pessimism in that it predicts a sobering decline in traditional media use as a consequence of
new media consumption. The displaced effects perspective argues that new interactive media use clashes with use of more traditional media, preventing even accidental exposure to political information, and discouraging citizens from orienting toward politics (e.g., Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Bucy, Gantz, & Zhang, 2007). Although people can select from an unbounded information menu, they may not tune in to news and information related to their political or civic involvement (see Jeffres, 2007), thus leading to a decline in knowledge, and a reduction in interpersonal discussions, about politics.

This decline in traditional media usage is predicted to be most pronounced among younger audiences, which Mindich (2004) portrays as “tuned out” of mass media, social involvement, politics, and current events. He notes that: (1) the percentage of Americans in their mid-30s reading a daily newspaper was 74% in 1972, and is only 28% today; (2) the average CNN viewer is 60 years of age; and (3) only 11% of young people list news as a major reason for going online. This is a particular concern among college students and younger audience segments, where declines in political knowledge have paralleled decreases in traditional media use (e.g., Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Mindich, 2004). These declines in media use parallel those in political knowledge, possibly explaining why only about 16% of the electorate below age 30 voted in 2004 (Mindich, 2004). Similarly, Putnam (2000) documents declining levels of interest and activity concerning civic matters, which he sees depleting the social capital available for civic progress. These symptoms of “videomaliase” (Robinson, 1976) seem ominous to some political observers, particularly as these audiences become a voting majority and could lack the interest in, or understanding of, political issues on which they may be asked to vote.

The present study has two purposes. First, it provides a test of the social influence and displaced effects perspectives concerning the relationship between new and traditional media (see, Hamilton, 2009). Consistent with the social influence model of media effects (Eveland, 2001; Eveland, Cortese, & Dunwoody, 2004; Eveland, Marton, & Seo, 2004; Eveland, Seo, & Marton, 2002; Eveland, Shah, & Marton, 2002; Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton & Nowak, 2008), the functions of media consumption were found to structure the relationship among media. Second, the study examines the antecedents and consequences of these functional media uses. The key antecedent variables were identity demographics, access to the Internet, and household size. Political involvement, interpersonal conversations about politics, and following the presidential campaign were proposed as mediating variables. These mediating variables were predicted to influence political knowledge gain as well as receiver evaluations of Democrats and Republicans. Trends in the use of new media evident in the larger population are particularly pronounced among college students (Diddi & LaRose, 2006), rendering them an ideal group with which to test the two divergent views on the effects of new media on politics.
THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF MEDIA USE

The Uses and Gratifications Model predicts that people select media they believe will meet their needs (e.g., Blumler & Katz, 1974; McQuail & Windahl, 1993). The assumption that people are conscious of their motives and that they are actively selecting media to facilitate their goals is an essential component to this perspective (Pearce & Rubin, 1998; Papachrissi & Rubin, 2000). Multiple motive models of the social influence model discussed above propose that receivers can engage in one or more parallel processes characterized by sequences of internalization, social adjustment, or compliance (Hamilton, 2007). This 3-sequence model was derived from the earlier work on attitude functions (Kelman, 1961; Kelman & Eagly, 1965; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956) and is similar to the tripartite motivation distinctions in the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken & Eagly, 1993; Johnson & Eagly, 1989). Two of the three sequences constrain typical media consumption (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). The two relevant sequences, as shown in Figure 1, are internalization and social adjustment. The internalization sequence includes the satisfaction of ego needs (such as defense) and knowledge acquisition functions, whereas the social adjustment sequence includes the attachment and identification functions. These functions are bound together by the motives that drive them and are distinguished by the amounts of investment required—investments that include time, effort, or expense (Hamilton, 2009).

The four functions with their associated sequence and investment dimensions are responsible for four factors of media use (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). The gratification of ego needs from the media is driven by individualistic motives with low investment and is largely obtained from mass video (e.g., broadcast and cable TV). Knowledge acquisition from the media is driven by individualistic motives with high investment and is largely obtained from print and Internet media (e.g., magazines and web news). Attachment via the media is driven by social motives with low investment (e.g., connecting through instant messaging or electronic mail). Identification via the media is driven by social motives with high investment (e.g., comfort gained from photo sharing or books on tape).

Regardless of whether media are traditional or new, the use of specific media within each of the four factors should be positively correlated with one another (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). That is, the factor structure for media use should reflect the functions characterized by the internalization-social adjustment distinction as well as the low-high investment distinction. This coalescing by function would also explain the factor structure of computer applications. Nowak, Hamilton, and Hammond (2009) found that computer applications could be differentiated as technical and practical factors.

Use of Identification Media within the Internalization Sequence

In the internalization sequence, those who orient toward their external environment are motivated to acquire knowledge, whereas those who orient toward self are motivated by
ego-defensiveness (Hamilton, 2007; Katz, 1960). Media users who have an external orientation are assumed to be motivated to accumulate information and observe their environment. This assumption is consistent with a Uses and Gratifications paradigm, which
argues that those who seek more information about the world around them will do so because they have a greater need to observe their environment (e.g., Charney & Greenberg, 2002). Users with a more internal orientation will, by contrast, be motivated by the satisfaction of ego needs and may divert their attention from stressful messages and negative affect through entertainment and diversion media.

Online news content is an important source of information on a variety of news topics (e.g., Aikat, 2000; Pew, 2005; Salwen, et al., 2005) and actively seeking information is a primary motivation for going online (e.g., Caplan, et al., 2007; Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Lin, Salwen, & Abdullah, 2005; Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). While undergraduates primarily use the Internet for entertainment, it is also a source of news and information and active use of the Internet for news is positively correlated with reading newspapers (Altaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Tewksbury & Altaus, 2001; Stempel, Hargrove, & Bernt, 2000; Jeffres, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2003; Jeffres et al., 2007; Salwen et al., 2005).

Proposed factor structure. The social influence model groups media used to fulfill information or monitoring motives (e.g. newspapers, and online news) and media used to satisfy entertainment or diversion needs (e.g., television, and cable TV) based on whether the medium requires low or high investment rather than whether the medium is traditional or new. This reasoning led to our first individualistic media hypothesis:

I-H1: Use of specific media related to knowledge acquisition and monitoring-diversion functions will be positively correlated, forming factors that indicate individualistic motives, differentiated along a low to high investment dimension.

Proposed antecedents. Internet access was found to be positively correlated with the satisfying ego needs (mass video) function (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008), although this effect did not replicate (Hamilton, 2009). The present study sought to resolve this inconsistency in past findings. Internet access was found to be positively correlated with the knowledge acquisition function (.12 on print media) in two studies (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008; Hamilton, 2009). In addition to the apparent direct effect of Internet access on knowledge acquisition, there was also a potential indirect effect. The satisfaction of ego needs function (mass video) may have a small positive effect (.11) on the knowledge acquisition function (Hamilton, 2009) although this effect was not found in a previous study (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). This reasoning led to our second individualistic media hypothesis:

I-H2: Internet access will increase use of media factors driven by internalization motives.
Use of Social Media within the Social Adjustment Sequence

Of course, media are not the only sources of information about politics or anything else. In fact, Scheufele (2002, p. 46) heralds interpersonal communication about public affairs as the “soul of democracy,” as it reinforces media as a stimulus for citizen involvement (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; De Boer & Velthuijsen, 2001; Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005; Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003; Scheufele et al., 2004). The interactive new media allow people to communicate interpersonally via media and make new connections and form online social networks. Thus, in the social adjustment sequence, those who are externally oriented are more powerfully motivated to develop positive associations with others (and avoid negative associations), whereas those who orient toward self and are likely to identify with the source (Hamilton, 2007). Media users who have an external orientation will be motivated to make connections in social networks both online and offline and fulfill roles. These functions are related to social adjustment (Smith et al., 1956). Media users who have an internal orientation will seek comfort in identifying with important others (Kelman, 1961).

Proposed factor structure. The social influence perspective groups media that are used to connect with others (e.g., instant messaging) and media that provide comfort through identification (e.g., books on tape, sharing photographs). This grouping is based on whether the medium requires low or high investment rather than whether the medium is traditional or new. This reasoning led to our first social media hypothesis:

S-H1: Use of specific media pertaining to the identification and attachment functions will be positively correlated, forming factors that indicate social motives, differentiated along a low to high investment dimension.

Proposed antecedents. Internet access was found to have a positive effect (.23) on consumption of attachment (connecting) media use (Hamilton, 2009). Internet access also appears to have a small positive effect (.10) on consumption of identification (comforting) media (Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). It is unclear whether identification media increase use of knowledge acquisition media (.18 in, Hamilton, 2009) or knowledge acquisition media increase use of identification media (.15 in, Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). Given that use of comforting media was not measured in the present study, the directionality of this relationship could not be resolved. This reasoning led to our second social media hypothesis:

S-H2: Internet access will increase use of media factors driven by social motives.
EXPOSURE EFFECTS

The social influence model of media effects based on Information Processing Theory (Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton & Nowak, 2008) proposes that source qualities, media access, and the demographics that define identity have an impact on media use. First, identity demographics influence media access, with access driving individualistic and social media use. Second, identity demographics influence how users orient toward media, where the ability and motivation to use specific media technology drives media use factors. Third, source qualities in social networks should influence media use factors. These exposure effects are shown in Figure 1.

The Impact of Identity Demographics

Media use is influenced by identity demographics via media access and the individual difference factors of motivation and ability. Consider the effect of identity demographics on media access. The digital divide is a gulf between those with access to new media and those without access. Those groups who have more power in society are assumed to have greater access. Men, ethnic majorities, and youth are presumed by critical scholars to have greater access to the Internet. Empirical studies suggest that whatever advantage men have over women in Internet access is slight at best (Caplan, et al., 2007; Hamilton & Nowak, 2008; Nowak, et al., 2009).

The positive effect of ethnic majority on Internet access ranges from $r=.06$ to .12, averaging .09 in others studies (Hamilton, 2009). The overall impact of age on Internet access should be negative ($r=-.27$), although this effect is moderated to some extent by income and range restriction (Hamilton, 2009). Although the effect of biological sex on Internet access is assumed to be negligible, male sex should have a positive effect on political conservatism, as should belonging to an ethnic majority (e.g., Pew, 2007). Within popular culture, the concept of the politically reactive (angry) white male has resonated in the media (Krauthammer, 1995). The present study tested whether “maleness” and “whiteness” correlate positively with conservatism.

Identity demographics also influence media use factors via motivation and ability variables. The mediating effect of experience with media technology can be seen in Figure 1. Prior research (Nowak, et al., 2009) suggests that these experiences fall out along two dimensions—one related to technical skills and the other related to practical skills. The two ability dimensions appear related in that technical capability increases practical capability ($r=.37$). Men are more likely to have greater experience with practical applications than women ($r=.22$); a prediction based on the average of the Nowak, et al. (2009) finding (.31) and the Hamilton (2009) finding (.12).

The mediating influence of motivation can be seen in the structure of the individualistic and social media use factors. Individualistic motives have been found to drive
use of individualistic media and social motives have been found to drive use of social media (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). The model in Figure 1 assumes that technical applications are driven by individualistic motives, whereas practical applications are driven more by social motives; that is, experience with technical applications should increase use of individualistic media \( (r=.14) \) whereas experience with practical applications should increase use of social media \( (r=.12) \).

**The Impact of Source Qualities**

As described earlier, a person’s social network should influence their media use (e.g., Scheufele, et al., 2003; 2004). The number of people in a person’s household is one indicator of their social network and it appears to affect social motives as well as use of individualistic media such as magazines (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008).

**THE EFFECT OF MEDIA USE ON POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND ATTITUDES**

Message effects studies have demonstrated that the impact of message exposure on attitudes is mediated by accumulated information on the topic of emotional involvement (Hamilton & Nowak, 2005). Accumulated information is measured as subjective knowledge, indicating the total amount of information in memory structures, without regard for the quality of information (Hamilton, Hunter, & Boster, 1993; Hunter, Danes, & Cohen, 1984). The model in Figure 1 assumes that knowledge gleaned from media use and interpersonal sources constitutes accumulated information. Accurate or objective knowledge learned, by contrast, indicates information integration.

Exposure to message content has been shown to increase accumulated information, although the size of this effect depends on the particular message features (Hamilton, 1997, 1998; Hamilton & Hunter, 1998). Meta-analysis (Hamilton, 2007) has found that accumulated information massively increases emotional involvement \( (r=.68, \text{ on average}) \), with emotional involvement polarizing attitudes \( (r=.24, \text{ on average}) \). Hence, the media use factor should have a large combined effect on political involvement \( (MR=.68) \). Despite the apparent crucial role played by involvement in the social influence process, little is known about the effect of media use on political involvement.

**The Effect of Individualistic Media on Political Involvement**

Each media channel makes distinct and significant contributions to voter learning (Basinger & Lavine, 2005; Donsbach & Traugott, 2007; Martinelli & Chaffee, 1995). These distinct effects stem from differences in the amount and nature of available media content,
the level of attention required for message processing, and associated uses and gratifications that attract audiences to the medium. For example, newspapers and other print media contain more “hard news” and detailed coverage of political campaigns and are actively sought out by readers. They require more focused attention for message processing, which enhances learning (Jeffres, et al., 2007). While exposure to broadcast advertising has been shown to increase political interest and involvement (e.g., Atkin & Heald, 1976), newspapers remain the primary modality for increasing political knowledge and information integration (Berkowitz & Pritchard, 1989; Robinson & Levy, 1996; Jeffres et al., 2002; 2007).

Several studies demonstrate that political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors are a function of political information available to voters, even after controlling for identity demographics (e.g., Delli, Carpini, & Keeter, 1996; Gilens, 2001; Jeffres, et al., 2004; Sitorivic & McLeod, 2001). In the new media realm, for instance, chat room use is a predictor of expressing opinions on political issues (Jeffres, et al., 2009). The information acquisition motive of media use has been found to have a large effect on “social capital”—akin to dimensions of political orienting that we employed in the present study—which was measured as volunteer work, attending organizational meetings, and working on projects (Shah, et al., 2001). Information and monitoring motives increase accumulated information about political issues, with accumulated information increasing political involvement. Outside of this point of agreement, there is little consensus about how other media use relates to information-monitoring motives.

The social influence perspective proposes that information-monitoring motives are part of the individualistic media factor. A primary motivation that people report for going online is to seek news and information (e.g., Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Hoffman, & Novak, 1996; Lin, et al., 2005; Rodgers, & Thorson, 2000). Hence, the individualistic media use factor should have a positive effect on political involvement.

**The Effect of Social Media on Political Involvement**

The displacement hypothesis proposes that social media should pull audiences away from less interactive, individualistic media. Thus, this perspective would predict a negative effect of social media use on both traditional media and political involvement (although this effect may be indirect, mediated by inhibiting print media use). Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) found that college students using the Internet as a news source were more poorly informed than newspaper readers about core events, and argued that, “with this increased opportunity to personalize the flow of news, fewer people may be exposed to politically important stories” (p. 459). However, like television, the Internet has only a modest effect on information integration such as knowledge of candidate positions (Johnson, Braima, & Sothirajah, 1999; McLeod, et al., 1996; Weaver & Drew, 2001).
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**METHOD**

An online survey was conducted during the spring of 2005. Participants were recruited from introductory communication courses at a large public university in the eastern United States, and students received extra credit for participating. The 230 participants were 56% female and 44% male and between the ages of 18 and 25, with an average age of 19.5 (1.12) years. Years spent in college ranged from 1 to 5 with an average of 1.88 (.83) years.

**Constructing the Measurement Model**

Exploratory data reduction on possible scale items was accomplished with principal components analysis. An eigenvalue cutoff of 1.0 was employed to determine the number of factors, and the solution was rotated using Varimax. Scale items were subsequently evaluated with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

**Measures**

Use of traditional mass media and the Internet was measured by asking students to indicate how much time per day, on average; they spent in a variety of media activities. Specific measures included watching television, listening to the radio, reading a newspaper, on the Internet at home, on the Internet at work, logged onto an instant messaging program, on news websites, on media websites (TV networks, and radio stations), using a computer to socialize, playing a video or computer game, and overall use of a computer.

**Political conservatism.** Respondents were asked about their political views on nine issues (α = .95). The nine policies addressed were the economy, the environment, education, morals and values, social security and Medicare, abortion, gun control, the Iraq war and foreign policies, national security.

**Political affiliation.** Political affiliation was assessed by asking respondents to indicate whether they are a “strong Republican,” “lean towards Republican,” “Independent,” “lean towards Democrat,” “strong Democrat,” and “I don’t know.”

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1Item quality was evaluated using three criteria: homogeneity of content, internal consistency, and external consistency. To be homogeneous in content, the items on a scale had to tap into the same underlying dimension. To be internally consistent, the matrix of correlations among the items on the scale must be either relatively flat (when items are of equal quality) or form a Guttman Simplex (when there is a gradient of item quality). To be externally consistent, items on a scale correlate with other scales in the study to approximately the same degree (in the case of equal item quality) or form a gradient.
**Political involvement.** Political involvement was assessed with 8-likert-type items on a 7-point metric ($r = .94$) (Jacobs, Phalet, & Swngedous, 2004; Buck, Anderson, Chaudhuri, & Ray, 2004), and included the following: “I do a lot of thinking about politics,” “I keep up with political news,” “I think politics are highly important,” “I have strong feelings about politics,” “politics can make me very angry,” “I find politics to be exciting,” “I often try to convince others to agree with my political views,” “I actively seek out political information.”

**Interpersonal communication about politics.** Interpersonal communication about politics was measured by three items on a 5-point metric [1) Almost never, 2) Seldom, 3) Very frequent, and 4) All the time]. “How often do you talk about politics and current events with your family?” “Your closest friends?” “People at work?” ($r = .88$).

**Follow presidential campaign.** This factor consisted of six items ($r = .61$): “Did you watch the first Presidential debate?” “Did you watch the second Presidential debate?” “Did you watch the third Presidential debate?” “Did you watch the Vice-Presidential debate?” “How closely did you follow the presidential campaign on TV?” (1 = not at all, 4 = closely) and “Do you surf political websites?” Responses included “yes” or “no.”

**Profile of the Sample**

A series of univariate analyses, described in the section to follow, were conducted to profile the sample. The distribution of political affiliation across college years is homogeneous, as indicated by a non-significant chi-square test ($\chi^2(6) = 5.51$, $p = .48$), with some 23.5% of respondents identifying themselves as Republican, 20% as Independent, 33.1% as Democrat, and 22.2% did not know their affiliation. The distribution of political affiliation across gender, however, was not homogeneous ($\chi^2(3) = 9.99$, $p = .02$). Males are distributed as 32% Republican, 23.2% Democrat, 24.2% Independent, and 21% did not know their affiliation. Females were more likely to be Democrats, with 40% associating themselves with the party, 19% with the Republican Party, 18% saying they were Independent and 24% indicating no affiliation.

With regard to political philosophy, 20.5% of respondents reported being conservative, 37% reported being liberal, 23.5% reported being in the middle and 17.8% did not know where they stood. Political philosophy and affiliation were highly correlated ($r = .72$, $p < .001$).

**RESULTS**

The analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage examined the media use factors and their antecedents. The media use factors were extracted using exploratory then confirmatory factor analysis. Then multiple regression was employed to analyze the effect
of identity demographics, Internet access, experience with media technology, and social network on the media use factors. The second stage extended the regression analysis to include as criterion variables political involvement, political talk, following the Presidential campaign, trust and likeability ratings of Democrats and Republicans, and the acquisition of political knowledge. A causal model was constructed to test the predicted model with the identity demographics and social network variables, political conservatism, and the media use factors as predictors of political involvement, and the seven appraisal variables.

**Media Use Factors**

The principal components analysis indicated that the eight items coalesced into three factors, differentiated as individualized or social and low or high investment. The knowledge acquisition factor (individualized with high investment) consisted of five items: media websites (TV networks or radio stations), news websites, playing a video or computer game, listening to the radio, and reading a newspaper. The combination of traditional and new media on this factor provided support for our first individualistic media hypothesis. The attachment factor (social with low investment) consisted of two items: logged onto an instant messaging program and using a computer to socialize. The lack of traditional media that might load on this factor provided a less than optimal test of our first social media hypothesis. The satisfying ego needs factor (individualized with low investment) consisted of the watch TV item. The lack of identification-relevant items on the survey (social with high investment) precluded uncovering an identification factor.

**Antecedents to Media Use**

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses was conducted to determine which of the identity demographics were antecedent to media use, and whether the experiential factors, Internet access, or household size were mediating those effects. In the first block, the three identity demographics were entered: sex, age, ethnic majority (white or not). In the second block, the two experiential factors (technical applications and practical applications) were entered. In the third block, Internet access and household size were entered. Preliminary analysis had indicated that political conservatism and party affiliation had no effect on the media use factors.

Using media to satisfy ego needs. The ego-needs factor (TV use) was considered first. The block of identity demographics predicted TV use: \( R = .24, F(3, 212) = 4.11, p < .01 \). Specifically, TV use increased with male sex (\( \beta = .17, p = .01 \)) and decreased with age (\( \beta = -.18, p < .01 \)). The addition of the experiential block did not increase variance explained in TV use: \( \Delta R = .03, F(2, 210) = 1.49, ns \). Consistent with the model proposed in Figure 1, neither technical application (\( \beta = .10, ns \)) nor practical application (\( \beta = -.08, ns \)) mediated the effects of male sex and age on TV use.
The addition of the third block increased variance explained in TV use: $\Delta R = .07, F(2, 208) = 5.10, p < .01$. Specifically, TV use increased with Internet access ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) but not with household size ($\beta = -.03, ns$). This finding is consistent with the model proposed in Figure 1, where Internet access is supposed to mediate the effect of age on TV use. Despite the possible mediating role of Internet access, there were still direct effects for male sex ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) and age ($\beta = -.16, p = .02$).

Using media to acquire knowledge. The block of identity demographics predicted the knowledge acquisition factor: $R = .19, F(3, 212) = 2.51, p < .05$ (one-tailed). Specifically, the acquisition factor increased with male sex ($\beta = .18, p = .01$). The addition of the experiential block increased variance explained in the acquisition factor: $\Delta R = .24, F(2, 210) = 18.55, p < .001$. Consistent with the model proposed in Figure 1, the acquisition factor increased with technical application ($\beta = .40, p < .001$) but not practical application ($\beta = -.08, ns$). The size of the technical application effect (.40) was larger than predicted (.14).

Using media to connect with others. The block of identity demographics predicted the attachment factor: $R = .22, F(3, 212) = 3.53, p = .02$. Specifically, attachment media use decreased with male sex ($\beta = -.20, p < .01$). The addition of the experiential block did not increase variance explained in the attachment factor: $\Delta R = .00, F(2, 210) = .07, ns$. Consistent with the model proposed in Figure 1, the attachment factor was not influenced by either technical application ($\beta = .01, ns$) or practical application ($\beta = .02, ns$).

The addition of the third block did increase variance explained in TV use: $\Delta R = .27, F(2, 208) = 58.50, p < .001$. Specifically, the acquisition factor increased with Internet access ($\beta = .56, p < .001$) but not with household size ($\beta = .05, ns$). The model in Figure 1 had predicted a small positive effect of household size on knowledge acquisition (.10) but the observed effect was half of that. This finding is consistent with the model proposed in Figure 1, where Internet access mediates the effect of age on TV use. Thus, it appeared that the male sex effect on knowledge acquisition was fully mediated by technical application.

**Testing the Proposed Causal Model**

The correlations among the five exposure variables, three media use variables, political involvement and political conservatism, as well as the seven appraisal variables shown in Figure 1 were calculated. The correlations appear in Table 1. Path analysis (Hunter & Hamilton, 2008) yielded a model with very good fit: $RMSE = .062, 2(136, 230) = 59.64, p = .999$. The resulting model appears in Figure 2. The relationship between the five exposure variables and six perception and orienting variables is presented first. Then, the impact of these 11 variables on the seven message appraisal variables is presented.

**Predicting message reception variables.** The model in Figure 1 proposed that use of technical applications would increase use of practical applications. This effect was not obtained. Moreover, the two identity demographics had opposite effects on the two types of applications: males were associated with technical applications rather than practical applications.
### Table 1. Original Correlations.

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applications, whereas whites were associated with practical applications rather than technical applications. That is, technical application increased with male sex ($r = .30$) but decreased with ethnic majority ($r = -.13$); while practical application increased with ethnic majority ($r = .11$) and decreased with male sex ($r = -.25$). Hence, the concept of “white males” as a monolithic construct did not apply to computer use. Only the positive effect of male sex on practical applications was predicted. The other three effects were not predicted. Together with the lack of relationship between technical and practical application use, these findings are generally heterogeneous with the findings of Nowak, et al. (2009). Given that the ethnic composition of the present study was similar to that of the earlier study, it appears that the slightly different nature of the technical applications concept in the present study (as opposed to internet use and technical efficacy) was responsible for the heterogeneity in findings. There appeared to be more overlap between the concept of practical applications in the present study and application use in the earlier study, as reflected in the findings.

The model in Figure 1 predicted that political conservatism would increase with male sex and ethnic majority, generating a “white male” preference for more right-wing attitudes. Consistent with the prediction, political conservatism increased with male sex ($r = .21$) and ethnic majority ($r = .05$). The ethnic majority effect was not, however, statistically significant so the path was not included in the final model.

The model in Figure 1 predicted that Internet access would increase with ethnic majority and technical application, but decrease with age. Consistent with prediction, Internet access increased with ethnic majority ($r = .05$) and decreased with age ($r = -.12$). The ethnic majority effect was not, however, statistically significant so the path was not included in the final model. The positive effect of technical application on Internet access ($r = .18$) was within sampling error of the value predicted in Figure 1 (.12).

The model in Figure 1 tentatively predicted that Internet access would increase ego-needs media use. The effect of Internet access on use of ego-satisfying needs in the present study ($r = .19$) was almost exactly as predicted. The model in Figure 1 predicted that consumption of knowledge acquisition media would increase with use of technical application, Internet access, and TV use. This technical application effect ($r = .31$) was twice as large as predicted, and the Internet access effect ($r = .45$) was over three times as large. Even the effect of ego-needs media use (TV) was larger ($r = .17$) than predicted. There was no support for the proposition that household size would increase use of knowledge acquisition media. The model in Figure 1 predicted that use of attachment media would increase with Internet access. The effect obtained ($r = .34$) was actually larger than predicted. The negative effect of male sex on attachment media ($r = -.17$) was not predicted.

Consistent with the proposed model in Figure 1, political involvement increased with use of knowledge acquisition media ($r = .14$) and decreased with use of attachment media ($r = -.22$). Two unanticipated effects were obtained on political involvement. Use of media that satisfy ego-needs decreased political involvement ($r = -.13$). Thus, the two individualistic media use factors, knowledge acquisition and ego-needs media, have opposite effects on
political involvement. Household size increased political involvement ($r = .14$). The model in Figure 1 predicted that household size would have a positive indirect effect on political involvement, mediated by knowledge acquisition media. Instead, the positive effect was direct.
Predicting message appraisal variables. As predicted, political conservatism increased amount of political talk, although the effect was small ($r = .10$). Internet access increased political talk ($r = .11$). The model in Figure 1 had predicted that attachment media (e.g., internet use) would increase political talk. Instead, it was Internet access rather than Internet use that was the key predictor of political conversations. Political involvement increased both political talk ($r = .59$) and following of the presidential campaign ($r = .44$). In turn, political talk increased following of the presidential campaign in the media ($r = .20$). These findings indicate that the more involved people exert greater effort in tracking interpersonal communication and mediated communication and that interpersonal channels foster media interest.

As predicted, following the presidential campaign, increased political knowledge acquired ($r = .18$). This effect appeared to be evidence of systematic processing of issue information. Political conservatism increased trust of Republicans ($r = .58$) and decreased trust of Democrats ($r = -.49$). Political talk also increased trust of Republicans ($r = .14$) and decreased trust of Democrats ($r = -.12$). Thus, political conservatism had both indirect (mediated by political talk) and direct effects on evaluations of political figures. The massive effects of prior beliefs on political sources occurred both with and without interpersonal conversation. In turn, trust in Republicans led to their liking ($r = .83$), just as trust in Democrats led to their liking ($r = .82$).

**Discussion**

The present study set out to examine how college students use both new and traditional media for individualistic and social purposes, and the effect of this use on a variety of political outcome measures. Study results explain a substantial amount of variation in political orienting. The weak and divergent influences of Internet and mass media observed here point to the utility of employing a comprehensive media use approach to studying media effects in the online political context (e.g., Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Rubin, 1981). People can now more easily select when and where to get their political information, as well as whether they want to get political information at all. Nonetheless, media variables account for much more of the variance in political orienting than do interpersonal variables, though interpersonal variables are important to consider.

Use of traditional public affairs media, like the newspaper, did not predict political involvement. Instead, use of the Internet (particularly news websites) was the most compelling predictor of political involvement. These findings, taken together with those for the messaging applications discussed above, underscore the need to consider a wider range of emerging informational channels—beyond the conventional news media—as correlates of political involvement, particularly among young voters.
Message Reception Findings

The model in Figure 2 shows three ways in which identity demographics influenced media use. First, identity demographics can influence the experiential factors related to computer use, with these experiential factors having an impact on the media use factors. Men were more likely to use technical applications and less likely to use practical applications; the opposite was true for women. The size of these effects ranged from .25 to .30. Whites were more likely to use practical applications and less likely to use technical applications; the opposite was true for non-Whites. The size of these effects ranged from .11 to .13. Thus, user sex had over twice the impact on computer use as ethnicity. Whites and men were more likely to be conservative than non-Whites and women. This finding corroborates the popular concept of the angry White male voting conservative (e.g., Krauthammer, 1995).

As predicted, increased age showed decreased Internet access. The age effect was smaller than anticipated but this may be due to the relatively restricted range on the age variable in this sample. The positive correlation between technical applications and Internet access has been consistent across studies. The results of the present study suggest that technical experience enables Internet access. In turn, Internet access increased use of all three types of media as well as political talk, which supports the more optimistic social influence model.

Use of media that satisfy ego-needs led to greater use of knowledge acquisition media, an effect that was within sampling error of the findings of Hamilton (2009). Use of technical applications also increased Internet access, an effect reminiscent of the somewhat smaller effect of individualistic motives on magazine use (Hamilton & Nowak, 2008). By contrast, the negative effect of male sex on use of attachment media in the present study was not found in previous studies.

As anticipated, use of attachment media decreased political involvement (see, Mindich, 2004). This finding lends support to a limited interpretation of the displaced effects hypothesis. Use of knowledge acquisition media increased political involvement, just as predicted in Figure 1. Yet media use satisfies ego-needs resulted in a decrease in political involvement. This is consistent with the work of Holbert, et al. (2007), who found that alternative, entertainment-oriented new media channels generate relatively weak primacy effects on political gratifications of college students. Household size had a direct rather than an indirect positive effect on political involvement.

Message Appraisal Findings

Consistent with the model in Figure 1, political conservatism (as an expression of White male anger) increased trust of Republicans and distrust of Democrats. A tiny portion of this effect is mediated by political talk, such that political conservatism increases political talk, with talk increasing trust of Republicans and distrust of Democrats. In turn, liking of
attitude toward Republicans and Democrats followed trust.

Political involvement was positively correlated with political knowledge acquired ($r = .12$, $p < .05$, one-tailed). This was due to a 2-step causal chain in which political involvement led people to more closely follow the presidential campaign ($r = .57$, $p < .001$), and this increased political knowledge acquired. The effect of political involvement on following the presidential campaign was both indirect (.12 mediated by political talk) and direct (.44). That is, the effect of political involvement on following the presidential campaign was much larger as part of the internalization sequence (.44) than as part of the social adjustment sequence (.12).

The Media Genre Motives

The four internalization motives showed a consistent pattern of effects. Female gender and education decreased both information seeking and monitoring motives, although the effects were noticeably smaller for monitoring than information seeking. This dynamic is consistent with Knowbloch-Westerwick’s (2007) finding that women prefer fewer messages when anticipating a mood-impacting activity. Female gender and education also decreased visual preference and diversion, although the effects were noticeably smaller for diversion than visual preference. The pattern of effects was less consistent for the social adjustment motives. Female gender increased proximate socializing, but not distal socializing. These findings suggested that the genre motives formed two strata. The primary motives consisted of information seeking, visual preference, and proximate socializing on computers. The secondary motives consisted of monitoring, diversion, and distal socializing on computers.

The Effect of Genre Motives on the Use of Specific Media

The effect of genre motives on use of specific media depends on whether a medium is associated with the internalization sequence or the social adjustment sequences. Three kinds of media were associated with the internalization sequence—news-related, video diversion, and task-related. The social locator education influenced video diversion media but not news- or task-related media.

Use of the two news-related media (newspapers and Web news) increased with information seeking and monitoring motives but decreased with visual preference. The diversion motive was unrelated to news-related media. People with a visual preference preferred to use Web news rather than newspapers. Use of the three video diversion media (television, Web media, and videogames) increased with information seeking, diversion, and visual preference but decreased with monitoring. This pattern of findings suggests that the video diversion media are driven largely by entertainment goals (e.g., Holbert et al., 2007). There was a tendency for more educated people to play videogames rather than watch TV. Use of task-related media (Internet at work and radio) increased with the information seeking
motive and decreased with the monitoring motive. Use of the Internet at work increased with visual preference motives but decreased with diversion motives, whereas use of the radio increased with diversion motives but decreased with visual preference motives. Thus, task-related media are used to fulfill information seeking needs that do not include monitoring. Use of the radio and Internet at work differ on diversion and visual preference motives: greater visual preference favors the Internet over radio, whereas diversion favors the radio over the Internet.

Overall computer use, use of the Internet at home, and use of computers to socialize all increased with the proximate and distal socializing on computers motives, which supports past work showing that interpersonal applications drive Internet uses (e.g., Caplan, 2007). By contrast, use of instant messaging increased with the proximate socializing on computers motive but decreased with the distal socializing on computers motive, consistent with past work on chat service uses (e.g., Atkin, et al., 2005). Internet use at home increased with the monitoring motive but decreased with the visual preference motive. This confirms early research (e.g., Young, 1998) showing that dependent users favored the social and interactive Internet functions, but information-gathering applications are preferred among less dependent users. Such preferences for online social interaction, according to Cognitive Behavioral Theory, may stem from the fact that users perceive it to be less threatening (and perceive themselves to be more efficacious) when interacting online (e.g., Caplan, et al., 2007). In contrast, using computers to socialize increased with the visual preference motive. Asian-Americans were more likely to use instant messaging to socialize, but were less likely to use other forms of computer-mediated communication for that purpose.

**CONCLUSION**

Interactive media allow users to select only news and information that matches their individual interests (Bucy, et al., 2007) and what they believe will best meet their goals. As predicted by Uses and Gratifications approach to media, this project provides support for the assumption that people actively select media that will meet their goals and that they will select different media when their goals or motives change. Interestingly, the data provide support for the social influence model when people’s motives are information seeking, monitoring, or even socialization, but support for the displacement effects hypothesis when people’s motives are diversion or to satisfy ego needs. This suggests that user motive may explain why media have different effects on different users. The reason people use media influence not only in their selection of media but also the influence of such media on their political involvement. Future research should examine whether motives can similarly explain other media effects.

In support of displacement hypothesis, theorists have argued that giving people the ability to select interactive media “could fragment audiences into small groups of like-minded individuals who do not interact with other groups or with society as a whole and...
chose to receive only the news and information that reinforces their beliefs and values” (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2004, p. 24). This dynamic would provide a logical explanation for the inverse linkages between new media use and political involvement observed here. Audience fragmentation could heighten audience isolation and erode social capital (Putnam, 1995; 2000), sense of community, and perhaps even political involvement. Over time, the acerbic tone of an increasingly partisan media environment—coupled with commercialization made evident with media consolidation—might fuel voter alienation (McChesney, 2004). However, this only seems to apply when people have entertainment or diversion motives. Those with diversion motives are more likely to select television, video games, and web media for entertainment. People wanting diversion motives may be more likely to go to traditional, lean back media that require little effort and where they may not be expected to engage or think.

Interactive media allows users to seek and find any type of information they want from sources they trust, but they require active motives and engaged users. In emerging online forums, voters can find support for any position they want from an almost endless supply of sources, and are free to avoid exposure to contrary positions all together. The more dystopian predictions implied that this would lead to a disconnect among voters from political involvement. However, the data here provides support for the more optimistic predictions of the social influence model in that access to interactive media facilitates knowledge acquisition, which predicts political involvement. People with greater Internet access had greater knowledge acquisition and Internet access and use were predicted by information seeking and monitoring media use motives. People wanting information are more likely to use task related media and Internet and newspapers. Access to this type of information and media use predict political talk and involvement.

On balance, study findings suggest that younger voters carefully select their media and that they use interpersonal and new media channels to buttress their existing attitudes and that these interpersonal conversations enhance political understanding and involvement. It also seems that interpersonal channels and discussions foster political involvement and make it more likely that people will seek information about politics. Future research should explore the models introduced here in an effort to determine whether new media fosters political involvement, or ultimately serve to undermine the social cohesion necessary for democracy to thrive.

REFERENCES


A Test of Motivational vs. Cognitive Explanations for the Third-Person Perception

Lijiang Shen, Zhongdang Pan, and Ye Sun

Recognizing insufficient direct tests of the cognitive and motivational explanations of the third-person perception (TPP), this study formulated and tested a set of hypotheses derived from them with web-based survey data (N=575). The motivational explanation appears to receive more support than the cognitive account. Consistent with the motivational account, there was evidence for the social desirability corollary. Moreover, social desirability of presumed message influence predicted effects on self positively but effects on others in one’s peer group negatively; and when a target other was viewed as superior in knowledge of and experience with the media, the patterns of self-other gaps in perceived effects were either reduced or reversed. Individuals utilized media effects schema to estimate message effects across three referents, demonstrating some evidence for the general cognitive account of self-other asymmetry in information and beliefs. However, individual hypotheses from the cognitive account (attribution, exposure and social distance) did not receive support. Implication and directions for future research on TPP are discussed.

Keywords: third-person perception, motivational, cognitive, social comparison, media effects schema

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The third-person effect (TPE) hypothesis originated in Davison’s (1983) seminal paper. The central idea is that people tend to believe that others easily fall prey to media influences whereas they themselves can remain unaffected. There are two components in the TPE: a perceptual component and a behavioral component. The perceptual component, called the third-person perception (TPP), captures the self-other asymmetry in individuals’ perception of media influences. Davison also suggested that this perceptual bias may lead people to take certain actions (see Sun, Pan, & Shen, 2008, Xu & Gozenbach, 2008). The behavioral component of TPE is about how people react to perceived media influences and consequently, alter social relationships and other aspects of their social realities (Perloff, 2002). This paper focuses on the perceptual component of TPE, rather than the behavioral component.

There has been substantial empirical evidence that the TPP is a robust phenomenon (Davison, 1996; Perloff, 2002; Sun et al., 2008). Scholars have uncovered a host of relevant factors that form two general theoretical accounts of TPP: one motivational and the other cognitive. The motivational account explains TPP as a “self-serving” or “self-enhancement” bias (Perloff, 2002). According to this account, individuals are motivated to project an image of being superior to an average other. Consequently, they tend to assign greater effects of undesirable messages to others, and conversely, assign greater effects of messages with desirable influences to themselves (a self-other perceptual gap known as the “first-person perception,” FPP). The cognitive account contends that individuals use factors in their lay theories to estimate message effects on self vs. on others; and that it is the self-other disparities in the utilized factors that lead to TPP or FPP.

These two accounts are not necessarily incompatible with one another, but they do emphasize different aspects of the mechanism underlying TPP or FPP. In his narrative review, Perloff (2002) declares that the motivational explanation for TPP has the most evidence. With a few exceptions (e.g., McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001; Reid & Hogg, 2005), studies on TPP oftentimes did not measure the explanatory factors empirically to estimate their relationships with the self-other gap in perceived effects. In addition, with the complex and intertwined relationship between motivation and cognition (Phelps, 2006), it is plausible that TPP results from both motivational and cognitive processes. However, there have been few studies that test the two explanations simultaneously (see, Reid, Byrne, Brundidge, Shoham, & Marlow, 2007), such that they can be directly tested against each other. Consequently, it remains inconclusive whether TPP is motivational or cognitive in nature, or the combination of the two.

We hope to fill this gap in the TPP literature by a) empirically measuring the explanatory factors, and b) testing hypotheses derived from the motivational and cognitive explanations against each other in the same study. We will first offer working definitions of cognition and motivation. Following a theoretical articulation of different approaches within each general explanation, data from a web-based survey will be analyzed to assess a) self-other perceptual gaps across three types of messages varying in social desirability, and b) the
relationships between such perceptual gaps and a host of predictors that comprise parts of the two general accounts and involve their joint operation.

Cognition vs. Motivation

Researchers agree that cognition and motivation are different mechanisms and contribute to human behavior and information processing in different ways. They also correspond to different regions in the brain: the midbrain (Hypothalamus) for motivation and forebrain (prefrontal cortex) for cognition (e.g., Daw & Shohamy, 2008). There is also a consensus that cognition and motivation are inter-related (e.g., Kuhl, 1986; Locke, 2000; Phelps, 2006). Therefore, it might be helpful to present working definitions for cognition and motivation before discussing the two explanations for TPP. In a narrow sense, cognition is defined as a specific type of representation of objects and facts. In a broader sense, cognition can include any presentation of incoming (i.e., external) information, including all mental structures and processes. The term motivation is oftentimes used in a narrow sense referring to emotional processes that are closely connected with preferred actions. In a broader sense, motivations are the desires or wants that energize and direct goal-oriented behavior. It can be the processing of action-related information, including action plans and cognitive processing of internal states.

Motivational Explanations for TPP

Social desirability. Evidence for the motivational explanation for TPP is circumstantial for the most part. Some scholars have measured related constructs such as optimistic bias and self-esteem to capture the self-enhancing motivation, but they failed to detect any significant effects (e.g., Banning, 2001; Chapin, 2000). Others inferred the operation of the self-enhancing motive based on the association between self-other perceptual gaps and social desirability of the presumed influence. The rationale is that, to enhance one’s self image, individuals tend to deny or discount their own susceptibility to undesirable social influences, but to accept or overestimate their own receptivity to desirable effects. The former is summarized as “the negative influence corollary” (Gunther & Storey, 2003), and the latter “the reversed third-person effect” or “the first-person effect” (Gunther & Mundy, 1993). Social desirability, therefore, lies at the heart of testing the motivational explanation for TPP.

Studies that measured social desirability of presumed influence and estimated its effect empirically (e.g., Jensen & Hurley, 2005; McLeod et al., 2001) showed that the variable has a significant negative effect on TPP. This finding is supported by a recent meta-analysis (Sun et al., 2008). The meta-analysis also shows that the self-other perceptual gaps follow the TPP pattern when the desirability of presumed media influence is ambiguous. Thus, it is predicted that:
H1: Social desirability is negatively associated with the self-other gap in perceived effects such that:

H1a: Others will be seen as being influenced more than self by a media message when the presumed influence is socially undesirable (TPP);
H1b: TPP occurs when the social desirability of a message’s presumed influence is ambiguous;
H1c: Others will be viewed as being less influenced than self if the presumed influence is socially desirable (FPP).

The empirical evidence for the negative association between social desirability and TPP, however, while consistent with the motivational interpretation of TPP, can also support the cognitive account, which contends that individuals use components in their lay theories of media effects as informational ingredients when making effect judgments. Social desirability may be just one component in such lay theories. The point here is that the main effect of social desirability on TPP is insufficient evidence for the motivational account. Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, and Ross (2001) suggested that there are cognitive alternatives to the motivational explanation for self-enhancing assessments. Therefore, caution is needed in interpreting such results when the motivational and cognitive explanations are viewed as co-occurring and/or competitive with each other.

More direct evidence for the motivational account of TPP would come from how social desirability may be used as a factor in reaching effect estimates. Given that motivations behind the TPP are self-enhancing in nature, the motivational application of social desirability in the process of effects estimation should be favorable to oneself (i.e., the more desirable a message is, the more effects on self), but unfavorable to others (i.e., the more undesirable a message is, the more effects on others). In other words, the self-enhancing motivation should lead to self-serving “errors” and “biased information processing” (Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995) in forming their attributions and judgments concerning self and others respectively. This line of arguments is consistent with the claim that perceived-effects on self and others are two differentiable perceptual processes in TPP (McLeod et al., 2001). Hence, we predicted that

H2: Social desirability impacts perceived effects on self and others differently such that:

H2a: It predicts perceived effects on self, positively;
H2b: It predicts perceived effects on others negatively.

Motivated social comparison. There has been sporadic evidence for the “social distance corollary” (Cohen, Price, Mutz, & Gunther, 1988), which states that the more distant an “other” is, the greater the self-other perceptual gap. Part of the reason can be attributed to the fact that the construct of social distance is not well-explicated or
operationalized. On the other hand, there is a motivational explanation for its lack of support. Although the message effects questions in most TPP studies are asked on each target alone and absolute judgments (Chambers & Windschitl, 2004), TPP is a social judgment that is comparative in nature. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that individuals’ choices of comparison others are, in part, determined by a) (dis)similarity of a target other, and b) perceived benefits and costs of making the comparison in the content domain of evaluation (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990; Wood, 1989). When self and others are placed on the same level of some normatively evaluative hierarchy (Locke, 2003), the theory predicts that similar, rather than dissimilar, others provide more desirable standards for comparison, especially when the dimension under evaluation is negative (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990; Wood, 1989). It is argued that comparison with dissimilar others may serve the goal of learning about the dimension under evaluation, whereas comparison with similar others serve the goal of self-enhancement (Wood, 1989). Consider the illusory superiority in “better than average effect.” Individuals tend to select an average person (i.e., similar to themselves) as the referent, rather than someone at the extremes. These extreme referents are oftentimes selected in the context (or for the purpose) of learning and education, for example, as role models and/or anti-role models.

Such “motivated” social comparison suggests that when the “other” is perceived to be superior to self regarding experiences of media and/or resistance to influences. For example, being more mature, more experienced with and knowledgeable about the media, and more critical when consuming media content, individuals tend to a) avoid social comparison to maintain a positive self-image, or b) to engage in an upward social comparison such that self will be perceived as “more similar” to this superior other in the domain of (resisting) media influence. Hence, self-image is enhanced (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990; Wood, 1989). This argument leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: When a third person is perceived as superior in the domain of being influenced by specific media messages, TPP/FPP will be reduced or even reversed.

**Cognitive Explanations for TPP**

Because the message effects questions compel a person to place multiple referents on a scale of being influenced, rendering such a judgment requires retrieving, selecting, using, and weighing information about each target, some undifferentiated social aggregate as a whole, and oneself. In other words, it is assumed that individuals have lay theories of media effects as informational ingredients when making effect judgments. Researchers labeled one of such lay theories as “media effects schemas” (e.g., McLeod et al., 2001; Price, Huang, & Tewksbury, 1997).

Media effects schemas are cognitive schemas about how media function and influence individuals. They might be “a constellation of beliefs that media messages are often
persuasive or manipulative, and that audience members are generally gullible and susceptible to manipulation” (Price & Tewksbury, 1996, p. 123). Such schemas may be viewed as containing two inter-related sets of beliefs: those about audience’s dispositions and those about situational factors. The dispositional components are beliefs about factors originating from within an individual, such as one’s selective use of media content, susceptibility to influences in general and to media influence in particular, and (lack of) critical use of the media (Price et al., 1997). Their roots can be traced to individuals’ personality or attitudinal dispositions. The situational components are the beliefs about the media and how the media emanate influences upon individuals, such as beliefs about media power, social desirability of presumed message influences, and the beliefs about people’s use of particular media messages as the locus of being “victimized” by the media. While media use is presumably an individual-enacted behavior, falling prey to media influences through such use is presumably an unintended consequence that is not rooted in one’s disposition.

Three cognitive accounts can be identified in the extant literature: attribution error, exposure hypothesis, and the social distance corollary. These explanations for TPP share the assumption that individuals may bring to bear information regarding the messages in question and target referents. Their differences lie in what information (about referents, media messages, etc.) individuals utilize when they render effects estimates on multiple referents (self vs. others).

Attribution error. The first cognitive explanation is based on the fundamental attribution error (e.g., Gunther, 1991). It suggests that individuals tend to attribute their own psychological reactions to what they regard as “the objective reality,” or external conditions, but those of others to their personal characteristics, or internal dispositions. Placed in this theoretical account, TPP is a subset of various perceptual biases rooted in the epistemic tendency called “naïve realism” (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004), which refers to the tendency to privilege one’s own psychological experiences. Based on this line of argument, it is predicted that:

H4: Self-other gap in perceived effects arises from attribution error such that:

H4a: Individuals attribute effects on self to situational/external factors.
H4b: Individuals attribute effects on others to dispositional/internal factors.

Exposure. The second cognitive approach to TPP focuses on perceivers’ presumptions of message exposure of specific others. This line of arguments suggests that individuals, when estimating message effects on various referents, consider the likelihood or the general levels of exposure to the messages in question. Greater message effect is allotted to a specific referent if this referent is seen as having a higher likelihood of exposure (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999; Innes & Zeits, 1988) or categorized as a member of a group, to which exposure to the message is normative (Reid & Hogg, 2005). A recent
meta-analysis (Sun et al., 2008) shows that the effect size of TPP increases when others are perceived to be “likely audience” of a particular media message. Hence, it is predicted that:

H5: Self-other gap in perceived effects is a function of exposure to messages such that:

H5a: TPP occurs when others are perceived to have more exposure to media messages than self.
H5b: FPP occurs when others are perceived to have less exposure to media messages than self.

Social distance. Studies that provided evidence for the social distance corollary (Cohen et al., 1988) tend to concur that its underlying psychological mechanism is cognitive in nature (see Eveland et al., 1999 for a discussion). An alternative approach is that individuals have more privileged information about self than about others. Such information differentials are activated by the cues present in a judgment context, such as the descriptors of “others.” Thus TPP can be considered as resulting from comparative social judgments rendered under different availability (or lack) of information (David, Liu, & Myser, 2004; Paek, Pan, Sun, Abisaid, & Douden, 2005). The rationale is that, the more distant the target referent is, the less information is available about this “other.” Hence, larger effect size in TPP. Therefore, it is predicted that:

H6: Self-other gap is positively associated with social distance.

**METHOD**

**Data Collection**

*Participants.* Data were collected via a web-based survey of undergraduate students in introductory communication and journalism courses in a major Midwest university. Students accessed the survey at any location with Internet connection by entering their student ID as a password. They completed the survey in a two-week study period in exchange for a small amount of extra credit. Duplicate surveys were carefully identified and discarded, yielding a valid sample of 575 respondents. This sample consisted of 71% females and 29% males; 5.6% were freshmen, 38.3% sophomores, 37.6% juniors and 18.6% seniors. They were between ages 18-32 (M=20.49, SD=1.42). The sample was somewhat heterogeneous in ethnicity (89.2% white/Caucasian, 5.9% Asian, 2.9% Hispanic and 1.9% African American).

*Target referents.* We constructed verbal descriptors of two kinds of others: “an average person in your own age group” and “an average person in your parents’ age group.”
singularity was used to remove possible confound of heterogeneity, size, generality, and
group-level comparisons in designations of different target others. The labels “your own”
and “your parents” were used to make the descriptors convey concrete similarity and
difference between self and each target other. The label “your parents” was used to cue the
image of a different (in age and life experiences) but superior (in knowledge of and
experiences with media) other that the undergraduate participants might hold in the domain
of experiences with media influences.

Media messages. Three types of media message were used: Internet pornography,
reality TV shows, and public service announcements (PSA). To ensure the same messages
were under consideration by the participants, other than Internet pornography, the effect-
estimate questions referred to specific messages. For Internet pornography, we simply
referred to label with no description, and the participants were left to use their own
definition. We asked about two Reality TV shows that were popular at the time of the
survey, The Benefactor and The Apprentice after a brief synopsis about each show. Synopses
were also provided before the measures related to the two PSAs, one titled “In America” that
encourages donations to charity; and the other titled “Steps” that advocates connecting with
people in one’s community.

Measures

All variables have multiple indices except belief in media power. The multiple indices
under one concept were necessitated either by multiple referents (i.e., measures repeated for
“yourself” and the two others), such as critical media use, susceptibility to influence in
general, and susceptibility to media, or by multiple messages (i.e., measures repeated or
adapted to three different message types), such as perceived social desirability of message
influence; or both (i.e., measures replicated on self and the two others, and varying with
message types), such as perceived message exposure and perceived message effects. Scale
reliabilities were estimated using the procedure developed by Raykov (1997), where
reliability is calculated as: \( \rho = \frac{(\text{Sum of factor loadings})^2}{((\text{Sum of factor loadings})^2 + (\text{sum of}}
\text{error variance})) \), which is based on the conceptualization that scale reliability is a ratio of true
variance in the latent variable to its observed variance, and is computed based on the
parameter estimates from confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). The advantages of \( \rho \) over
Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) lies that it overcomes the limitations of the later (see Sijtsma, 2009).

Perceived similarity. We operationalized social distance as perceived (dis)similarity.
Perceived similarity was measured by four 7-point items (1 = not at all similar and 7 = very
similar) in terms of basic values, goals in life, ways of treating other people, and the sense
of social responsibility. CFA showed that these items were unidimensional for each referent.
Ratings on these four items were averaged into a single index for each referent. The scale reliability ($r$) was .70 for the peer group measure and .58 for the parent group measure.

**Belief in media power.** Belief in media power was measured by 14 Likert scale items ($1=\text{Strongly disagree}, 7=\text{Strongly agree}$). Sample items were: “Media can strongly influence how people think about issues,” “Media are powerful in shaping how we see the world” and “Media often elicit strong emotions among people.” Four items were excluded to achieve unidimensionality. The other ten items were averaged into a single index ($r = .86$).

**Social desirability of message influence.** Social desirability was measured by four 7-point semantic differential scales. The word pairs were: “socially undesirable,” “beneficial to society,” “harmful to cultural values,” and “favorable to societal norms,” versus their counterparts. CFA confirmed that these items were unidimensional for each message. These items were averaged into a single index within each message. The scale reliability ($r$) of the measure ranged from .74 to .77 across the three messages.

**Critical media use.** Respondents were asked to rate their own critical use of the media on six questions ($1=\text{rarely}, 7=\text{very often}$) adapted from Kosicki and J. McLeod (1990) to capture two dimensions: active media use (such as “read between the lines of media stories”) and reflective media use strategy (such as “discuss with others about some media reports”). CFA, however, showed that a single-factor structure yielded a better fit. Hence the six items were averaged into one scale ($r = .84$). Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of the two others’ media use strategies in comparison to their own. The specific wording was “Compared with you, how much more or less does an average person in your age group/your parents’ age group do the above things when using the media?” ($1=\text{a lot less}, 7=\text{a lot more}$). Two such questions were asked, one following the items on one’s own active media use, and the other following the items on one’s reflective media use. They were averaged into one scale for peer ($r = .74$) and parent ($r = .76$) respectively.

**Susceptibility to influence in general.** Susceptibility to influence in general was measured by six items ($1=\text{very unlikely}, 7=\text{very likely}$). The respondents indicated how likely they themselves and each of the two others would: “be swayed by others who seem to know more;” “take up the perspective of a media report;” “be persuaded by an ad to buy a product;” “switch positions on an issue in a debate;” etc. CFA confirmed that for each referent, the set of items formed a single factor. They were then averaged into an index for each referent. The scale reliability ranged between .72 and .79.

**Susceptibility to media.** A single question was asked about respondents’ own susceptibility to media ($1=\text{not at all}, 7=\text{very}$). The exact wording was, “People differ in how
susceptible they are to media influences. How susceptible do you think YOU are to media influence?” Two comparative questions, each using a 7-point scale anchored by 1=“a lot less,” 7=“a lot more,” were asked to capture how respondents perceived each of the two others would differ from them respectively in terms of susceptibility to media.

Message exposure. The participants estimated the amount of exposure to each type of media content for each referent. We asked two questions about exposure to Internet pornography. To dilute the intrusiveness of such questions and increase participants’ truthful reporting, we included a preamble acknowledging that encountering such materials could be accidental given its prevalence on the Internet. Then we asked a) how frequently (1=“never,” 7=“quite often”) the participants themselves and the two others encountered such materials on the Internet and b) if they accidentally encountered such materials, how likely (1=“very unlikely,” 7=“quite likely”) they would “take a look at them.” The two measures were correlated for each target (r=.51, p <.001, for self; r=.47, p <.001, for peer, and r=.34, p <.001 for parent). The logic of this measurement strategy dictates that second item was conditioned upon the first one. Therefore, for each target, the two items were multiplied to form an exposure index, which was then transformed via square root, returning it to the original scale.

For each of the reality shows, participants were asked to indicate how frequently they themselves and the two others watched each of the two shows asked about in the survey (1=“never,” 7=“quite often”). The two measures were correlated for each target (r=.23, p <.001, for self; r=.40, p <.001, for peer, and r=.52, p <.001 for parent). A cumulative index of reality show exposure was created by taking the average of the two.

Exposure to PSAs was measured in a similar way as Internet pornography. Because the label PSA may sound less familiar to the participants, the preamble briefly introduced what kind of messages counted as PSAs. After that, we asked the participants to rate a) how often (1=“never,” 7=“quite often”) they and the two others have encountered a PSA in the past 12 months, and b) how likely (1=“very unlikely,” 7=“quite likely”) each referent would pay attention to it if encountering one on TV. For each target, the two items were correlated for each target (r=.39, p <.001, for self; r=.40, p <.001, for peer, and r=.39, p <.001 for parent). For each target, the two items were multiplied to form an index of PSA exposure. Each resulting index was transformed via square root to the original scale.

Perceived message effects. For each type of media content, a specific set of perceived effect measures were asked on respondents themselves and on the two others. Within each message type, the order of the evaluated targets was randomized to remove potential question-order effects. For all questions, the same 7-point scale was used, with 1 being not at all and 7 being a great deal. The items for Internet pornography were: “How much do you think they would influence your/the target referent’s moral values concerning sex/ways of dealing with sexually involved relationships/acceptance of sexually explicit talks or
images?" The items for reality TV shows were: "How much do you think they would influence your/the target referent’s perceptions of the business world/goals in life/work ethics/definition of success?" And the items for PSAs were: "How much do you think they would influence your/the target referent’s altruistic values/perception of charity/behavior of helping others/donation to charity?" CFA showed that all the perceived effects measures were unidimensional. Across three referents, the scale reliability ranged from .93 to .94 for reality shows, from .86 to .88 for Internet pornography, and .94 for PSAs.

RESULTS

Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis took two steps: a) auxiliary analyses on the differences in desirability across messages and in perceived similarity and differences among referents, and b) testing the substantive hypotheses. A series of repeated-measures models were estimated through either the General Linear Model (GLM) procedure or multilevel linear modeling (MLM) procedure. In this study, perceived effect varies across different measurement occasions defined by messages and referents. With three messages and three referents, each respondent rendered 9 different effect estimates. To test our hypotheses, for each referent, a two-level model, with individuals at the higher level and measurement occasions as repeated measures clustered within individuals, is estimated (see, Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2005 for discussions of multilevel models in general).

Auxiliary Analyses

Perceived similarity. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the perceived similarity between self and each of the referent others. An average person in one’s own age group was perceived as more similar to oneself (M=4.48, SD=.97) than an average person in parents’ age group (M=4.26, SD=.88): t(574)=4.34, p <.001, η² = .014. This significant, albeit small difference in perceived similarity supports our expectation in developing the descriptors that “an average person in your parents’ age group” would be viewed as being more distant than an average peer.

Social desirability. A repeated-measures General Linear Model (GLM) procedure, with message (Internet pornography, reality TV shows, and PSAs) as the within-subjects factor and sex and age as covariates, was used to compare the social desirability of the three types of media messages. Pair-wise comparisons were carried out via Bonferroni method to adjust for possible Type I error inflation due to multiple tests. The omnibus $F$ was significant: $F(2, 572)=48.29, p<.001, η² = .150$. So was the linear trend: $F(1, 572)=96.69, p<.001, η² = .140$. The PSAs were perceived as most socially desirable: (M=5.68, SD=1.00),
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followed by reality TV shows ($M=3.73, SD=.99$); and Internet pornography was considered as most undesirable ($M=2.12, SD=1.09$). All pair-wise differences were significant at the level of $p<.05$. Assuming alpha=.05, with a sample size of 575, the statistical power to detect an effect size equivalent to $r=.20$ exceeded .99. These results are entirely consistent with our expectation in selecting the messages and descriptors of the two target others for the study.

**Self-other disparities in media effects schemas.** Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the media effect schemas for each referent. One sample $t$-tests were conducted for the two comparative measures (susceptibility to media and critical media use). In addition, repeated measures GLM procedures were conducted with susceptibility to influence in general, and exposure to each of the three messages as dependent variables, referent as the within-subjects factor, and sex and year in school as covariates; pair-wise comparisons were carried out via Bonferroni method. Assuming alpha=.05, with a sample size of 575, the statistical power to detect an effect size equivalent to $r=.20$ exceeded .99.

Compared with self, an average peer was perceived as more susceptible to media ($M=5.18, SD=.99$): $t(574)=6.74, p<.001, \eta^2=.027$, and less critical when using the media ($M=3.66, SD=1.21$): $t(574)=-28.60, p<.001, \eta^2=.038$. On the other hand, an average person of parents’ age was perceived to be equally susceptible to media ($M=3.93, SD=1.35$) as self: $t(574)=-1.27, p<.21, \eta^2=.00, \text{ but more critical when using the media } (M=4.47, SD=1.41)$ than self: $t(574)=8.04, p<.001, \eta^2=.052$.

There was a main effect of referent on susceptibility to influence in general: $F(2, 571)=31.66, p<.001, \eta^2=.100$. An average peer ($M=4.73, SD=.85$) was perceived as more susceptible to influence than self ($M=3.71, SD=.84$): $\eta^2=.268$, while an average person of parents’ age was perceived as less susceptible than self ($M=3.59, SD=.99$): $\eta^2=.004$. All pair-wise comparisons were significant at level of $p<.05$.

The main effect of referent was significant on exposure to Internet pornography: $F(2, 571)=35.38, p<.001, \eta^2=.110$. An average peer was estimated to have the greatest amount of exposure ($M=4.56, SD=1.22$), followed by an average person of parents’ age ($M=3.30, SD=1.25$), and self had the least ($M=2.93, SD=1.52$). The effect size was substantially larger for the difference between an average peer and self ($r=.252$) than that between an average person of parents’ age and self ($\eta^2=.017$). All pair-wise differences were significant at $p<.001$.

The main effect of referent was also significant on exposure to reality TV shows: $F(2, 571)=60.70, p<.001, \eta^2=.180$. Pair-wise comparisons showed that self was estimated to have significantly less exposure ($M=3.67, SD=2.21$) than either an average peer ($M=7.73, SD=2.30, \eta^2=.448$), or an average person of parents’ age ($M=7.55, SD=2.64, \eta^2=r=.386), p<.001; \text{ while the two others did not differ in their estimated exposure } (p<.47)$.

The main effect of referent was also significant on the estimated exposure to PSA: $F(2, 571)=6.58, p<.01, \eta^2=.020$. Self ($M=4.37, SD=1.38$) was estimated to have more exposure than an average peer ($M=4.11, SD=1.26$): $\eta^2=.009$, but less than an average person of
These results demonstrated that the label “an average person in your parents’ age group” successfully evoked an image of a “different but superior other” in the domain of experiences with the media. There is self-serving bias in estimates of message exposure by self and the target referents (see, also, Peiser & Peter, 2000), except for parents’ age group’s exposure to PSA. The participants believed that an average person in their parents’ age group was less susceptible to influences and used media more critically. We considered this as evidence that the third-person descriptor “an average person in your parents’ age group” did evoke perceptions of a “different but superior other” in the domain of experiences with the media: The superiority of that target referent does not lie in the fact that they are less exposed to undesirable messages, and/or more exposed to desirable messages, but in their being less susceptible to influences and having more critical media use strategies.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Media Effect Schema Factors under Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics under Comparison</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General susceptibility</td>
<td>3.71a (.84)</td>
<td>4.73b (.85)</td>
<td>3.59c ( .99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to media influences²</td>
<td>3.90 (1.17)</td>
<td>5.18** (.99)</td>
<td>3.93 (1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical media use²</td>
<td>4.46 (1.19)</td>
<td>3.66** (1.21)</td>
<td>4.47** (1.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequencies of exposure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet sex materials</td>
<td>3.12a (1.49)</td>
<td>4.62b (1.91)</td>
<td>3.42c (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality shows on TV</td>
<td>1.84a (1.10)</td>
<td>3.87b (1.15)</td>
<td>3.77b (1.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSAs</td>
<td>4.48a (1.33)</td>
<td>4.25b (1.23)</td>
<td>4.61c (1.21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Means in each row with different superscripts are significantly different at \( p < .05 \).
2. For self, the measure is on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (rarely or not at all) to 7 (very often or very). For each target other, the measure is in comparison with self on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (a lot less) to 7 (a lot more). One-sample t-test is used to compare the means with the mid-point (no difference between self and the target other) of the scale for these variables.
   * \( p < .05 \); ** \( p < .01 \).

Standard deviations in parentheses
Impact of Message and Target Referent

H1, H3 and H6 make specific predictions on the direction and magnitude of self-other gaps in perceived effects as a function of message and target referent combined. A repeated-measures GLM was estimated to test these two hypotheses. Message (Internet pornography, reality TV shows, and PSAs) and referent (self, average peer, and average person of parents’ age) were specified as within-subjects factors, sex and year in school were specified as covariates. Pair-wise comparisons were carried out via Bonferroni method. Figure 1 presents the perceived effects on each referent across the three messages.

The main effect of referent on perceived effect: $F(2, 571)=32.62, p<.001, \eta^2 = .10$. The main effect of message was also significant: $F(2, 571)=4.41, p<.05, \eta^2 = .015$. The interaction between referent and message was significant: $F(4, 569)=17.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .110$. Pair-wise comparisons showed that the self-other gaps in perceived effects were generally consistent with the predictions.

For Internet pornography, there was a significant TPP gap between self and an average peer: $t=-21.86, p<.001, \eta^2 = .130$; but not between self and an average person of parents’ age: $t=-1.23, p<.56, \eta^2 = .00$. The pattern was very similar for reality TV shows: There was a significant TPP gap between self and an average peer: $t=-24.39, p<.001, \eta^2 = .168$, but not between self and an average person of parents’ age: $t=1.67, p<.30, \eta^2 = .001$. For PSAs, there was a significant FPP gap between self and an average peer: $t=3.39, p<.001, \eta^2 = .002$. The gap between self and an average person of parents’ age was also significant, but in the direction of TPP: $t=-6.71, p<.001, \eta^2 = .011$.

Therefore, in the context of comparing with one’s peer, the three components of H1 were all supported: TPP occurred for socially undesirable messages (Internet pornography) and ambiguous messages (Reality TV shows), while FPP occurred for the socially desirable message (pro-social PSAs). The generalization of these results on TPP and FPP needs to be qualified in light of the evidence supporting H3: In the context of comparing with a target referent who was perceived to be superior in relevant domains, the self-other gap predicted in H1a-H1c was either reduced to non-significance (Internet pornography and Reality TV shows) or reversed (PSAs). These results, while providing support to H3, mean that H6 was not supported: an average person of one’s parents’ age is more distant (dissimilar) to self than an average peer; however, TPP was reduced or even reversed, instead of increased.

H5 predicts that TPP occurs when others are perceived to have more exposure to media messages than self; while FPP occurs when others are perceived to have less exposure than self. Results from the auxiliary analyses and the repeated measures GLM analyses also allowed for the testing of this hypothesis. When the target referent is an average peer, H5 was supported across three media messages: an average peer was perceived to have more exposure to Internet pornography and reality TV shows than self, and TPP was significant for both messages. An average peer was perceived to have less exposure to PSAs than self, and FPP was significant. The results were mixed when it comes to an average peer of one’s
parents’ age: On one hand, this other was perceived to have less exposure to PSAs than self, and FPP was significant; on the other and, this referent was perceived to have more exposure to both Internet pornography and reality TV shows, yet TPP was nonsignificant in both cases.

**Information Utilized in Estimating Messages Effects on Self vs. Others**

H2 and H4 concern how various media effects schemas are used in individuals’ lay theory to estimate message effects on self vs. others. These two hypotheses were tested together with series of MLM analyses via the *xtmixed* procedure in Stata. In these models, each predictor was estimated in its “unique” impact on the perceived-effect estimate concerning a referent. This was accomplished by including the perceived effects on the other
two referents as predictors. For each referent, two models were estimated. The one without media effect schema variables was construed as the null model and the one with these variables added was labeled as the full model. Table 2 presents the fixed effects in unstandardized regression coefficients for each predictor (expressed as r to be consistent with the model specification) and the random effects in variances.

Results from the two-level models showed that the set of media effects schema variables predicted significant proportion of variances in perceived effects across three referents: .13 for effects on self, .07 for effects on an average peer, and .06 for effects on an average person of parents’ age. We turn to the fixed effects parameter estimates for specific predictors to test H2 and H4. H2 predicts that social desirability positively predicts effects on self, but negatively predicts effects on others. The parameters estimate for that variable was positive and significant on effects on self ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), but negative and significant on perceived effects on peer ($\beta = -.12, p < .001$). Its impact on perceived effects on parent was positive, but non-significant, which is generally consistent with the prediction (i.e., not being considered in a favorable manner). Hence, H2 was supported.

H4 predicts that individuals tend to attribute effects on self to external factors and effects on others to internal factors. Across three messages, both external (desirability and exposure) and internal (critical media use, susceptibility to influence and to media) were significant predictors of effects on self. For effects on an average peer, all three external factors, but only one internal factor (susceptibility to media) were significant predictors. For effects on an average person of parents’ age, two external (belief in media power and exposure) and two internal (susceptibility to influence and to media) factors were significant predictors. These results provide little evidence for H4.

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

**Strengths and Limitations**

In this study, we discussed the motivational and cognitive accounts of TPP in the extant literature and tested a set of hypotheses derived from such accounts. The motivational account suggests that individuals estimate message effects on self vs. others in a way to help portraying a positive self-image. The cognitive perspective, on the other hand, suggests that individuals utilize information regarding media messages and referent others in their lay theories to estimate message effects on self as well as on others. The results from the web-based survey data from a college student sample help shed some light on how TPP or FPP may occur and how they may vary.

The strength of this study comes from increased internal validity as well as external validity. Threats to internal validity are reduced in two aspects in this study: first, the multilevel modeling approach is more parsimonious, which reduces the inflation in Type I error due to multiple tests. Second, the procedure is more appropriate when the independence...
Table 2

*Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimates (Unstandardized) of Two-level Mixed Model of Perceived Effects*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed Part</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirability</td>
<td>.15***</td>
<td>-.12***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in media</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01*</td>
<td>-.01*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>.15***</td>
<td>.09***</td>
<td>.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical media use</td>
<td>-.05*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to influence</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to media</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>.10***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random Part</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>.11***</td>
<td>.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual (σ²)</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total variance</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log restricted likelihood</td>
<td>-2292.53</td>
<td>2162.49</td>
<td>-2304.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2251.38</td>
<td>-2252.77</td>
<td>-2206.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional variance explained</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td>.07***</td>
<td>.06***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a.* Number of observations: N=1725; number of clusters: I=575; number of observations per cluster: J=3.

*b.* The predictors in the null models were: sex, year in school, two dummy variables for message, and two perceived effects variables (on the other two referents).

*c.* Based on $\chi^2$ test of the difference in the log likelihood statistics between the null and full models for each referent. The results are: $\chi^2=130.04$ for perceived effects on self, $\chi^2=53.15$ for perceived effects on peer, and $\chi^2=45.93$ for perceived effect on parent. All the tests have 6 degrees of freedom.

$* p <.05$, $** p <.01$, $*** p <.001$,

Standard errors in parentheses.
assumption is violated due to repeated measures. The multilevel model approach yields unbiased estimates of the error terms, hence produces less biased estimates and significance tests. Regarding external validity, we recognize that our findings have low ecological validity because the participants in our study were not randomly selected from a larger definable population. But other features of our study, such as including three message types that varied in empirically validated levels of desirability and the perceived-effect measures that referred to concrete messages evaluated, contribute to enhancing other aspects of external validity (see Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982). That is, the findings have knowable relationships with messages and message-effect estimates that populate our media-shaped world. It is more difficult to conclude the same about findings based on references to “the media” in general or general content category with only assumed rather than measured desirability of their presumed influences.

As a web-based survey, our study was cost-effective as far as resources and efficiency were concerned. However, the first limitation is that we did not have the same levels of control in the data collection as in a laboratory study. The second limitation is in the lack of generalizability of our findings. The three types of messages selected for this study only address variations among media messages on the dimension of social desirability. Other possible dimensions of message were not addressed. For example, perceived relevance of a message and/or its presumed effect may be important to consider. The literature on social comparison suggests that self-relevance of the dimension under evaluation is a major factor that affects whether social comparison would occur (e.g., Pleban & Tesser, 1981). Another clear limitation lies in the fact that some of the scales had relatively low reliability (e.g., perceived similarity for parent-age group). With these strengths and limitations in mind, we turn to the specific findings.

**The Motivational Account of TPP**

All three hypotheses derived from the motivational account of TPP received support from the data. First, self-other gap in perceived effects is in the form of TPP for a socially undesirable (Internet pornography), but in the form of FPP for a desirable message (PSAs) (H1a and H1c). Second, these self-other gaps in perceived effects are more pronounced when social comparisons in the domain of message effects serve, presumably, the function of self-enhancement, indicated by comparisons against a target other how is presumed at the similar level in an evaluative hierarchy such as a peer. However, it is reduced or reversed when the self-enhancing gain works toward believing in more similarities, as indicated by comparison against a superior other (H3). Third, more direct evidence for the motivational process embedded in the role of social desirability of presumed influence came from the prediction of self-serving mode of “biased processing” (H2). This states that social desirability is utilized positively when estimating message effects on self but negatively when estimating effects on an average peer, the other against whom social comparisons would result more
gain in self-enhancement. The non-significant association between social desirability and perceived effects on the parent-age group also constitutes evidence supporting the motivational account in that the same motivation in social comparison with a superior other in the domain of evaluation would lead individuals to choose a different algorithm.

**The Cognitive Account of TPP**

The fact that the set of media effects schema variables predicted significant proportion of variances in perceived effects across three referents provided support for the general premise of the cognitive explanations of TPP in that individuals do utilize media effects schema components in generating message effects estimates. These considerations are clearly informational for individuals to render their estimates of message effects. The information may be amassed for a judgment task from multiple sources: lay theories about self and others, a third person descriptor that constitutes a cue in the immediate environment of message effect evaluations, and the media message in question.

The results were mixed, however, when it comes to cognitive explanations that concern specific predictors (exposure and social distance). This is not surprising given that it would be rare, if not impossible, for individuals to consider only one piece of information when estimating message effects. Instead, results in this study show that individuals use information from a host of factors. There has been evidence that when exposure is taken into consideration, social distance no longer predicts TPP (e.g., Eveland et al., 1999); and that the impact of exposure would disappear when the target referent is perceived to use media critically (the current study), or when self-categorization and group norm are functioning (e.g., Reid & Hogg, 2005; Reid et al., 2007). The exposure hypothesis and the social distance corollary would probably receive support when different factors that impact TPP are in the same direction, for example, a more distant other is perceived to have more exposure.

The attribution error explanation did not receive support either. This account predicts that individuals would attribute effects on self to external factors and effects on others to internal factors. Our results showed that a) both external and internal factors predicted effects on self, and effects parent (superior other), and b) more external (all three) than internal (one out of three) factors predicted effects on an average peer. Post hoc analyses estimating two-level models within each message showed that the pattern did not differ between the undesirable Internet pornography and the desirable PSAs.

**Is TPP Motivational, Cognitive, or Both?**

Perloff (2002) claims that the motivational, self-enhancement explanation for TPP has received more evidence than the cognitive explanation. Results from this study appear to provide further evidence for his claim. We should not, however, make haste to reject the cognitive account. First, results showed that the set of media effects schema variables
explained significant proportions of variance in perceived effects on all three referents. This constitutes clear evidence for the general premise of the cognitive account—individuals utilize information on target referents, messages, and media in general to estimate message effects on multiple referents.

Second, individuals tend to be more “systematic” when estimating effects on self (i.e., more variance explained) than when doing so on others, especially with regard to utilizing information about referent’s internal dispositions (e.g., susceptibility) and experiences (e.g., critical processing of media content). This self-other asymmetry might be because individuals have more available, more accessible, and more presumably applicable information on self than on others. It is reasonable to infer this self-other asymmetry as some indirect evidence for the cognitive “information asymmetry thesis” (Paek et al., 2004). A basic premise for this thesis states that individuals have more privileged information about self than about others (see Epley & Dunning, 2000; Kruger & Gilovich, 2004; Pronin et al., 2001, 2004). This information disparity concerning self and others might be the cognitive mechanism that underlies self-other gaps in perceived effects.

Third, the current conceptualization for the cognitive explanations tends to be oversimplified—they tend to focus on one or two factors at a time, which unfortunately puts them at a disadvantageous position. Fourth, estimates of message effects, as in all social judgments, are “relational,” “motivational,” and “selective” (Dunning, 2000, p. 374). No theoretical model of TPP would be truly integrative until both motivational and cognitive factors are explicitly incorporated as explanatory variables. The challenge for us in future studies, thus, is to develop a clear theoretical framework to not only differentiate, incorporate, but also explain judgments embedded with motivated and non-motivated forms of biases (Chambers & Windschitl, 2004; Dunning et al., 1995). By proposing and testing hypotheses derived from the cognitive and motivational accounts simultaneously, we intended to strive for an integrated theoretical view on TPP, and to invite theoretical efforts to incorporate both motivational and cognitive explanations of TPP. Future studies on TPP, as Banning (2008) calls for, should be more “experimental in focus and interdisciplinary in scope” so as to broaden our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Without extensive theoretical work, the TPP research will remain, as Mussweiler, Rüter and Epstude (2004, p. 833) lamented of social comparison research, “a disintegrated puzzle.”

REFERENCES


Motivational vs. Cognitive Explanations for the Third-person Perception
Lijiang Shen, Zhongdang Pan, and Ye Sun


Demand Characteristics and Biases in Self-Reports of Media Use Through an Online Diary

Prabu David, Mihye Seo and Tom German

Cognitive and motivational biases in self-reports of media use were examined in two experiments. Self-reports of media use increased with cued recall and through self-reports through an electronic diary. These benefits were most apparent for high-use electronic media, such as TV, Internet and DVDs, but not for newspapers or magazines. We also examined whether self-reports of higher television use through the electronic media diary was due to acquiescence or self-presentation biases, but we found no evidence of either of these biases. In fact, careful monitoring of media use through a diary neutralized the perceived gap in media use between self and other study participants, which persisted in the no-diary condition.

Keywords: media diary, media use measures, cognitive biases, motivational biases, self-reports

Retrospective recall is one of the most common techniques to assess human behaviors, which is to simply ask people to report their experiences. Assessment of media use has relied heavily on retrospective recall and a variety of measurement instruments have been employed by communication researchers, including diaries (e.g., Pardun, L’Engle, & Brown, 2005; van der Voort & Voojis, 1990). Recently, electronic diaries (Greenberg et al., 2005) have become popular given the reach of technologies such as the Internet, personal

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computers and handheld computers.

Whether through diaries or through long-term retrospective recall, assessment of media use is a measurement challenge recognized by academic and applied researchers. Distinction between media reliance and media use (e.g., Faber, Reese, & Steeves, 1985), between global media use and content-specific media use (e.g., Culbertson & Stempel, 1986; Slater, 2004) and the need to focus on attention (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; McLeod & McDonald, 1985) are some of the issues that have been addressed in the past. Recently, a special issue of the *Communication Methods and Measures Journal* was dedicated to media exposure (Fishbein & Hornik, 2008), emphasizing various challenges in measurement in an increasingly complex media environment. However, fewer studies have examined inherent biases in self-reported media use (Peiser & Peter, 2000; Price & Zaller, 1993; Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005) and the psychological process involved in self-reports of media use has not been well fleshed out.

Self-reports of media use can be affected by numerous biases, including lapses in memory (e.g., Sudman & Bradburn, 1974), social desirability biases (e.g., Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), demand characteristics (e.g., Orne, 1962), and acquiescence biases (e.g., Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1984). Against the backdrop of these biases, we examined the potential for the cognitive and motivational biases in reports of media use through a diary. Study 1 focused mainly on cognitive biases with a preliminary examination of the perceptions of social norms of media use. Some of the key findings were replicated in Study 2 with perceived difference in media use between self and others as one of the dependent variables, which was examined under two experimental conditions.

**COGNITIVE BIASES: FREE RECALL, CUED RECALL AND MEDIA DIARIES**

Memory biases can be examined at the encoding, storage and retrieval stages of information processing (e.g., Fischoff, 1975; Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977; Schwarz, 1999; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Perhaps the most common type of cognitive bias is forgetting, which is a type of retrieval error in which a memory trace for a media use experience is available in memory, but not accessible during retrieval. Moreover, to answer retrospective recall questions of media use, respondents need to retrieve their past behaviors and aggregate them into a single report. If an individual does not allocate significant cognitive resources to the recall task, the potential for retrieval biases increases (e.g., Krosnick 1991; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Sudman & Bradburn, 1974). Even when sufficient cognitive resources are allocated, the retrieval and aggregation of media use experiences may be limited by the capacity of human cognition (e.g., Burton & Blair, 1991; Lang, 1998). Capacity and effort may be particularly challenging when recalling radio, television or Internet use, which are often used in multitasking situations (Papper, Holmes, & Popovich,
The range of programs and choices available and the use of media for multiple functions, including background "noise," pose formidable measurement challenges. With print media, on the other hand, which are used far less frequently, these demands are considerably lower, and retrospective recall may be easier for newspaper and magazine use (Thompson, Skowronski, Larsen, & Betz, 1996). This may be because atypical events are remembered more easily than frequent or typical events.

The challenges stemming from both limited effort and limited capacity can be minimized to some extent through the use of cued recall. Cueing has been found to be a valuable tool in autobiographical memory research (Bjork, 1978; Robinson, 1976). Memory cues that provide assistance during retrieval (Conway & Bekerian, 1987; Lewis, 1971) often result in enhanced recall (Unnava, Burnkrant & Erevelles, 1994). If a person is presented with a category name, for example, it serves as a cue to recall items from that category (Tulving & Pearlstone, 1966). Therefore, cues presented during retrospective recall can significantly improve access to traces in memory that are otherwise inaccessible or forgotten.

Although the concept of cueing is simple, given the range of media choices and programs that are available, paper-and-pencil measures of cued recall, with long lists of programs, can be cumbersome to administer. With online surveys, many of the limitations of the paper-and-pencil task can be addressed. Beginning with a database of media choices, a computer program can systematically present media categories and genres. Skip patterns and branching could be added to guide the user through a limited menu of choices that are contingent on previous choices. Using such a database-driven survey form, the differences in media use assessments between free recall and cued recall were tested in this study. We predicted that participants in the cued recall condition would be able to access more traces of media use in memory, particularly for television. Although an increase in minutes of reported media does not confirm more accuracy, given the heavy use of television and the likelihood of forgetting in the absence of cues, higher estimates of television use in cued recall was predicted.

H1: Estimates of media use in minutes will be greater in the cued recall condition in comparison to the free recall condition.

While cued recall may ease some of errors during retrieval, other strategies could be employed to improve accuracy. One way to improve recall of past experiences is to minimize the duration between the media experience and the reporting episode, thereby reducing the likelihood of decay of the memory trace (Bjork, 1978; Blair & Burton, 1987; Burton & Blair, 1991). Electronic media diaries that allow individuals to report media use periodically or "in the moment" when the experience occurs can minimize the time lag between media experience and the reporting of the experience (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Papper et al., 2004). Further, electronic diaries provide timestamps that can be used to validate frequency and periodicity of the diary maintenance behaviors.

Given the pervasiveness of media in popular culture, media experiences can be fleeting
and media use could be one of many simultaneous activities. If these media use experiences are not captured before forgetting, they may never be retrieved. Therefore, to facilitate frequent entries, an online media diary with timestamps was provided. Evidence for higher estimates of media use via a diary in comparison to assessments provided via a telephone survey was observed in the Middletown study (Papper et al., 2004). Further, online diaries make the diary-keeping easier through a point-and-click interface. Hence, the next hypothesis is based on the reasoning that electronic diaries would increase the likelihood of capturing more media use episodes, which in turn would translate into higher estimates of media use in comparison to retrospective recall, even if it were cued recall.

\[H2: \text{Self-reports of minutes of media use will be greater through a media diary than through retrospective cued recall.}\]

**INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE**

Although the diary is a useful tool that could minimize lapses in memory, self-reports are prone to motivational biases (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). For example, a student who believes that other students watch less television may be motivated to underreport individual television use. Or, a student who watches a fair amount of television may be tempted to believe that others spend many hours watching television. Therefore, beliefs and assessments of the collective can provide useful diagnostics of reports of the self.

The importance of the self in assessments of others (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004) and the importance of perceptions of others in assessments and behaviors of self (Miller & Prentice, 1994) are social judgment phenomena with extensive literatures. Among these social judgments, one that is most relevant to this study is the influence of erroneously perceived social norms on individual behavior, which is referred to as pluralistic ignorance. For instance, Prentice and Miller (1993) demonstrated that misperception about the permissive use of alcohol on a college campus was predictive of an individual’s alcohol consumption.

Similarly, misperceived social norms could have an impact in retrospective accounts of media behaviors, which are often arrived through heuristic assessments rather than accurate summations of time spent watching various shows. In the case of alcohol, despite the possibility that some students might want to report higher levels of consumption than actual, empirical findings suggest that students’ perception of the social norm was higher than the actual. However, for media use it is difficult to make theoretical predictions whether individual use will be higher or lower than perceived social norm because it not clear how media use is perceived among college students. Empirical evidence is also sparse with the exception of a study by Pieser and Peter (2000), which reported that respondents perceived others to be heavier consumers of “undesirable” television than they are themselves. However, if the negative connotation of undesirable media is not imposed, and if media use
were to be assessed in general, it is not clear whether the self-other difference would be evident. In the absence of directional findings from prior research, the potential difference in the estimates of media use between self and others was posed as a research question.

RQ1: Is the reported minutes of media use by self different from the perceived use of media by others in the study?

**STUDY I**

The main purpose of Study 1 was to examine potential cognitive biases in self-reports of media use and to examine differences between estimates of media use by self and others, which was introduced as a proxy measure to examine potential sources of bias.

**Design and Participants**

Participants were recruited from an introductory course in communication at a large Midwestern university. A total of 99 undergraduate students (38.4% male and 61.6% female) participated in the study for extra credit. Average age of the participants was 21. A single experimental manipulation was used. In the pre-test phase, participants were assigned to the free recall or cued recall condition. After the pre-test, all participants were asked to maintain an online media diary for one week, which was followed by a post-test. Each individual’s retrospective cued recall of media use over a week was compared against that individual’s online diary reports. Also, participants’ estimates of media use both by self and others were assessed during the post-test.

**Procedure**

When participants arrived at a computer lab, they were assigned to one of two retrospective recall conditions. In the cued recall condition, participants were asked to fill out online surveys about media use behaviors for the past seven days, with separate sections for television, videos/DVDs, magazines, newspaper, and Internet. A range of media options were presented in cued recall. For example, using TV Guide and other sources, most of the shows available to the students via cable television were included in the diary. Local newspapers and magazines that students were most likely to read were also programmed. In addition, students had the option of adding entries if the item was not already available. Along with the media entry, students were requested to enter the number of minutes spent with each media use episode. Participants in the free-recall condition were not provided a list of programs. They were asked to list all their media experiences, such as names of shows and the minutes allocated to each experience. However, they were cued to provide data by
separate media categories, namely television, videos/DVDs, magazines, newspaper, and Internet. The data from the free and cued recall were compared to test H1. After filling out the online survey, all participants were provided a link to a web-based media-diary, which was of the same format used by participants in the cued recall condition. Participants were told to log in and maintain the daily diary over a week and to return to the lab at the same date and time the following week. During the week following the first session, all participants were sent three reminders to complete their online media diary via e-mail. Each diary entry was saved along with a timestamp. When participants returned a week after the first session, all participants were asked to provide a cued-recall summary assessment of the total amount of time they spent on different media, which was compared to the daily diary assessments, in order to test H2. Using the same cued recall forms, participants were then asked to estimate media use of the other students in the study. Participant evaluation of others was compared against self-reported cued recall to test RQ1.

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants would report more media use in the cued recall condition than in free recall condition. The hypothesized pattern was found for television use, $t(43)=4.17, p<.001$. Respondents reported nearly twice as much television use in the cued recall condition ($M=172.10, SD=108.87$) as in the free recall condition ($M=87.74, SD=68.99$). However, in the cued recall condition, participants reported slightly less use of magazines ($M=6.15, SD=6.95$) than in the free recall condition ($M=10.01, SD=10.47$), $t(43)=2.07, p<.05$. The differences between the free and cued recall was not significant for any of the other media examined in the study (newspapers, Movies/Video/DVD, or Internet). The results presented in Table 1 suggest that Hypothesis 1 was true only for television use, but not for other media. Reported use of magazines was in the opposite direction, with a higher assessment in the free recall condition than in the cued recall condition.

In Hypothesis 2, we had predicted that self-reported use of media obtained through a diary would be greater than retrospective cued recall of media use over the same period. The results are shown in Table 2. Significant differences were observed between diary data and retrospective cued recall for television $t(96) = 3.50, p < .01$, movie/DVD, $t(96) = 3.60, p < .01$, and Internet use $t(96) = 2.80, p < .001$. However, no significant differences were observed for newspapers and magazines. All differences were compared using paired t-tests. In comparison to retrospective cued recall, it appears that the frequent registering of media use via a diary led to higher estimates only for high-use electronic media, namely television, the Internet and DVDs/videos. Apparently, registering use via a diary did not result in any advantages for print media, such as newspapers and magazines, which were used for less than 10 minutes a day. Significantly higher use of screen media via the diary in comparison to the retrospective reports was also observed in the Middletown study (Papper, et al., 2004). In our study, even after maintaining the diary for a week, retrospective recall over the same
period led to lower assessments of media use of electronic media.

Next, using paired t-tests, a preliminary examination of perceived media use differences between self and others was conducted. As shown in Table 3, compared to self, others were perceived to be heavier users of newspapers, \( t(96) = 6.97, p < .001 \), movie/DVD, \( t(96) = 5.25, p < .001 \), magazines, \( t(96) = 8.32, p < .001 \), and the Internet, \( t(96) = 3.37, p < .001 \), whereas no difference between self and others was observed for television.

In summary, the results from Study 1 showed significant differences between three types of media-use measures, and these differences varied by media. First, television use was almost twice as high with cued recall than with free recall. Second, individuals reported more media use through diary reports than through retrospective cued recall for television, Internet and DVDs, but not for newspapers and magazines. Finally, with the exception of television, others were perceived to be heavier users of media than self.

The estimate of minutes spent watching television found in this study (154 minutes) is within the range of findings from two other large probability sample studies: 278 minutes
in the *Middletown* study (Papper et al., 2004) and 184 minutes in the *Generation M* study (Roberts et al., 2005). While the *Generation M* study focused on 8-18 year olds, the Middletown study included participants who were 18 or older, both of which were based on samples quite different from the sample of university students who participated in our study. The estimate of newspaper use (5.4 minutes) was also lower in our study compared to the 26 minutes per day reported in the Middletown study, which included older participants who are more likely to read newspapers. Another point to consider is the rapid inroads made by the Internet in delivering newspaper and television content. With a convenience sample of university students, our goal was not to obtain population parameters of media use, but to examine the psychology underlying the reporting of media use. To pursue this goal, we decided to focus only on television and newspapers, which represented the ends of the continuum of media use, with television being the most frequently and widely used medium
and newspapers representing the least used medium.

In summary, the findings from Study 1 suggest that with cueing and the use of a diary, self reports of television use increased significantly, although neither cueing nor diary use made a difference in estimates of newspaper use, a low-frequency behavior. However, when self-other differences were examined, no differences were observed for television, although a difference was evident for newspaper use, with others perceived to be heavier consumers of newspapers than self. Using these differences between television and newspapers, some of the potential motivation biases associated with diaries were examined in a follow-up study.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Media Use by Self</th>
<th>Media Use by Others</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>115.06</td>
<td>110.80</td>
<td>-.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(85.55)</td>
<td>(63.72)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>6.97***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.27)</td>
<td>(7.27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie/DVD</td>
<td>25.80</td>
<td>40.10</td>
<td>5.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(26.43)</td>
<td>(27.22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>14.74</td>
<td>8.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.68)</td>
<td>(11.83)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>61.06</td>
<td>85.21</td>
<td>3.73***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(61.41)</td>
<td>(62.96)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=97; Numbers in the parentheses are standard deviations; *** p < .001
Demand Characteristics and Motivational Bias

Higher estimates of television use found in the diary report raises the question whether maintaining a diary created a demand characteristic to inflate media use. One of the potential biases associated with a media diary is the awareness that one is being studied, which could lead individuals to provide more data, which is a form of good-subject or acquiescence bias (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1993). This type of bias is similar to the increased productivity observed among workers who knew that they were being studied, commonly known as the Hawthorne effect (Adair, 1984). The challenge for the researcher, then, is to rule out potential biases in media use reports. One way to determine whether participants in the diary condition were prone to exaggeration is by comparing the diary group against controls or a placebo group.

In addition to the good-subject bias noted above, a more strategic, motivationally driven self-presentation bias of media use is possible as well. Previous research has shown that reasoning about the self is often swayed by self-protective or self-presentation biases (Kunda, 1987; Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004). An example of a self-presentation bias in reports of media use was reported by Price and Zaller (1993), who found that 35 percent of the respondents in a National Election Study said they listened to National Public Radio (NPR), which was in contrast to Arbitron Radio Diary data from that region, which showed that only 6% of the study population listened to NPR at least once a week during the study period.

To examine potential motivation biases, two experimental factors were added to Study 1. First, a no-diary, control condition was added. Second, an experimental manipulation was added to induce motivations to over-report newspaper use and under-report television use. The reason for choosing newspapers and television were mainly because they were in the opposite ends of the use continuum. With limited newspaper use, which was almost at the floor level, we thought that with newspapers we would be able to detect an over-reporting bias, if any. Similarly, with television use, which was almost at the ceiling level, we predicted that it would be ideal for detecting motivational biases, if any, due to underreporting.

RQ2: In comparison to the diary-only condition, will the diary-with-manipulation condition result in over-reporting of newspaper use and the under-reporting of television use?

Moreover, in Study 1, which employed the diary-only condition, there was no difference in perceived use of television between self and other, but an estimate of greater use of newspapers by others in comparison to self. Hence, our last research question focused on whether the absence of a self-other difference for television and the presence of self-other
difference for newspapers, which was observed in the diary condition in Study 1, could be replicated in the control condition and the diary-with-manipulation condition in Study 2.

RQ3: Does the pattern of a self-other difference for television and newspaper use found in the diary condition in Study 1 persist in the control condition and diary-with-manipulation condition?

**STUDY 2**

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate Study 1 and to examine potential motivational biases framed as research questions in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. To address RQ2 and RQ3, which were not part of Study 1, two additional experimental conditions were added. First, a control condition was added in which participants did not perform any form of media use tracking in the week between the pre-test and post-test. Second, to examine potential motivational biases, a cover story was introduced as a manipulation to accentuate the desirability of newspaper use and the undesirability of television use. By emphasizing media desirability through an experimental manipulation, we hoped to prime motivational biases. Participants were randomized into one of three experimental conditions: no-diary control, diary, or diary with manipulation.

**Design and Participants**

Students were recruited from an introductory course in communication at a large, Midwestern university. A total of 93 undergraduate students (20.7% male and 79.3% female) participated in the study in return for extra credit. A 3x2 mixed design was used. The Diary Condition dimension included “Control,” “Diary,” and “Diary + Manipulation.” The Evaluation Target dimension included “Self” and “Other study participants.” Diary Condition was a between-subjects factor and evaluation target was a within-subject factor.

**Stimuli**

A media desirability questionnaire was designed to cue students that the researchers were interested in testing differences between newspaper and television use. Students were asked to rate their agreement on a 10-point scale to items such as “I watch too much television,” “College students who read newspapers on a regular basis get higher paying jobs when they graduate,” and “People who watch a lot of television are likely to be overweight.” The goal of this manipulation was to induce motivations to exaggerate newspaper use and downplay television use.
Procedure

Upon arrival, participants were assigned to one of the three experimental conditions and provided a computer. After informed consent, students completed retrospective cued recall of media use during the 7 days before the study. After completing the 7-day retrospective cued recall, participants in the no-diary condition were asked to return the following week.

The remaining participants were instructed that they were to maintain an online media diary everyday for the next week. Participants in the diary-with-manipulation condition were given the media manipulation questionnaire, and participants in the diary-only condition were given a distracter quiz. Then they were thanked for their participation and asked to return at the same time the following week. Participants in both diary conditions were sent three e-mails to reminding them to complete the online diaries. Seven days after the first visit, all participants returned to the lab to complete a retrospective cued recall of their media use during the previous 7 days. Using the same online cued recall forms, they were also asked to estimate the amount of media use by other participants in the study.

Results

First, we examined the whether the difference between diary reports and retrospective recall that was evident in Study 1 could be replicated in Study 2. Among participants who maintained a diary, reported use of television via a diary was higher ($M = 122.80, SD = 99.15$) than retrospective recall of television use ($M = 100.73, SD = 80.68$). For newspapers, the difference between the diary and retrospective recall was not significant. A significant gain in reported use via the diary for television and no corresponding gain in newspapers was a replication of findings from Study 1. See Table 4.

Next, to address RQ2, we examined whether the experimental manipulation had an effect. The purpose of the media manipulation was to examine whether participants would over-report newspaper use and under-report television use. Mean comparisons between the manipulation and no-manipulation diary conditions suggest that despite a trend in the right direction, the difference was not statistically significant. Diary reports of television use in the media manipulation condition ($M=89.41, SD=81.11$) were lower than reports of television use in the no-manipulation condition ($M=108.52, SD=77.97$), but were not statistically significant and the effect size was weak (Cohen’s $d=-0.24$). In contrast, diary reports of newspaper use in the manipulation condition ($M=4.50, SD=5.43$) was higher than in the no-manipulation ($M=2.96, SD=4.05$). This difference, too, was not significant and the effect was weak (Cohen’s $d=0.32$). In the absence of a significant effect of the media manipulation on diary reports, the data were pooled from the manipulation and no-manipulation arms of the study into a single diary condition. Subsequent analysis of the between-subject diary factor was based on comparisons between participants in the diary
condition and no-diary controls.

Having pooled the data from the control and manipulation conditions, the difference in retrospective recall between the diary and no-diary conditions was examined. See Table 4. For both television ($M_{\text{No-Diary}} = 69.69$, $M_{\text{Diary}} = 100.73$) and newspapers ($M_{\text{No-Diary}} = 1.96$, $M_{\text{Diary}} = 4.48$), retrospective cued recall of media use was higher in the diary condition than in the no-diary condition.

Finally, we examined self-other differences that were observed in Study 1. Using the retrospective recall of media use by self and others, RQ1 and RQ3 were addressed. See Table 5. After maintaining a diary for a week, when participants were asked to think back over the week and recall their own media use and provide projections of other study participants’ media use, there was no difference between self and others for television ($M_{\text{Self}} = 100.73$, $M_{\text{Others}} = 101.69$), but for newspapers, others were perceived to be heavier consumers than self ($M_{\text{Self}} = 4.40$, $M_{\text{Others}} = 10.63$). In summary, in the diary condition in Study 2, the pattern of self-other differences for television and newspaper were identical to what we observed in Study 1.
However, when these self-other differences were examined in the control condition, which was included in Study 2, the difference between self and others for television viewing ($M_{Self} = 69.70$, $M_{Others} = 94.40$) was tending toward significance ($p < .06$), which was in contrast to the null difference between the two in the diary condition ($M_{Self} = 100.73$, $M_{Others} = 101.69$).

For newspapers, the self-other pattern was comparable between the control and diary conditions. See Table 5. The presence of a self-other difference in television use in the control condition and the closing of the gap in the diary condition is an interesting finding, which is examined in the discussion.

In summary, the findings from Study 2 replicated the findings from Study 1 and provided some additional insights. First, television use reported through the diary was greater than television use reported through retrospective recall. Second, retrospective recall of television use after maintaining a media diary led to the closing of the self-other gap in media use in comparison to the control condition in which the self-other gap for television persisted. Third, to the extent that our manipulation was effective, the targeted motivational bias of over-reporting newspaper use and under-reporting television use was not statistically significant, though the effects were in the right direction. Finally, retrospective recall of media use after maintaining a diary resulted in higher estimates in comparison to retrospective recall among no-diary controls. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Assessments of media use are often obtained either through retrospective recall or
through a media diary. The findings from this study show that estimates obtained from these two methods are not always comparable. Estimates of use of electronic media, such as the television, Internet, and DVDs were significantly higher when assessed through an electronic diary than through retrospective recall. This finding is particularly telling because the retrospective recall task was performed by the participants after a week of maintaining the diary. It appears that looking back over the week, despite having completing the diary, the respondents were not able to capture all episodes that were recorded in the diary. In light of the heavy use of electronic or “screen” media, often under multitasking conditions, if media use estimates are desired and if the study design can accommodate a diary, it appears diary estimates are to be preferred than retrospective recall.

On average, on a typical day the students in our sample watched TV for 154 minutes, watched DVDs or movies for 48 minutes, and spent 94 minutes on the Internet. In total, on a typical day, including time spent on the Internet, students spent approximately five hours using electronic media. In stark contrast, use of print media, a combination of newspapers and magazines, was less than 10 minutes. These findings reinforce the popular notion that the current generation of youth rely heavily on electronic media for both entertainment and information and engage in minimal use of print-based newspapers and magazines.

Another applied finding that could be useful to media researchers is that cued recall assessment of television use offered estimates that were twice as high as free recall assessments. If the use of a media diary is not possible, then we recommend that cued is a better alternative than free recall. Particularly for television, with its wide range of programs and the multiple modes of consumption, including the Internet and DVDs, cueing can jog the memory. The effects of cueing were not significant for other media, except for a small difference for magazine use. In summary, in both studies, memory aids, namely cued recall and electronic diary seemed to make a significant difference in the reports of media use.

Next we examined various potential motivational biases in the reporting of television use. The increase in reports of television use via the diary was examined by inducing an experimental manipulation to under-report television use and over-report newspaper use. However, no significant differences were found between the manipulation condition and no-manipulation condition. A null finding in isolation cannot be used as empirical evidence of no difference. However, in light of the other significant findings, it appears that despite our efforts to induce a motivational bias, there was no difference in the report of media use between the diary group and the diary-with-manipulation group.

Another contribution of this study was the use of self-other assessments as a proxy indicator of potential motivation bias. We had argued that the difference between individual use of media and perceived use by others could provide diagnostic information of potential self-presentation biases. The results indicate that when asked to evaluate time spent watching television in control condition, without the benefit of diary self-reports, the response from students was that others in the study watched approximately 50% more television than themselves. However, when the students were given the same task after a week of
Demand Characteristics and Biases in Self-Reports of Media Use

Prabu David, Mihye Seo and Tom German

maintaining the diary, there was no gap between self and others on television use. However, after the week, others were perceived to be heavier users of the newspaper than self. It appears that diary maintenance did not lead participants to present themselves as unique and deviant from the social norm. To the contrary, maintaining the diary seemed to have increased self-realization that one is not different from other participants when it comes to watching television.

In summary, two attempts were made to elicit motivational bias, one an experimental manipulation and the other a potential self-serving bias in form of a perceived difference in media use between self and others. While the manipulation did not induce and changes in media use estimates, the maintenance of a media diary closed the gap in perceived use of television by self and others, suggesting that self-other biases may be eliminated by careful monitoring of media use through a diary. Taking all the findings together, it can be said that while the media diary and cued recall yield higher estimates of media, these estimates do not appear to be influenced by motivational biases. These findings corroborate results reported by Prior (forthcoming), which suggest that the over-reporting of news exposure seem to be associated with the cognitive challenge of recalling and estimating media use behaviors, rather than a social desirability bias.

This study is not without limitations. As mentioned already, the motivational manipulation to induce over-reporting of newspaper use and under-reporting of television use was not statistically significant. For a vast majority of university students, print newspapers are a thing of the past. With convergence of media and the emergence of cable news channels on television, perhaps the delineation between newspapers and television that we attempted to draw did not seem to resonate. A stronger and cleaner motivational manipulation, perhaps with a differentiation between entertainment and information is a topic for future research.

One the issues that was not addressed in depth in this paper is Internet use, which appears to be a promising area for future research. The media diet of today’s youth includes video games, music, radio, podcasts and the like. Given the seamless integration of media through convergence, numerous challenges lie ahead for the media researcher interested in a rich and rigorous assessment of media use. More challenging is the distinction between information and entertainment use especially on the Internet platform, where entertainment, information and communication coalesce into one whole. Some of these challenges are being addressed by media researchers, though more research is needed. Finally, although we used an Internet-based electronic media diary, our participants were not provided a handheld device that they could use at any moment to capture media use. Our participants had to find a computer to enter data, which is a limitation. The use of mobile electronic diaries could be a fruitful direction for future study as well.

Measurement of media use is critical to media researchers who routinely include media use as an independent variable or a control variable. Yet, potential cognitive and motivational biases associated with self-reports of media use have not been examined
thoroughly. In this study, we examined cognitive bias, acquiescence bias, motivational bias, and a self-serving bias (through self-other differences). None of these biases were exacerbated with the use of a media diary. In fact, the findings offer promise that the use of a media diary reduces cognitive and self-other biases.

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Para-Romantic Love and Para-Friendships: Development and Assessment of a Multiple Parasocial Relationships Scale

Riva Tuchakinsky

Parasocial-relationships (PSR) are viewers’ imaginary relationships with media personae. Despite the growing body of research on PSR, the field is still lacking a clear conceptualization and precise measure of this phenomenon. The present study suggests a novel theorization of PSR as para-friendship and para-love. Study 1 demonstrates construct validity of a new Multiple-PSR scale using the logic of a multi-trait multi-method approach. Study 2 replicates the factorial solution using confirmatory factor analysis. Finally, Study 3 provides evidence for the criterion validity of the scales. Together, these findings suggest that PSR encompass several types of relationships that might mediate different media effects.

Keywords: parasocial relationships, entertainment, media psychology, measurement, media involvement

Since the early days of television, viewers have reported emotional bonding with media personae (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These parasocial interactions (PSI) were originally defined as quasi-social interactions that span the duration of the viewing experience (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This conceptualization was subsequently expanded to include long-term relationships formed between viewers and media figures (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). In accordance with this later view, parasocial relationships (PSR) are the experience of friendliness, companionship (Levi, 1979), and “affective participant involvement” (Rubin

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Media personae are thereby perceived by the viewers’ as friends and as a part of the viewers’ own social world (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). PSR involve strong emotional responses (e.g., Levy, 1979), and when a television show is terminated, viewers may experience a sense of loss similar to that found in real life breakups (Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

PSR have become an established area of media research. Numerous theoretical and empirical efforts have been implemented to explain the fundamental nature of PSR. In particular, research has focused on identifying the factors that prompt the occurrence of PSR (e.g., Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Greenwood, 2008; Hoffner, 1996; Perse, 1990), the contribution of PSR to viewers’ gratifications from media use (Bartsch, Mangold, Viehoff, & Vorderer, 2006; Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006) and PSR as mediators of various media effects (Brown & Cody, 1991; Derrick, Gabriel & Tippin, 2008; Hoffner & Cohen, 2009; Papa, et al., 2000).

Despite the fact that PSR studies have a long history, the term PSR has not been articulated in way that fully reflects the nuanced nature of this phenomenon (Giles, 2002). This paper aims to reconceptualize PSR as an interrelated set of unique, qualitatively different, viewer-characters relationships. Specifically, the present study will focus on conceptualizing and developing measures of two types of parasocial relationships — parasocial love and parasocial friendship.

**PSR AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Following the uses and gratifications tradition, PSR were hypothesized to serve as compensation for viewers’ unsatisfied social needs. Contrary to this assertion, studies have shown that PSR are not related to deficits in social interactions (e.g., Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001; Rubin et al., 1985); instead, PSR are generally associated with seeking affiliation from others (Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999). In much the same way that social relationships grow, PSR involve the development of elaborated characters’ schemas (Perse & Rubin, 1989) and entail social attraction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). In addition, many essential characteristics of real relationship breakups apply to parasocial relationships and to viewers’ experience of loss when their favorite characters go off the air (e.g., Eyal & Cohen, 2006). In light of these findings, PSR were re-conceptualized as an extension of, rather than a substitution for, real life interactions.

Simply said, PSR are social relationships that are manifested in a mediated context (Giles, 2002). As such, both “real” and parasocial relationships employ the same social skills and draw upon similar psychological mechanisms. The comparisons commonly drawn between PSR and social relationships are lacking, however, since no published attempts have yet been made to identify concrete parallels between PSR and specific types of social relationships. Social relationships encompass a wide spectrum of different types of associations that range from mere acquaintance to love. Hence, it is reasonable to assume
that PSR is a generic term spanning a wide range of relationships that encompass distinct PSR such as parasocial love and friendship.

Consider the following example: the popular website YouTube, allows companies and individuals to upload short videos and to comment on them. One such video includes a segment of an episode from the television hospital drama *House*. In this scene, the main character, Dr. House (Hugh Laurie), kisses Cuddy (Lisa Edelstein). The comments posted by some of the viewers suggest that these individuals are sexually and romantically attracted to the actor and to the character he plays. For example, one of these viewers commented: “I’m 15, and I think he’s the sexiest guy alive, charming, sarcastic, classy, and a doctor!” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvopC9H5vJ4). Some viewers even seemed to be jealous in the face of a fictional romantic relationship that the character has experienced on screen: “O.M.G why im not Cuddy?????? i wanna be cuddy!!!! how can i be cuddy?? why i don’t have House in front of me???”

Compare these descriptions to those of viewers who instead feel companionship and non-sexual affection towards the same character. Such viewers think of House as someone trustworthy, a person to whom they would ask for advice, or with whom they might share their personal concerns. The nature of this latter relationship could be viewed as a parasocial equivalent to friendship. Such viewers might also wish to provide the character with emotional support and companionship. Take, for example, a comment posted on the same website, following a video depicting House’s emotional distress: “[...] I nearly cried for House...especially at 1:50 when his eyes were all red from crying and he looked so sad. [...] bless him!” (http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=gLD006xv6Y&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DgLD006xv6Y%26feature%3Drelated)

To summarize, it is argued here that in the same way that it is impossible to speak of social relationships as a single, homogeneous phenomenon, the definition and conceptual assessment of PSR should account for the various types of parasocial experiences. The people noted in the examples above engage in qualitatively different parasocial relationships (friendship versus romantic love). Unfortunately, existing conceptualizations and measures of PSR do not distinguish between these types; instead they examine only the intensity but not the intrinsic nature of PSR.

**Existing Measures and Conceptualizations of PSR**

Most of the existing definitions and measures of PSR ignore the multi-faced nature of these relationships. The PSR scale was originally designed to assess viewers’ relationships with news-casters (Levy, 1979). Although the scale was later extended and applied to fiction genres (e.g., Rubin & Perse 1987), the adjustments made in the scale were, perhaps, not sufficient to capture the diversity of PSR in other contexts. More recently, several attempts have been made to create multidimensional PSR scales (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Sood, 2002). However, while these efforts have improved our understanding of the components
within PSR, they have continued to overlook the potential differences between different types of parasocial relationships.

Currently, the most commonly used PSR scale is the Parasocial Interaction Scale created by Rubin et al. (1985). Unfortunately, the items included in the scale capture theoretical constructs other than PSR, such as perceived realism, affinity, and identification. Approximately one half of the items directly address the core components of PSR such as viewers’ feelings towards the character and their interactions (e.g., “I think of my favorite newscaster like an old friend”). Thus, although the scale statistically converges into a single latent variable, the face validity of the scale remains in question.

In sum, it seems that despite the well established correspondence between social and parasocial relations, past research did not fully elaborate parallels between specific types of PSR and different social relationships. As noted above, PSR may vary not only in their intensity but also in their quality. Similar to real life relationships, PSR can range from a mere acquaintance to friendship or love. It is suggested here that it is critical to make a theoretical distinction between qualitatively unique PSR that parallel distinct social relationships.

**PSR as Multiple Relationships**

Social relationships are dynamic processes that transform over time as a result of ongoing interactions. The term friendship itself encompasses a wide range of relations that vary in their degree of intensity and expression (Hinde, 1997; Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994). However, according to most scholarly definitions, friendship lacks (or does not necessarily include) sexual elements (Hinde, 1997). Accordingly, friendship represents a mutual, reciprocal relationship founded upon understanding, trust, intimacy, and responsibility (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994) as well as support and self-disclosure (Hays, 1984).

In a parasocial context, friendship can be conceptualized as liking the character, feeling solidarity with and trust in the media figure, and desiring self-disclosure and communication with him or her. For instance, parasocial friendship could be used to characterize viewers’ bond with the female characters in soap operas: “After a while the characters do become real people, and we are concerned for their well being just as we are concerned for our friends and colleagues” (Livingstone, 1988, p. 70). Similarly, one of the viewers of The Cosby Show referred to Cliff Huxtable by saying, “he is so likable, and I get the feeling if he were your neighbor or your relative you’d love to see him come in.” (Jhally & Lewis, 1992, p. 37).

However, PSR can also correspond to romantic relationships. The boundaries between love and friendship are often blurred (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993). Like friendship, love is based on intimacy, trust and disclosure. The difference between love and friendship parallels the difference between liking and love (where love involves a strong desire to be in the
other’s presence, longing for physical closeness and need for approval and care [Rubin, 1973]). Similar to friendship, love is not a homogeneous phenomenon. In fact, love encompasses various different types of relationships such as maternal love and platonic love (Fehr, 1994). To limit the scope of the current discussion, this paper will focus upon romantic love, which, as most scholars agree, is strongly driven by sexual attraction and its accompanied intense emotions (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1990; Marston et al., 1987; Sterenberg, 1986).

It seems that a parasocial version of romantic love is an integral part of the contemporary popular culture with a long history dated back to “crushes” on media stars such as Elvis Presley (Fraser & Brown, 2002) and Greta Garbo (Blumer, 1933). For instance, during WWII, soldiers sent love letters to Donna Reed and decorated them with sketches of broken hearts (Rother, 2009). Many recent studies have documented similar parasocial romantic behaviors among female adolescents (Karniol, 2001; Raviv, Bar-Tal & Ben-Horin, 1995; Steele & Brown, 1995).

Romantic and sexual bonds between the viewers and media figures can take less extreme forms and be targeted towards fictional characters, not only the performers. For instance, one of Livingstone’s interviewees described her motivation to view her favorite soap opera by saying that “They always have someone good looking who you can fancy and wish you could go out with” (Livingstone, 1988, p. 72). Similarly, some viewers of Sex and the City report not only engaging in friendship-like relationships with the female protagonists in the series but also developing some quasi-romantic relationships with the male characters (Tukachinsky, 2008).

THE NEED FOR RECONCEPTUALIZATION

PSR have increasingly become the focus of media research and are theorized to play a central role in media gratifications (e.g., Bartsch, et al., 2006) and effects (e.g., Brown & Fraser, 2004). However, despite the need for a fundamental understanding of the emotional experiences that PSR entail, PSR are typically studied and conceptualized in a very narrow manner that seems to overlook the richness and multiplicity embedded in the phenomenon. In fact, it is possible for different types of parasocial relationships to be driven by different theoretical mechanisms and, subsequently, to lead to distinct effects.

To illustrate, Klimmt et al. (2006) review conflicting evidence regarding possible changes in levels of PSR across the life span. While some studies have documented higher PSR in middle-age viewers, other studies have found that adolescents report the highest PSR. Differentiation among various kinds of PSR could, potentially, resolve this inconsistency if different kinds of PSR are more or less prominent within different age-groups. For example, past studies have shown that adolescents can “fall in love” with media figures as part of their transition into sexuality and as a means of defining their sexual identity (e.g., Karniol, 2001; Raviv et al., 1995). Due to the psychological needs typical to this developmental stage, it is
possible to assume that, on average, adolescents will report higher PSL but not higher PSF than adults.

Furthermore, different PSR can mediate different media effects. As in real-life interactions, distinct models can be relevant for modeling different behaviors. Thus, it is possible that violence or pro-social behaviors are promoted by the PSR equivalent of friendship, whereas cultivation of romantic expectations will occur through parasocial romance. Thus, differentiation between various kinds of PSR will enhance the validity of the PSR measure, improve our theoretical understanding PSR as mediators of effects, and increase the total amount of variance explained by PSR.

The present study aims to provide a richer and a more differentiated view of the distinct types of PSR that viewers develop with media figures, thereby elucidating the diversity and complexity of media involvement as well as the role media plays in viewers’ lives. More specifically, the present study examines parasocial love and parasocial friendship as two, distinct facets of PSR. Parasocial friendship was chosen as a core form of PSR, given the long-standing view of PSR as quasi-friendship (e.g., Rubin et al., 1985). This kind of PSR is distinguished in this paper from parasocial love, because of their high prevalence in society, as was discussed in the previous sections (e.g., Karniol, 2001).

A multiple-PSR scale is developed and validated in a series of three studies. In Study 1, a multiple-PSR scale was created using a number of sources that well establish the face validity of the scale. Initially, items were formulated based on a qualitative analysis of television viewers’ reports of their experiences in PSR and existing measures of friendship and romantic love. Next, the construct validity of the new PSR scale was assessed based on the logic of a multi-trait multi-method approach. Then, Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, Study 3 provided substantial evidence for the criterion validity of the scales by employing a quasi-experimental approach to manipulate various dimensions of PSR.

**STUDY 1: SCALE CONSTRUCTION AND EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Study 1 describes the construction of a new PSR scale. Items utilized in the scale were adapted from measures of real-life relationships such that they reflect the PSR experiences as described in the pilot study.

**Qualitative Pilot Study**

The pilot study was conducted as a means for assessing the content validity of the new measure developed in Study 1. The pilot study ensures that the items in the questionnaire properly reflect the ways in which individuals discuss and experience PSR. Responses to the
open-ended pilot study were used to choose statements for the Multiple-PSR questionnaire. Seven students at a large public university wrote a brief essay describing their PSR with a character of their choice. Participants were prompted to choose characters with whom they engage in PSR. Cohen and Perse (2003) demonstrated that such instructions for choosing a character indeed helped respondents pick characters with which they formed PSR rather than other forms of relationships such as identification. Respondents were asked to describe several elements of the relationship including their feelings toward the character, the ways in which they would like to interact with the character, and the type of relationship they would want to develop with the character.

Responses to these open ended questions were qualitatively analyzed by identifying repeating themes that were then clustered into categories. The themes repeated in the essays included a sense of friendship (e.g., “like a friend,” “would want to be a friend of his”), communication (e.g., “share things,” “talk about stuff”), and physical attraction (e.g., “sexy,” “hot”). These same themes are reflected in items from measures used to assess real life romantic love and friendship (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; McCroskey & McCain, 1974).

In addition to these embedded themes, another category emerged from the analysis. Two of the participants referred to their favorite character as possessing characteristics of a model (“I would like to ask for an advice” and “I imagine what he would do in the same situation”). Since these comments did not overlap with items found in the existing scales, they were added to the questionnaire to fully reflect mentoring aspects of PSR not represented by existing social-relationships measures. Table 1 presents the final pool of items.

**Sample and Procedure**

A preliminary, paper and pencil, multiple-PSR questionnaire was distributed among 90 college students at a major public university (61% females, 68% Whites [the rest identified themselves as Latino], mean age 21.78 years, *SD*=1.33). These students were asked to complete a questionnaire pertaining to interpersonal relationships and television viewing experience.

Each participant was asked to choose two media figures—a figure he or she has a parasocial friendship with and a figure that he or she is parasocially in love with. This choice was made based on the results of the qualitative pilot study that revealed a friendship-like and a pseudo-romantic relationship between the viewers and their favorite characters. In order to prompt participants to choose such media figures, the original Cohen and Perse (2003) instructions for picking a character were slightly altered. Participants were asked to fill out the same Multiple-PSR and the classic PSR scales for a character they “feel affinity towards” (para-friendship) and a character they are “attracted to and in love with” (para-love).
Table 1

Factor loadings of a four-factor solution of EFA (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I could have disclosed negative things about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myself honestly and deeply to him/her</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I could have disclosed a great deal of</td>
<td>.829</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things about myself to X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes, I wish I knew what X would do in my situation</td>
<td>.746</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I could have disclosed positive things</td>
<td>.579</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about myself honestly and deeply to him/her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes, I wish I could ask X for advice</td>
<td>.504</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think X could be a friend of mine</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find X very attractive physically</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>-.032</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think X is quite handsome/pretty</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>-.380</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X is very sexy looking</td>
<td>-.133</td>
<td>-.328</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X fits my ideal standards of physical beauty/handsomeness</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>-.746</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want X physically, emotionally, and mentally</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>-.235</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>-.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me, X could be the perfect romantic partner</td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>-.355</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I think that X and I are just meant for each other</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td>.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish X could know my thoughts, my fears, and my hopes</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X influences my mood</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>-.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I admire X</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>-.281</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>-.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I idealize X</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I would be able to count on X in time of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I would give him/her emotional support</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, he/she would be able to count on me in</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time of need</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I would share my possessions with him/her</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I could trust him/her completely</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If X was a real person, I could have a warm relationship with him/her</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>-.164</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to promote the well-being of X</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instrument

Preliminary Multiple PSR Scale. The preliminary scale included 24 items based on existing measures of personal attraction, closeness, companionship, trust, solidarity and romantic love (Berscheid, Snyder & Omoto 1989; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; McCroskey & McCain, 1974; Sternberg, 1997; Wheeless, 1978). These items were adjusted so that they could be used in reference to media figures. For example some statements were changed to start with a qualifier “If X was a real person.” Table 1 presents the items for the preliminary scale.
Classic PSR. Participants were asked to respond to a short (10-item) version of A. Rubin et al.’s (1985) PSI scale with regard to each of the two characters they have chosen (i.e., the “in-love” [Cronbach’s $\alpha=.81$] and “friend-like” characters [Cronbach’s $\alpha=.85$]).

Real-Life Friendship and Love. To assess convergent and discriminant validity, participants were asked about their real-life relationships. Respondents replayed to a set of 11 questions about their best friend (e.g., “I want to promote the well-being of my best friend,” $\alpha=.79$).

Most (75%) participants indicated that they were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study. These individuals were requested to answer additional 11 questions about their current romantic partner (e.g., “I adore my romantic partner,” $\alpha=.95$). A principal components factor analysis (PCA) revealed only one underlying factor for each of the scales (with factor loadings of over .80 for the friendship scale and over .40 for the love scale).

Control Variables. The questionnaire also included questions about the character’s sex, the name of the program in which the character appeared, how long the respondent had been watching the show, and the viewer’s sex, age and ethnicity.

Results: General Description of the Characters

The majority (59.3%) of the loved-characters and less than a half (43.2%) of the friend-characters were male media figures. Only 39.1% of the friend characters but 85.5% of the loved characters were of the opposite gender of the respondent’s gender. On average, respondents had been watching the show starring the media figure for a few years (33.65 months [$SD=30.70$] for loved characters and 42.45 months [$SD=35.50$] for friend-characters).

Although they were not prompted to choose a fictitious character or a “real” person, all but three participants chose fictional characters from television dramatic-comic series (e.g., Sex in the City, Gossip Girls) or suspense (e.g., Lost). The only exceptions were the choice of Oprah Winfrey and Erin Andrews from ESPN. In one instance, one of the respondents referred to a fictional character but nominated the actors who played them: Sarah Jessica Parker from Sex and the City and Steve Carell from The Office (rather than to the characters they portray: Carrie Bradshaw and Evan Baxter, respectively).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the factorial structure (i.e., subscales) of the new measure by assessing the statistical relationships between the items. In a preliminary analysis, all 24 items were factor-analyzed using ML estimation. Five
factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. Based on the analysis of the scree plot and interpretation of the factor loadings in a preliminary EFA, the analysis was repeated with a four-factorial solution constraint. Oblique Direct Oblimin rotation was used based on the assumption that the different aspects of relationships with characters will be likely to correlate with each other. The final solution (Table 1) resulted in a well defined, four-factorial solution without any cross-loading items. These factors are consistent with theoretical aspects of the measured constructs.

The analysis correctly discriminated between PSL and PSF. Furthermore, the EFA extracted four factors, two of which included items from the PSL scale and two factors with PSF items. The first friendship factor was focused on the theme of communication (disclosure and advice seeking), but it also included the item “If X was a real person, he/she could be a good friend of mine.” This finding is consistent with existing literature on real life friendships that suggests that friendships in adulthood are defined by communication and disclosure (Hays, 1984). The second friendship factor reflected the theme of support and companionship (trust, sharing and mutual help). Similarly, PSL was divided into two factors: physical attraction and a strong emotional response to the character (e.g., admiration, mood change).

High correlations emerged between the two friendships factors (.44) and the two components of PSL (.37). These correlations were higher than the correlations between PSF-support and PSL factors (.28 and .25). PSF communication had a low correlation with physical love (.19) but a high correlation with emotional love (.40). Based on the results of the EFA, the items were combined into four scales that have shown high internal consistency: Cronbach’s alpha was .89 for PSF support, .86 for PSF communication, .84 for PSL emotional, and .92 for PSL physical.

**Construct Validation of the PSL and PSF Scales**

To assess the construct validity of the PSL and PSF measures, the scores on both scales for loved and friend-like characters were compared. It was assumed that individuals would report higher PSL with characters that they are “in-love with” than with friends-characters and vice versa. The PSR scores were also compared for the two types of characters in order to determine the extent to which the new scales better discriminate between the two types of characters.

As can be seen from Table 2, in line with expectations, respondents reported significantly higher PSL with loved characters than with friend characters. However, no significant differences were noted between PSF with friend and loved characters. Similarly, PSR levels were similar for both types of characters.
Tests for Convergent/Discriminate Validity of PSL and PSF

Next, the PSR scale was correlated with PSL and PSF scales for loved and friend characters. It was expected that to show a good convergent/discriminant validity, the PSR scale would be more highly correlated with PSF for friend-characters than for loved characters, but it would be more strongly correlated with PSL for loved characters.

As predicted, PSL scales correlated more highly with PSR with loved characters (physical $r=.48$ and emotional $r=.45$) than with PSR with friend characters (physical $r=.21$ and emotional $r=.30$) ($t(87)=3.52, p<.001$ and $t(87)=1.89, p<.05$). Similarly, PSF scales were more strongly correlated with PSR with friend character (support $r=.61$ and communication $r=.58$) than with PSR with loved characters (support $r=.43$ and communication $r=.45$) ($t(87)=-2.39, p<.01$ and $t(87)=-1.80, p<.10$ respectively).

Additional evidence of convergent and discriminant validity emerged from correlations between PSL and PSF with love and friendship in reality, since PSR are considered an extension of real life relationships. PSL scales were more strongly (but not significantly so) correlated with love than with friendship (physical: $r=.29$, $p<.01$ versus $r=.22$, $p<.01$; emotional: $r=.09$ versus $r=.05$). PSF scales were more strongly (but not significantly so) correlated with real life friendship than with real life love (communication: $r=.18$, $p<.05$ versus $r=.33$, $p<.001$; support: $r=.25$, $p<.001$ versus $r=.26$, $p<.01$). Though the differences between the correlations were in the expected direction, none of the differences between the correlations was statistically significant.

**Discussion**

The findings from Study 1 demonstrate that the new scales, in fact, capture two different kinds of relationships with characters. Although correlated, these two concepts are different from each other, and capture something other than PSR. Differences in levels of PSF were not discriminative of the character type (Table 2). However, this scale did exhibit...
convergent validity when correlated with PSR for the two types of characters. To validate the scale constructed in Study 2, a CFA on a separate sample was conducted. Replication of these results is especially important, given the small sample size (N<100) used in this study.

**STUDY 2: VALIDATION OF THE MULTIPLE-PSR SCALE**

Study 2 replicates and extends the findings of Study 1. The methodological differences between the two studies were chosen to test the robustness of the earlier findings. First, the factorial structure in Study 1 was determined using exploratory methods. In EFA, the solution is data driven and, thus, should be replicated using subsequent confirmatory factor analysis. Second, in Study 1, participants were explicitly prompted to choose media figures with whom they “feel like friends with” and with whom they are “in-love” and are attracted to. Therefore, one could argue that the factorial structure that was extracted in Study 1 is an artifact of the instructions given to the participants. In Study 2, participants were asked to choose only one (their favorite) media figure. By replicating the findings of Study 1 using different targets of PSR, Study 2 demonstrates that PSL and PSF are two separate concepts, and it is possible to determine for a given character, whether the PSR are predominantly PSL or PSF driven.

**Sample and Instrumentation**

Participants in Study 3 were 93 undergraduate students in a major public university. The students were asked to participate in an online survey on television viewing experience for course credit. The majority (68%) of the participants was female and 75% were White and the remaining were Latinos, with the exception of two American-Asian participants. The mean age was 21.88 years (SD=2.70).

Participants were free to choose a media figure that they like, feel an emotional bond with or are attracted to. Participants were asked to fill out a set of questions about the character, including the character’s gender, the genre of the show in which the character appears and the duration for which the participant had been watching the show. Finally, participants answered the PSL, PSF and PSR questionnaires as in Study 1.

**Results**

The majority of the characters that were chosen by the respondents appeared in drama (33.3%) and comedy (37.6%) television series and the remaining characters were chosen from action/adventure series, reality shows and soap operas. Although there were no specific instructions to choose fictional characters, only two of targets were real (Heidi Klum from *Project Runaway* and Lauren Conrad from *The Hills*). One of the participants used the name
of the actor (Jennifer Aniston in Friends) instead of the character’s name (Rachel Green).
With these two exceptions, all other participants nominated fictional characters. Thus, it is not possible to meaningfully compare within Study 1 and Study 2 the levels of PSF and PSL to “real” people and fictional characters. On average, participants in the study had been watching the character for over two years ($M=2.14$, $SD=2.33$).

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

To validate results obtained in Study 2, the factorial structure of PSL and PSF was modeled using the AMOS 16.0 software package. The means, standard deviations and correlations between the scales are reported in Table 3. The loadings of the items on the factors were high (ranging between .67 and .99) and significant at $p<.001$. The subscales loaded well on the super ordinate factors: physical love loaded with .77 ($p<.001$) and emotional love loaded with .99 ($p<.001$) on the PSL factor. The communication scale had a loading of .95 ($p<.001$) and the support scale had a loading of .98 ($p<.001$) on the PSF second order factor. The model fit was relatively low ($\chi^2(247)=712.5$, CFI=.81, $R^2_{MSEA}<.15$), perhaps due to a small sample size ($N<200$).

Modification indices did not indicate any changes that could significantly improve model fit, suggesting that the sub-scales in the current model were properly specified. To test the sub-factorial structure, an alternative nested model was tested. The loadings of the sub factors (support, communication, physical and emotional attraction) on the first order factors (PSL and PSF) were constrained to 1.0, testing the hypothesis that the factorial structure includes only two (and not four) factors. The nested model showed a detrimental change in model fit ($\chi^2(249)=718.1$). The change in model fit was significant ($p=.05$), indicating that the hypothesized four-factorial solution fit the data significantly better than the alternative model.

**Psychometric Properties of the Scales**

On this occasion, participants chose only one (not two, as in the previous study) characters. For each character, PSL (physical and emotional) and PSF (support and communication) scales were computed. Cronbach’s alpha was high for all scales: .79 for PSF communication, .95 for support, .90 for emotional PSL, .93 for physical PSL and .80 for PSR.

**STUDY 3: CRITERION VALIDITY OF THE MULTIPLE-PSR SCALE**

The third study replicates and extends the findings from Study 1 and Study 2. Once again, to expand the validity of the scale and to demonstrate its applicability to different
Table 3

Means, standard deviations and correlations between PSR, PSL and PSF scales (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PSF comm.</th>
<th>PSF support</th>
<th>PSL physical</th>
<th>PSL emotional</th>
<th>PSR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSF communication</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.82**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSF support</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSL physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSL emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.83**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001

contexts, different targets of PSR were used. In the first two studies, participants responded to the items while referring to fictional characters (rather than to actors) of their choice. In Study 3, with the scale was used to assess PSL and PSF with media celebrities (e.g., Tom Cruise). Past theorizations suggested that viewers can form PSR with both real and non-real targets (Giles, 2002) and that PSR with celebrities are a precursor to audience’s later engagement with the characters they portray (Brown & Fraser, 2004). Thus, it is meaningful to examine the PSL and PSF scales in both contexts. Although a comparison of the intensity of PSL and PSF with different targets is an intriguing question, the data in the current study do not allow such a comparison, though this avenue could be further investigated in future research.

The primary goal of Study 3 was to validate the new scales using a quasi-experimental procedure. The rationale for the study was that if PSL and PSF scales indeed tap into different theoretical constructs, it would be possible to manipulate one of them without affecting the other. Because friendship is based on interpersonal attraction and liking, the similarity-based hypothesis may suggest that individuals will be more likely to experience PSF with members of one’s gender (since gender is a very salient dimension of comparison). On the other hand, since romantic love involves sexual attraction, it is reasonable to assume that for heterosexual viewers, PSL will be greater with characters of the opposite sex. Thus, in this study, participants were asked to report their PSL and PSF with regard to one female and one male media persona.
Piloting and Materials

Media figures were chosen on the basis of an open-ended pilot survey of a separate sample (N=22) of undergraduate students. Participants were asked to list the names of media figures that they like or read about in magazines. A total of 14 different names of celebrities were obtained. The three names that were repeated by most participants were Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston (each was nominated over 15 times). The next two names Johnny Depp (six nominations) and Tom Cruise (nine nominations), were also included in the study. High-resolution portraits of these five media figures were used as the experimental stimuli.

Sample and Procedure

Sixty-four undergraduate college students participated in the study. The majority (77%) were White (the rest were Latinos), with a mean age 21.61 years, (SD=.94). Due to the characteristics of the student population, only 15 (23%) of the participants were male.

Participants were given a link to a survey website. By clicking on the link, subjects were randomly referred to one of six versions of the questionnaire. In each version of the questionnaire participants were asked to answer questions about two media figures, one who was male and one female (e.g., the questionnaire referred to Jennifer Aniston and Tom Cruise or to Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie). The order in which the media persona were presented was counterbalanced. A picture of one of the media figure appeared on the screen and the participants were asked to type in the name of the person on the picture. Then, respondents were asked to fill out the PSL, PSF and PSR measures and move to the next page that included the second media figure. The questionnaires were similar to those used in Study 1 and Study 2, with the exception of a slight change in the wording of items that had previously begun with “If X was real.” Since, in Study 3, the items referred to real individuals and not to fictional characters, this preface was omitted. Once the questions on a page had been answered, it was impossible for the participants to return to an earlier page. All respondents were able to correctly identify all the celebrities.

Results

The multiple PSR scales showed high internal consistency comparable for same-sex and cross-sex media figures. Cronbach’s alpha for all PSL and PSF scales and for PSR varied between .81 and .95 both for men and women respondents. A series of paired samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there were differences in levels of PSF, PSL and PSR with media figures of opposite and of the same sex. Consistent with the hypothesis, individuals reported higher PSF with same-sex media persona (men respondents with male actors and female respondents with female actors) than with cross-sex actor (Table 4).
Results for PSF support trended in the predicted direction.

Similarly, consistent with the predictions, PSL, both physical and emotional, was greater for cross-sex rather than same-sex actors. While the new Multiple PSR scales (PSL and PSF) successfully discriminated between same and cross gender relationships, A. Rubin’s scale failed to do so. As predicted, no significant differences in PSR levels were found.

**Discussion**

Study 3 provided additional validation of the PSL and PSF scales. As predicted, PSL was stronger for cross-sex relationships, whereas PSF was stronger for same-sex relationships. This suggests that equal strength of PSR could be driven by different components (PSL vs. PSR) depending on the gender of the target. Since PSR levels are not distinguishably different for both characters, it is less informative than PSL and PSF scales. These findings once again validate the Multiple PSR scale and illuminate its advantage over A. Rubin et al.’s (1985) PSI measure.
GENERAL DISCUSSION

It is well established that media consumers form meaningful relationships with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, the nature of these relationships has not previously been clearly specified and demands further theoretical development (Giles, 2002). The present series of studies aimed to reconceptualize PSR as a set of multiple relationships that parallel the myriad of relationships that individuals can form in real life situations. Although, perhaps, there are many kinds of such relationships, the present study has focused on two of them, namely, parasocial friendship and parasocial romantic love. Three studies have created theoretically sound and empirically based PSL and PSF scales. Although the studies involve a small number of participants, the results across all three studies consistently indicate that the more differentiated approach argued here represents a substantial enhancement of the theory of PSR.

Newly developed scales were validated using construct, criterion and face validity, based upon various recruitment techniques and different target media figures, including both fictional characters (Study 1 and 2) and actors (Study 3). Taken together, these findings suggest that PSR is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be fully captured by using A. Rubin’s et al. (1985) scale. A more nuanced examination of PSR types should instead be employed when exploring the causes and consequences of PSR.

New Questions about the Course of Development and Precursors of PSR

Reporting both PSL and PSF can provide a more differentiated and reliable understanding of PSR and foster a host of new theoretical and empirical questions. Recently, PSR were conceptualized as a dynamic process evolving from initial impression formation to the establishment of deep relationships (Eder, 2006; Klimmt et al., 2006). Viewers’ schemas, knowledge and motivations and the character’s behaviors and characteristics can foster the growth of PSR. Through repeated exposure to the media persona, viewers become attracted to characters (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) and develop complex cognitive character schemas (Perse & Rubin, 1989), which can shape viewers’ affective dispositions. Such affective dispositions, in turn, limit viewers’ evaluative change as the plot unfolds (Renay, 2004). Viewers selectively process incoming character information in line with their existing affective disposition by being more tolerant of the character’s negative actions or dismissing the character’s positive behaviors. Reconceptualization of PSR as multiple kinds of relationships poses an interesting question as to how do these relationships differ in terms of their development.

First, the current study found that PSL has a strong physical attraction component. Thus, perhaps, affective dispositions are formed faster in PSL than in PSF, as the later require a slowly evolving psychological closeness with the character (Perse & Rubin, 1989). If so, in comparison to PSF, PSL may be less affected by the moral judgments of subsequent
character’s actions. Second, PSL and PSF are likely to be based on different relational schemas. As viewers watch the narrative they create mental representations of the characters and the plot as a function of activation of different mental models (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Yang & Lee, 2002). Thus, employing different relational schemas can lead viewers to creation of different mental representations and comprehension of the characters and narratives.

Apart from exploration of the development of PSR, separation between PSL and PSF calls for exploration of the different predictors of the two kinds of relationships. For instance, it is possible that people in different cultures are more prone to engage in some relationships but not in others. For instance, Giles (2002) noted the difference between Germans’ and Americans’ conceptualization of television characters as friends versus neighbors. It is interesting to examine the ways in which people from different cultures categorize, organize, interpret and construct their relationships as well as the ways in which these cultural differences might map on the differences in their PSR styles.

Furthermore, based on previous research (Koenig & Lessan, 1985), different genres, media content and media personae may be likely to prompt different types of parasocial relationships. Thus, different characters’ characteristics may have different significance for the development of different types of PSR. For example, the current study suggests that physical attraction is an important component of PSL, whereas Rubin and McHugh (1987) found that physical attraction does not predict general PSR in general. It is possible that attractiveness plays a more dominant role in PSL, whereas PSF can be more driven by perceived similarity.

**Potential Contribution to Media Effects and Uses and Gratifications Research**

An additional venue for future research is the illumination of different sources of viewers’ enjoyment from and affinity with television. It is quite possible that different parasocial ties satisfy different psychological needs and are related to enjoyment of different television programming. PSL could provide the audience with safe romantic experiences that prepare them for future romantic involvement (e.g., Karniol, 2001). Conversely, PSF may be a source of self-exploration and self-enhancement (Derrick, et al., 2008) through a sense of companionship and belongingness. Different types of PSR can relate to different aspects of viewers’ identity and thereby affect the viewers’ self differently (in line with Boon and Lomore [2001]).

Second, cognitive rehearsal is an important component of social learning (Bandura, 2001). Different types of PSR can provide an opportunity to rehearse different behaviors and thus mediate distinct media effects. For instance, PSL can prepare viewers for future romantic relationships. Although PSL can occur in various age groups, their socialization effect might be especially pronounced in the case of adolescents who have limited first-hand romantic experiences. Through PSL, young viewers can develop romantic scripts (i.e., one’s
Para-Romantic Love and Para-Friendships

Riva Tuchakinsky

likes and dislikes, expectations and needs [Simon & Gagnon, 1986]). Importantly, PSL are more than mere observational learning. Unlike media consumption per-se, PSL allow adolescents not only to construct but also to practice the romantic scripts through imaginary relationships. Such PSL could have long lasting effects, as the quality of romantic relationships can be influenced by past romantic experiences that mold romantic expectations and self-perceptions (Merolla, Weber, Myers & Booth-Butterfield, 2004).

Finally, multiple PSR can shape predictions regarding the effects of education entertainment programming. It is logical to assume that prosocial and aggressive behaviors are most effectively modeled by peers and likable others, namely, characters with whom the viewers engage in PSF. However, in the case of sexual-related behaviors (e.g., condom use), it is possible for the effects to be mediated by PSL with cross-sex viewers and PSF with same-sex viewers.

While the above questions go beyond the scope of the current research, the heuristic value of empirically capturing the diverse nature of parasocial relationships will enable a more differentiated tapestry of future study. Furthermore, while the present study focused on only two types of PSR, it is likely that many other kinds of PSR exist, including both positive varieties, such as those found in mentoring, as well as intrinsically negative relationships, such as formed with enemies and rivals. Thus, the present study represents a first of many potential next steps towards a more complete understanding of the intriguing relationships between audiences and media personae.

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TELEVISION CRIME DRAMA AND ATTITUDES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICANS

LINGLING ZHANG

This study aimed to investigate the effects of viewing television crime drama on attitudes toward African Americans, perceived importance of egalitarian value, and first order estimates of racial discrimination. A posttest control-only experimental design was used. Two experimental conditions (two episodes of television crime drama) were used to replicate the findings. Consistent across two experimental conditions, the results indicated that television crime drama has the power to make the story-related values more salient and increase viewers’ estimates of racial discrimination cases in the United States. Interaction effects between narrative engagement and television crime drama were found on attitudes toward African Americans. Viewers with higher level of engagement in the television crime drama have more positive attitudes toward African Americans. Implications and limitations of the study were discussed.

Keywords: narrative; attitudes toward African Americans; narrative engagement; egalitarian value; first order estimate

Americans’ attitudes toward African Americans have been widely studied from different perspectives. Some research focused on racism or prejudice, especially in the form of modern racism or aversive racism (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2005; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2000; Dummett, 2004; Levine, 2004; Oskamp & Jones, 2000; Pataki, 2004; Taguieff, 2001). Others have investigated explicit/controlled or automatic/uninhibited racial attitudes (Devine, 1989; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Studies have found that even

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though most Americans are becoming more liberal and less extreme in their attitudes toward African Americans, to some extent, racism manifests in subtle forms (Meerten & Pettigrew, 1997; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), and racial conflict has not gone away. Since negative racial perceptions victimize members of minority groups and could lead to negative social interactions, it becomes especially important to identify ways to change the negative racial attitudes (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994).

Among the models that guide research on attitudes change, some assign a prominent role to mass media. Studies on the relationships between media and attitudes toward African Americans have mainly focused on how media perpetuate negative perceptions about African Americans (e.g. Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Dixon, 2006; Dixon & Azocar, 2007). This is partly because content analyses have shown that African Americans are still more often negatively portrayed in the American media (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Mastro & Robinson, 2000; Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002), especially in television news programs (Dixon & Linz, 2000). Since studies have shown that the negative media representation of African Americans lead to negative attitudes toward African Americans, how about the media programs that reveal how African Americans still suffer from institutional racism? Can well-designed media messages lead to more positive perceptions about African Americans? Today, many television dramas tackle racial issues in a narrative format with strong emotional identification with African Americans (e.g., Law and Order; Without a Trace). However, few studies have been conducted to explore how narratives appearing in the electronic media interact with attitudes toward African Americans. Narrative is an important form because it has the power to take readers away from the real world and into a fictional universe (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2002; Green, 2004; Nell, 1988). In this experience, media consumers are transported into the narrative world and are fully absorbed in the story (Green & Brock, 2002). At the same time, they may take on characters’ perspectives in the story world (Cohen, 2001; Oatley & Gholamain, 1997). Researchers believe this experiential engagement increases a narrative’s ability to change viewers’ beliefs about the world (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, 2004). Despite the theoretically assumed persuasive effects of narratives, few studies have examined how electronic narratives, such as television crime drama, might affect viewers’ attitude toward a sensitive topic, such as race. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of electronic narrative on attitudes toward African Americans.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Attitudes toward African Americans**

Studies of Americans’ attitudes toward African Americans can be traced back to Katz and Braly’s (1933) landmark study, which showed that White Americans had negative
perceptions about Blacks. However, with time, changes have taken place to deal with the racial problems in the social, legal, and political climate of the United States. Accordingly, White Americans’ attitudes toward African Americans have changed in a positive way (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). Though most scholars admit that prejudiced attitudes toward African Americans have decreased and negative stereotypes about African Americans have weakened, some studies suggest what really changed is the form in which stereotypes and prejudice are expressed, and people’s willingness to explicitly express their negative racial attitudes (Devine & Elliot, 1995). Aversive racism is a better framework to understand the current form of racial attitudes, which states that culturalization practices and cognitive biases result in negative feelings conflicting with consciously held values, such as equality and justice among racial groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). It suggests that less overt expression of racism does not imply a prejudice-free society. Additionally, since automatic prejudice can also manifest in vicious behaviors toward outgroup members (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; McConnell & Leibold, 2001), efforts to reduce prejudice are still important.

**Approaches to Prejudice Reduction**

Social scientists have been actively engaged in exploring some effective ways to reduce prejudice ever since Allport (1958) pointed out that negative stereotyping leads to harmful behaviors towards the targeted groups.

The conversion model proposed by Rothbart (1981) is one of the first models aimed at changing negative stereotypes about social groups. It argues that a stereotype can be significantly changed in response to convincing instances of stereotype disconfirmation. Even though this model has received some empirical support (Hewstone, Johnson, & Aird, 1992), scholars argue that the conversion model is possible only when the disconfirming information is highly salient and critically important, which is rare in the area of stereotypes and prejudice (Schneider, 2004).

Another approach to reducing prejudice is contact hypothesis. Over the past half century or more, the contact hypothesis has been tested and retested (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001). The findings are mixed. Research shows that contact can have positive effects on reducing prejudice only when people from the different groups have mutually positive experiences from the interaction, and have equal status in a cooperative context (Amir, 1969; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew & Trop, 2000). However, in practice these conditions are hard to achieve.

A more recent model for reducing prejudice is the self-regulation model developed by Monteith and her colleagues (1993; Monteith, Zuwerink, & Devine, 1994). Monteith et al.(1994) argued that most people, especially today, try to be fair and just to minority groups because they strive for a positive self-image and cherish egalitarian value. According to the self-regulation model, the activation of a discrepancy between egalitarian values and
prejudiced behaviors will not only make low-prejudiced individuals experience a sense of guilt, but also motivate them to inhibit potential prejudiced responses in the future. Recent empirical studies have supported the self-regulation model (Monteith et al., 1994; Kawakami, et al., 2000). With enough activation of the egalitarian value as well as the discrepancy between the value and the existing discrimination in the society, prejudice can be reduced (Kawakami, et al., 2000). Applied to the present study, if an episode of television drama can activate the importance of egalitarian value with a dramatic demonstration of the unfair treatment to African Americans, it may contribute to the self-regulation cycle and reduce prejudice.

In addition, communication scholars have also investigated the potential of media messages that can serve the purpose of reducing prejudice (Tan, Fujioka, & Tan, 2000; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). This is especially important given that mass media have been shown to be important factors in perpetuating negative perceptions and stereotypical images of African-Americans (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Gorham, 2006). Cultivation theory has been the theoretical framework for many studies on media and racial attitudes. From the cultivation perspective (Gerbner, et al., 2002), television is an important agent to shape viewers’ beliefs, values, and attitudes. Heavy viewers tend to have perceptions that are consistent with media representation. Recent studies have shown that African Americans are still negatively portrayed in television news programs (Dixon & Linz, 2000), and much research has been done to study the cultivation effects of television viewing on attitudes toward African Americans. For example, Armstrong, Neuendorf, and Brentar (1992) found that the more exposure to TV news programs, the more negative ratings of the socioeconomic success of African-Americans.

If mass media have the power to influence viewers’ beliefs, values, and attitudes, carefully-designed media messages should also have the potential to change people’s existing negative attitudes, in this case to reduce prejudice. However, little research exists on how electronic narratives featuring a racial minority group could influence people’s perceptions of that group. Therefore, this study investigates whether viewing an episode of a television crime drama with an empathetic theme toward African Americans leads to positive attitudes toward African Americans.

The Persuasive Power of Narrative

Narratives have attracted the attention of social scientists recently (e.g., Busselle, Ryabovolova, & Wilson, 2004; Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Raney, 2002). Narrative is defined as the “representation of an event or a series of events” (Abbott, 2002, p. 12). The persuasive capability of narrative is mainly attributed to viewers’ experiential engagement in the fiction world, which is well articulated by Green, Brock, and their colleagues’ work on transportation into narrative (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Essentially, viewers become absorbed in the story (Green & Brock, 2002), and
“emotional responses are occurring consistent with the vicarious experience of the fictional events” (Slater & Rouner, 2002, p.179). At the same time, individuals also strongly identify with the characters. Cohen (2001) defined identification as the mechanism through which audience members process and interpret the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them. In a strong identification experience, the audience member becomes unaware of his or her role as an audience member, and temporarily takes the perspective of the character with whom he or she identifies with (Cohen, 2001; Oatley, 1999).

Taking the perspective of others has the potential to change attitudes, especially to improve attitudes toward a group as a whole. Dovidio and his colleagues (2004) believe that while taking the perspective of a member from another group, individuals can develop positive feelings toward that member, and even to the group as a whole. If a television program can illustrate the unjust treatment of members of a social group, it may evoke sympathetic feelings concerning the members of that group, which might inhibit negative stereotypical traits associated to that group (Dovidio, et al., 2004). However, the effects of perspective taking on attitude change have been mainly studied in the field of psychology. This is often investigated by asking participants to imagine how another person is feeling after providing information about his or her experience in a non-story format, such as interview or documentary (Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). For example, Batson, Polycarpou, Harmon-Jones and their colleagues (1997) conducted three experiments to explore whether sympathetic feelings toward a member of stigmatized group improve the attitudes toward the group. Three stigmatized groups were tested: people with AIDS, homeless people, and convicted murderers. Specifically, they asked participants to imagine how a young woman with AIDS, or a homeless man, or a convicted murder feels about what has happened after listening to an audiotaped interview with each individual about her or his experience. The study found that inducing empathy led to more positive attitudes toward people with AIDS and the homeless; Taking the perspective of a member of convicted murderers led to weak attitudes change toward murderers immediately and stronger change one or two weeks later.

Given that one major feature in the narrative transportation process is to take the perspective of the character, engagement in a television drama with empathetic theme toward African Americans (the stimuli in this study) should function in the same way as the manipulation in the empirical studies discussed above. Thus, engaging in a narrative with a pro-Black theme should also have the potential to reduce the prejudice against African Americans.

In addition, while experiencing fictional narratives, viewers might not have the motivation to critically assess the contents of the story (Green & Brock, 2002). According to the extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (Slater & Rouner, 2002), a narrative’s ability to change beliefs is partially because of its entertaining nature. While people are immersed in the story, they may not be thinking of real-world facts that contradict the claims made in the narratives. Their cognitive capacities become fully focused on the events occurring in the
narrative (Green & Brock, 2002), leaving mental resources less available for critical thinking (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008b). Hence, engagement in the story makes people less likely to counter-argue, and more likely to accept the assertions implied by the narrative. Empirical studies have also demonstrated involving in a narrative increases acceptance of the messages contained in the narrative (Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2002). This suggests that viewers who are engaged in a television drama with an empathetic theme about African Americans should be more likely to develop positive attitudes toward African Americans.

Given the discussion in the literature review about the persuasive power of narrative, a main effect of exposure to a narrative on viewers’ attitudes toward African Americans is expected:

H1: Viewers of a television crime drama with an empathetic theme towards African Americans will have more positive attitudes toward African Americans than non-viewers.

Dramatic narratives attract viewers by resolving a conflict, revealing a problem, and initiating a fantasy. By weaving a plot with some controversial or sensitive topics, television dramas generally embrace certain perspective or depict certain problem in the society. A program that demonstrates some unfair treatments toward African Americans and reflects the existence of racism in American society should be able to prime participants about the importance of egalitarian value in their belief system. Since activating the egalitarian value is a prerequisite to reducing prejudice based on the self-regulation model (Monteith, 1993; Monteith et al, 1994), narratives’ ability to reinforce the egalitarian value should help prejudice reduction.

H2: Viewers of a television crime drama with an empathetic theme towards African Americans will perceive the egalitarian value as more important than non-viewers.

First Order Estimates

Media effects scholars have distinguished two types of judgment that could be affected by media messages, first order estimate and second order judgment (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Potter, 1991; Shrum, 2001). First order estimates refer to quantitative prevalence estimates of the occurrences of certain things, such as the percentage of couples who get divorced in the United States. Second order judgments are general attitudes or beliefs about a certain topic, such as perceptions about gender roles. Viewers can not only learn information from media (first order estimate) but also construct perception based on media messages (second order judgment) (Hawkins & Pingree, 1982; Hawkins, Pingree & Adler, 1987).

Empirical studies found that first order estimate and second order judgment are not
related in general, and therefore are not interchangeable (Hawkins et al., 1987; Hawkins & Pingree, 1990; Potter, 1991, 1993). Shrum (2001) argued that first order estimates are generally constructed in real time through heuristic information process, while second order judgments are formed over time. Thus, to better understand the narrative effects on racial attitudes, it is also interesting to explore the first order estimate as affected by television drama.

Information processing strategies, particularly heuristic information processing bias, are underlying psychological processes that explain various media effects (Shrum, 1996; 2001; Busselle & Shrum, 2003). As Shrum (1995, 1996, 2001) argued, media effects can be understood in terms of the way people process information, such as the influence of television exemplars based on the availability heuristics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Heuristic process requires little cognitive resources for individuals to make social decisions based on recent activation of the information in the memory (Chaiken, 1987). This mode of processing is more likely to be used when people make frequency estimate of the prevalence of an issue (Shrum, 2001).

Essentially, television viewing increases the accessibility of relevant information and the accessibility of some attributes of certain issues from memory, and respondents use the ease of recall (heuristic shortcut) as a basis for their judgment (Busselle & Shrum, 2003; Shrum, 2001). One of the factors that influence the accessibility of particular information is the recency of the activation of a construct (Shrum, 2001). Specifically, messages that are most recently exposed to are more accessible while making related judgment. Given the literature discussed, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H3: Viewers of a television drama with an empathetic theme toward African Americans will have higher estimate of the prevalence of the discrimination cases against African Americans in the society than non-viewers.

Because of the importance of experiential engagement in explaining the persuasive power of a narrative, a research question investigating moderating effects of engagement on the narrative persuasion was posited.

RQ 1: How does narrative engagement intervene the effects of a television crime drama with an empathetic theme towards African Americans on a) viewers’ attitudes toward African Americans, b) viewers’ perceived importance of egalitarian value, and c) viewers’ estimate of the prevalence of the discrimination cases against African Americans in the United States?
METHOD

Procedure

During the fall semester, 2007, college students from an introductory communication course in a medium size northwestern university were recruited in this study. They were offered extra course credits as the compensation for the participation. Though it was convenience sampling, the use of college students for the study is justified for two reasons. First, students majoring in mass communication will most likely work for the media industries in the near future. Since media play such an important role in stereotypes formation, it is interesting to know what stereotypes the next generation of media practitioners and media researchers have about African Americans. Second, previous studies have shown that college students are the group that may be aware of their negative stereotypes about racial groups, and therefore deliberately monitor their outward expressions toward racial groups (Devine, 1989). Therefore, if the stimuli used in current study were able to affect college students’ perceptions toward African Americans, the stimuli could likely impact the perceptions of the general population.

Two shows were used to replicate results to rule out the explanation that findings may be due to the uniqueness of the program. Therefore, there are three conditions: two experimental conditions and one control condition. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. They were told that they were participating in a study about their reactions to a television crime drama. The participants first watched an episode of crime drama (a drama with empathetic theme toward African Africans in the experimental conditions and a drama with no discussion of racial issues in the control condition. All three episode s are approximately around forty-minute long and similar in terms of content intensity since they are all crime dramas). After watching the drama, the participants completed a questionnaire measuring their racial attitudes, perceived importance of the egalitarian value, and the demographic information. However, during one night of data collection, the video equipment in the control condition classroom had some problem and the session was cancelled. Therefore, there was unequal sample size in different conditions.

Stimuli

Experimental program 1. Law and Order focused on issues of race. The episode begins with an off-duty female police officer being shot on the street after leaving a bar. The suspect is an eighteen-year old African American boy. The motivation behind the shooting is that the boy’s elder brother was murdered eight years ago and the younger brother felt the investigating police officers did not work hard enough to find the murderer. The case revolves around a coroner’s checking “the suicide box” without a careful autopsy, which caused the case to be closed without further investigation. The mentioning of his brother’s
case in the defendant’s testimony initiates a re-investigation of that case. In the court, the defense lawyer argues that African Americans were and are discriminated against in the judicial system and in daily life. Specifically, he proposes that the defendant’s brother’s case was closed simply because the police officers did not care about and did not want to protect the African American victim or his family.

**Pretest on the program 1.** In order to make sure that this program can evoke race-related thoughts, a pretest was conducted. Thirty students from an introductory communication course were asked to watch the program and answer the question “What conclusions might you draw from this program?” All thirty students (100%) mentioned race-related issues in their comments and expressed unfair treatment toward African Americans was not right.

**Experimental program 2. Without a Trace** features on FBI investigation of the case of two missing kids, one White American girl and one African American boy. During the investigation, the news media get involved in order to attract public attention through live reporting of the investigation progress. However, media only report on the case of the missing White girl but not the Black boy. Moreover, FBI resources are cut from the boy’s case and more agents are assigned to the girl’s case. Emotions are high due to the unfair treatment to the Black boy. In the end, the girl is found dead and the boy is still alive.

**Pretest on program 2.** A pretest was conducted to explore the participants’ thoughts about this episode. A total of 111 students taking an introductory communication course participated in the pretest. They were asked to watch the episode of *Without a Trace.* Immediately after their viewing, they were asked to list what they were thinking about during their viewing and to draw some conclusions about the show. Among 111 respondents, 97 (87%) showed sympathetic feelings toward African Americans and condemned the institutionalized racism as demonstrated in the show; fourteen (13%) respondents had no comments about race. Based on that, it was concluded that this stimuli is empathetic toward African Americans.

**Program 3 in control condition.** An episode of *CSI* was used in the control condition for the purpose of genre consistence across all the conditions. This program features on the investigation of a kidnap case, which has nothing to do with racial issues.

**Participants**

There were a total of 239 participants in the study. Responses of six participants were discarded because they had either seen the episode previously or were African Americans. African Americans were excluded from the analysis for two reasons. First, the study was
mainly focused on the non-black population’s attitudes toward African Americans. Second, African Americans were the subject in the shows of the experimental conditions. Therefore, their attitudes toward themselves might be different from non-black population. A total of 233 participants were used for analysis, of which 40.1% were male (n=93), and 59.9% were female (n=140). Their average age was 19 years old. All respondents reported their ethnicity: 85.6% were Caucasian (n=200); 3.6% were Asian Americans (n=8); 4.5% were Latino/Hispanic (n=9); and 6.2% were others (n=16).

**Measures**

*Attitudes toward Blacks (ATB).* Attitudes toward African Americans were measured by the ATB scale, adopted from Brigham (1993). The ATB (Brigham, 1993) was developed to assess a variety of components underlying non-black’s racial attitudes, which has been proved to have higher reliability in measuring the explicit racial attitude compared to other explicit measures, such as Modern Racism Scale (Brigham, 1993; Plant & Devine, 1998). The questions were based on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree and 7=strongly disagree). Sample items include “Black and white people are inherently equal;” “I get very upset when I hear a white make a prejudicial remark about blacks.” Fifteen items were used with a Cronbach’s alpha of .80.

*Estimate of discrimination.* First order estimates were measured by three items. “What percentage of African Americans is suffering discrimination in their daily life?;” “What percentage of African Americans cannot buy or rent housing wherever they want because of their color?;” “What percentages of African Americans cannot get good paying jobs because of their color?” The participants estimated the percentage in an open-ended format. Those items were chosen because the stimuli revolved around the existence of racism and all these questions touched on the discrimination situation at the various life settings. The three items were combined to make one scale with a Cronbach’s alpha of .87.

*Value.* Viewers’ perceived salience of values related to the program was measured by one item: “Compared to other values that are important to you, please indicate the relative importance of the values listed below, 1=much less important, 6=about the same, 11=much more important.” The target values are equality, honesty, and tolerance, selected from Rokeach’s (1976) belief system and Schwartz’s value scale (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995). This question format was adopted from Slater, Rouner, and Long’s study (2006), in which the importance of values, such as “tolerance” “civil liberties,” were evaluated using the above response scale. It reflected the salience of the given value relative to other values by the use of the full response scale (Slater, et al., 2006). Only perceived importance of egalitarian value was included for analysis.
Narrative engagement. Narrative engagement items were adopted from the scale developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2008). This scale was used because it captured both cognitive understanding of and affective involvement in the electronic narrative. In order to fully engage in the narrative, viewers not only need to follow the story and understand what is going on but also develop emotional attachments to some characters. Cognitive understanding and affective involvement are critical to the narrative engagement process. The participants were asked to rate their opinion on the twelve statements on a 7-point Likert scale. Sample statements include “I was worried for some of the characters in the program”; “I could easily follow the actions and events.” Twelve items were used and the Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

RESULTS

H1, H2, and H3 were aimed to explore the main effect of television crime dramas on perceived importance of egalitarian value, first order estimates, and attitudes toward African Americans. RQ1 was to explore how the narrative engagement moderates the persuasive effects of narrative.

H1 predicted that viewers of a television drama that portrays racism would have more positive attitudes toward African Americans than non-viewers. Independent sample t-test was conducted to compare attitudes toward African Americans between the experimental condition 1 and the control group, and the experimental condition 2 and the control group. No significant differences were found across two comparisons. The participants in the experimental condition 1 ($M=5.63, SD=1.02$) did not have statistically different attitudes toward African Americans compared to the participants in the control ($M=5.35, SD=1.07$), $p<.24$; the findings were replicated by the experimental condition 2 ($M=5.91, SD=1.12$) and the control condition ($M=5.35, SD=1.07$), $p<.31$. Therefore, the participants exposed to the television crime drama with an empathetic theme toward African Americans did not have more positive attitudes toward African Americans than the participants with no exposure.

H2 predicted that viewers of a television drama that portrays racism would perceive the egalitarian value as more important than non-viewers. The independent sample t-test was conducted to explore H2. Levene’s statistic was checked to confirm the equal variance because of the unequal sample size. A main effect of television crime drama on perceived importance of the egalitarian value was found between the experimental condition 1 and the control group, $t(147)=-4.31, p<.000$. Participants in the experimental condition 1 ($M=10.00, SD=1.35, n=102$) perceived the egalitarian value more important compared to the participants in the control condition ($M=8.60, SD=2.04, n=47$). The same result was replicated by the experimental condition 2, $t(128)=-2.821, p<.006$. There was statistically significant difference on the perceived importance of egalitarian value between experimental condition 2 and the control group. The participants in the experimental condition ($M=9.57, SD=1.56, n=83$) perceived the egalitarian value as more important compared to the participants in the control condition ($M=8.60, SD=2.04, n=47$). Therefore, H2 was supported.
and replicated by the data. Television drama had the ability to make the narrative-related value more salient, in this case, the egalitarian value.

H3 proposed that viewers of a television drama that portrays racism would have higher estimate of the discrimination cases against African Americans in the American society than non-viewers. It was supported by the experimental condition 2, but not by the experimental condition 1. Significant effect of television crime drama on the first order estimates was found in the experimental condition 2, \( t(127)=-3.83, p<.000 \). Participants in the experiment condition \((M=37.61, \ SD=20.94, \ n=83)\) had higher estimate of the prevalence of the discrimination cases against African Americans in the American society than the participants in the control condition \((M=24.60, \ SD=17.10, \ n=47)\). No significant difference was found between the experimental condition 1 and the control condition \((p<.40)\), the participants in the experiment condition 1 had slightly higher estimate of the prevalence of the discrimination cases against African Americans \((M=26.61, \ SD=21.61)\) than the participants in the control condition \((M=24.60, \ SD=17.10)\).

Research question 1 tried to investigate the moderating effects of narrative engagement on attitudes toward African Americans, perceived importance of the egalitarian value, and the estimates of discrimination cases against African Americans in the United States. To answer research question 1, Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Using median split (Median=4.12), the engagement scales was dichotomized into two categories: high vs. low.

For RQ1a, ANOVA results found that an interaction effect between the condition (Control group vs. Experimental group) and the engagement (High vs. Low) on attitudes toward African Americans, which were replicated by both shows. For the experimental condition 1, a significant interaction effect between television crime drama and engagement was found \( F(1,144)=6.19, P<.014 \). Specifically, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference on attitudes toward African Americans among the participants with low level of engagement in the control group \((M=5.68, \ SD=.78)\) and the experimental group \((M=5.51, \ SD=.87)\). The significant difference was found among the participants with high level of engagement in the experimental group \((M=5.98, \ SD=.62)\) and the control group \((M=5.51, \ SD=.60)\), \( p<.05 \). Consistently, for the experimental condition 2, a significant interaction effect between television crime drama and engagement was also found \( F(1,126)=4.72, P<.031 \). There was no statistically different attitudes towards African Americans among the participants with low level of engagement in the control group \((M=5.68, \ SD=.78)\) and the experimental group \((M=5.47, \ SD=.64)\). Significant differences were found among participants with high level of engagement in the experimental group \((M=5.86, \ SD=.72)\) and the control group \((M=5.51, \ SD=.60)\), \( p<.05 \). Based on these results, the persuasive effect of television crime drama on attitudes toward African Americans was moderated by the level of engagement in the narrative.

For RQ1b, ANOVA results found no interaction effect between the condition (Control group vs. Experimental group) and the engagement (High vs. Low) on perceived importance
of the egalitarian value. For the experimental condition 1, $F(1,144)=0.15, P<.90$; for the experimental condition 2, $F(1,126)=.51, P<.48$.

To answer RQ1c, ANOVA results found no interaction effect between the condition (Control group vs. Experimental group) and the engagement (High vs. Low) on the estimates of discrimination cases against African Americans in the United States. For the experimental condition 1, $F(1,144)=0.76, P<.39$; for the experimental condition 2, $F(1,126)=.39, P<.53$.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study was to explore the effects of television narrative on attitudes toward African Americans in general. Specifically, it tested the main effects of television drama on attitudes toward African Americans, first order estimates, the perceived importance of egalitarian value, and the interaction effects of narrative exposure and engagement on attitudes toward African Americans.

The data from two shows supported Hypothesis 2. Television drama had the ability to make the narrative-related value more salient, which is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Vaske & Donnelly, 1999; Slater, et. al, 2006). Dramatic narratives often revolve around conflicts, in this case racial tension. Viewers exposed to race-related drama perceived the egalitarian value as more important. Priming the importance of certain value is necessary in order to change certain attitudes. With regard to racial attitudes, Devine and Monteith (1993)’s self-regulation model suggested that the activation of equality value is indispensable to change negative racial attitudes. Therefore, understanding narratives’ ability to prime underlying values is of importance to study the narrative effects on attitudes change. Values shape our relationships and our behaviors. Constant activation of positive values is an indispensable step in initiating pro-social change.

The main effect of television drama on the first order estimates was also identified by the data from one show. The viewers exposed to a television program with an empathetic theme toward African Americans had higher estimate of discrimination cases against African Americans in the American society than viewers in the control condition. Though not statistically significant, the results from the experimental condition 2 indicated the same trend. This can be explained by dual-process model (Chaiken, 1987; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Shrum (2001) believed that when asked to make the first order estimate, people are more likely to engage in heuristic mode of information processing. Although requiring less cognitive demand, heuristic processing is constrained by the fact that the information has to be stored in memory (i.e., available), retrieved from memory (i.e., accessible), and relevant (i.e., applicable) to the judgmental task at hand (Higgins, 1996). For the present study, watching a television program about the suffering of African Americans in today’s society may increase the accessibility and availability of the related exemplar. Viewers then made their first order estimates based on this heuristic shortcut or the recency of the exemplar (Busselle & Shrum, 2003).
The findings also suggest that television drama cannot change people’s attitudes toward African Americans directly and narrative engagement is a significant moderator. The significant main effect of narrative on the first order estimates, but not on racial attitudes confirmed the empirical findings that these two measures were not related to each other (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990). Therefore, it is worth investigating both first order estimates and second order judgments when studying media effects since viewers not only acquire information (first order) but also form perceptions (second order) from media. No significant main effects of television drama on attitudes toward African Americans were found. This might be due to the measure of racial attitudes. Nowadays racism is seldom expressed overtly, but more likely exists in subtle forms (Nelson, 2005), such as subtle (Meerten & Pettigrew, 1997), aversive (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), and ambivalent racism (Katz, 1981). Many White Americans may consciously control their outward expressions of internal negative feelings as a result of social desirability concerns (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Thus, if people are asked explicitly about their attitudes, the answers might not provide us with an accurate reflection of their attitudes toward racial groups, depending on how well they monitor their responses. For this study, the participants are the educated college students, who are the typical population of aversive racists (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). They are aware of their stereotypes about racial groups and they might consciously monitor their outward attitudinal and behavioral reactions toward racial minority groups (Devine, 1989). Implicit measure of racial attitudes, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), might capture a different aspect of their perceptions about African Americans, not the reactions after the deliberate inhibition, since it deals with the automatic associations people have concerning different social categories.

The significant interaction effects between television drama and engagement indicated that narrative viewing-related factors moderate the persuasive power of narratives. To be persuaded by the narrative, the viewers must become highly engaged in the story. Traditional media studies focused heavily on either the contents of the media, or the effects of the media. How people process information is a relatively less studied area. This study suggests that more attention should be given to study genre-specific information processing factors. In this case, future studies should incorporate more narrative processing factors in the study of narrative effects on racial attitudes such as identification, perceived realism, and counterarguing, which have been identified as important factors explaining the persuasive power of narrative (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008b). A narrative processing model including all the potential moderators or mediators should be explored and tested, which will not only help us understand how and why narrative has the persuasive power, but also provide some guidance for the professional television producers, especially those endeavoring to design entertainment education programs.

The present research has several limitations as well. First, the present study was based on responses from two race-related crime drama programs. Therefore, while this study illustrates the effects of television drama on attitudes toward African Americans, and
perceived importance of egalitarian value, the conclusion still cannot be generalized beyond this genre of the programs. Future research should replicate this study using programs of different genres. Second, more narrative-viewing related factors should be included for the study (such as counterarguing, and perceived realism), in which way we can test for interaction effects.

Another limitation is that the study was based on self-report measures. Even though a self-report method is generally considered reliable, it still needs to be cautiously interpreted in the context. Especially, the study is about racial attitudes. Using explicit self-report measure is wrought with social desirability concern. Future research should replicate the study using implicit measures such as IAT.

Moreover, racial attitudes are considered as a relatively stable set of beliefs that may be influenced by media content after repeated exposure. Therefore, the immediate short-term effect of the narrative exposure as demonstrated by the current study should not be considered as an indication of long-term effects. A longitudinal study of testing the long-term effects of television drama with an empathetic theme towards African Americans will be useful and should be continued since the short-term effects have been identified by the current research.

Finally, given the availability and accessibility of television in the society and the potential indicated by this study for television dramas to influence viewers’ attitudes, future studies should continue this line of research. Since most of the current studies on narrative effects are focused on health communication, it would be informative to study narrative effects in a broader range of topics. A recent article about the effects of narrative suggests that unlike traditional cultivation findings, watching fiction on television was positively related to the belief in a just world, instead of mean and scary world beliefs (Appel, 2008). This finding further proves the uniqueness of television dramas in our social construction process, which makes the study of narrative effects even more necessary and meaningful.

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ANTI-AMERICAN ATTITUDES AMONG YOUNG EUROPEANS: THE MITIGATING INFLUENCE OF SOFT POWER

Candace White

The recent rise in anti-American attitudes among European publics is a threat to American diplomatic efforts. Poll data indicate that young Europeans hold increasingly negative opinions about the United States. This study seeks to understand the influences that contribute to perceptions about the United States among young people in Europe using a phenomenological approach, going beyond opinion poll data. Open-ended long interviews with university students from Europe found they believe their political and cultural values are different from American values. They believe the United States imposes its culture and foreign policies on other countries and acts unilaterally in its own self-interest. However, admiration of American popular culture and positive beliefs about the United States that were inculcated at an early age, primarily from television and movies, served to temper attitudes that grew more negative with age. The study provides benchmark data collected at a pivotal time in history, a few months before the 2008 U.S. presidential election, that can provide indicators of whether increasingly negative attitudes is a temporary phenomenon that will change with new policy and a new U.S. president, or whether these attitudes represent a deeper, cultural values gap likely to endure.

Keywords: public diplomacy, anti-Americanism, soft power, political-cultural values gap

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Since the early part of the twenty-first century, public opinion surveys from around the world reveal increasing anti-American sentiment. While strong anti-Americanism among Muslim populations is of great concern, it is also concerning that increasingly negative attitudes toward the United States are found in Europe. Favorable opinion among traditional American allies in Europe has dropped 40 points since 2002 (Kohut & Stokes, 2006). The U.S. Council on Foreign Relations notes that “the most stunning reaction to our Iraqi enterprise did not come from the Arab street, but from the European street” (Independent Task Force Report (cfr.org, p. 51). Other factors besides foreign policy and opposition to the war in Iraq are to blame for anti-American judgments. A 2003 Eurobarometer poll showed the majority of Europeans believe the United States has hindered efforts to fight global poverty, protect the environment, and maintain peace. American cultural views about religion, capital punishment, guns, energy use, and health care are contrary to values held by much of the world, and particularly in Europe.

Europe is the United States’ closest competitor in terms of soft power, the ability to influence through attraction (Nye, 2004a). The European Union is becoming a force in solving global problems, and Europeans think more globally in terms of climate, peace, and health. EU countries have a long tradition in international cultural relations, providing 70% of overseas development assistance to poor countries, and lead the United States in hosting international non-governmental agencies including Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the World Health Organization, and the International Red Cross. Europe, which has moved from a collection of individual countries to a strong union cooperating militarily as well as economically, is important to the success of American foreign policy. Isernia (2006) believes Euro-American relationships are entering new, unchartered lands, and Wallace (2001) contends that better cooperation with the EU would not only promote better stability in world governance, but would help reduce anti-American rhetoric.

**Why Young Europeans Matter**

The rise in anti-Americanism and disillusionment with the United States has been particularly strong among young Europeans. Even in Great Britain, unfavorable opinion doubled between 2001 and 2005 among people ages 18-29. In France, Germany, Spain, and Netherlands, the younger generation holds the strongest anti-American sentiment of any other age group in those countries (Kohut & Stokes, 2006). For older generations, the efforts of the United States during the Cold War kept many Europeans pro-American. However, the younger generation of Europeans—the generation with the most global outlook—may not be as predisposed to have favorable attitudes toward the United States. The end of the Cold War left the United States as the sole remaining world superpower, which has led to a perception of the United States as an unrestrained “hyper-power” (Meunier, 2005). There is resentment toward the perceived domination of American culture among young people in
Europe who are weary of Americanization in the form of fast food, consumerism, and materialism (Kohut & Stokes, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to help understand the image of the United States held by young European university students, and to uncover how their images and attitudes are constructed. It considers international relations from a constructivist perspective articulated by Wendt (1994) that international relations is shaped by social identity, and it is necessary to understand the pattern of actions that shape how nation states see themselves in relations to other nation states. To use this perspective implies that it is not enough to understand how Europeans view the United States, but it is also necessary to understand how Europeans see themselves in relation to the United States.

College students are the future elites from which leaders will emerge. Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell believes one of the greatest diplomatic assets of the United States is the number of future leaders who are educated there. Anti-American sentiments among Europe’s future leaders could pose long-term challenges for American public diplomacy, and understanding them can help provide long-term solutions and lead to more effective cross-cultural communication.

**Anti-Americanism**

Anti-Americanism has different causes and different manifestations. It exists on a continuum, in terms of time periods, in terms of cultures and societies, and in terms of attitudes among individuals in a society, ranging from attitudes of distaste to intense, deeply-rooted hostility, making it hard to define. Anti-Americanism is a psychological tendency to negatively evaluate the United States (Hollander, 2004; Isernia, 2006). It can be based on resentment of power imbalances, envy, consequences or fear of globalization, loss of trust, loss of nationalism and conflicting identities, conflicting core values, and/or historical events, resulting in a persistent negative, biased interpretation of American actions and policies and the singular idea that America is deeply wrong and threatening to the rest of the world (Ceaser, 2003; Crockatt, 2003; Meunier, 2005; Spiro, 1988). U.S. foreign policy affects, but does not necessarily cause anti-Americanism. Foreign policy is, however, a factor in explaining anti-Americanism since anti-Americanism ebbs and flows in relation to situational and contextual factors (Isernia, 2006). However, in its extreme form, anti-Americanism is hostility rooted in matters unrelated to actual U.S. foreign policy or attributes of American values (Hollander, 2004).

Katzenstein and Keohane (2007) identified six types of anti-Americanism that are helpful for understanding root causes and dimensions. Liberal anti-Americanism is a shared belief in American social and political ideals, while at the same time holding the belief that Americans do not live up to these purported values. This view notes the hypocrisy between U.S. policy and actions, such as promoting free trade while imposing tariffs and tax loopholes. Social anti-Americanism faults the American brand of democracy for failing to
provide social safety nets for its citizens, therefore creating a fundamentally unequal society. This view recognizes there are many forms of democracy, and that the American system of democracy often is at odds with European systems that favor deeper state involvement in social programs as well as multilateral approaches to problem solving. **Sovereign-nationalist anti-Americanism** is the view that unilateral, self-centered actions of the United States, commercially, militarily, and economically, threaten the national identity of other countries. Concerns about cultural dominance (for example, adoption of western dress and English as the *lingua franca*) lead to the belief that American success indicates a failure of other countries. **Radical anti-Americanism** takes the sovereign-national view a step further, resulting in a desire to weaken U.S. political and economic power based on the belief that American policies and actions are wrong and harmful to the rest of the world. The four types of anti-Americanism discussed above are not variants on the same schema, but rather express antithetical attitudes of different parts of the world. Liberal and social forms of anti-Americanism are prevalent in Europe, sovereign-nationalists are found in more authoritarian countries such as China, and radical forms are associated with anti-Americanism in the Middle East.

Katzenstein and Keohane also identified two historical dimensions of anti-Americanism, **Legacy anti-Americanism** and **elitist anti-Americanism**. The legacy view is built up over many years of perceived past wrongdoing by the United States to another country, which leads to animosity and distrust. The perceived “wrongs” vary from country to country based on historical events such as territorial disputes. **Elitist anti-Americanism** is opposition to cultural values, rather than political policies, usually found in countries with a long history of looking down at America. Elitists feel their culture is superior to crude, commercial American cultural values (Meunier, 2005).

**DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AMERICA AND AMERICANS**

There is a difference between anti-Americanism toward the U.S. government and anti-Americanism directed at its citizens. In a meta-analysis of survey data spanning 40 years, Isernia (2006) found that respondents distinguish between a nation’s people and its government, and attitudes about each may be different. His study of poll data from Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France found a difference between a general affective orientation toward America people and attitudes about the American government. There was consensus that the U.S. government is more arrogant and less warm than its citizens, suggesting a greater liking for the people of the United States than for the government.

Glick, et al. (2006), in a survey of students in 11 countries, also found that respondents differentiated between the U.S. government and American citizens. While the U.S. government was perceived more negatively on most measures than were citizens, the differences were small and often not significant. Overall, their study found that the United States was admired and held in contempt in almost equal measure. Among the paradoxes
were: the country is competent, but arrogant; rich, but fails its citizens in social well-being; powerful, but uses power for domination and exploitation rather than for promotion of human rights and liberty. Glick et al. (2006) surveyed only young people, and found less favorable opinions about the United States and less difference between perceptions of the government and its citizens, suggesting a generational difference in long-term attitudes. Elasmar (2009), in a study that used data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project, found that the older the respondents, the more positive their attitude toward the United States.

**Anti-Americanism in Europe**

Berman (2004) identified three types of anti-Americanism in Europe that he believes can overlap and coexist, but have different nuances in different national contexts. Pre-democratic anti-Americanism, similar to Katzenstein and Keohane’s elitist anti-Americanism, expresses that American mass culture is inferior to that of more aristocratic European values, and includes a disdain for American democracy and modernization. Communist anti-Americanism acknowledges the hypocrisy of self-serving American foreign policy that changes as American interests change. Post-democratic anti-Americanism represents attitudes that the United States is reluctant to relinquish its political sovereignty to international governance bodies, putting its own interest above the common good.

Increasingly negative attitudes of Europeans toward the United States may be shifting from criticism about specific policies, to a deeper dislike, distrust, and resentment of the United States. Johnston and Ray (2004), using a meta-analysis of Eurobarometer data, found the strongest predictors of anti-American attitudes were differences in ideology, nationalism, attachment to supra-national Europe (European Union), and security concerns. Fabbrini (2004) found that anti-Americanism among Europeans is based on a fear of economic and cultural Americanization of Europe and fear of Americanization of the European political process. There may be a connection between increasing anti-Americanism and the dynamics of political identity connected to the process of European integration, with collective anti-American sentiments becoming part of the cultural identity of the European Union (Meunier, 2005; Ruzza & Bozzini, 2006). Another important concern of Europeans is that the United States has been slow to move from unilateralism in a multilateral world, creating a pattern of unilateral policies. Johnston and Ray (2004) found that what Europeans oppose the most is the willingness of the United States to act alone. The intense opposition in Europe to the U.S. invasion of Iraq may be based less on the fact that a sovereign nation was invaded, and more on the fact that it was done unilaterally, against the advice of the UN Security Council and NATO (Ruzza & Bozzini, 2006).

The studies above are consistent with Berman’s (2004) belief that anti-Americanism is not a reasoned response to foreign policy, but is based on cultural interpretations. In this sense, anti-Americanism is a cultural phenomenon that expresses historical predispositions as well as political ideologies. This is consistent with Fabbrini’s (2004) belief that European
reaction to the U.S. invasion of Iraq was the tip of a much larger iceberg, revealing an already deep-rooted anti-American mood. The perception of many Europeans, based on poll data, is that the United States has been slow to accept the shifts in the world economy, slow to embrace the smart balance between soft power and military force, and slow to acknowledge the negative change in world sentiment. The recent vehemence of criticism from Europeans seems to go beyond the distinction of opposition to the policies of the Bush administration to a deeper belief that the United States is “an oppressive power influenced by religious zealots, big business corporations, oil companies, and the Israeli lobby” (Curtis, 2004, p. 374).

Elasmar (2009) contends that understanding what influences opinions about the United States can reveal what it will take to change them in a desirable direction and that public diplomacy is a potential remedy for negative public opinion.

A MANY-TO-MANY COMMUNICATION MODEL OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy is the attempt to bring about understanding for a nation’s ideas and ideals, institutions and culture, as well as its goals and policies (Tuch, 1990). The sailing ship environment of traditional diplomacy has been completely altered by the confluence of globalization, instantaneous communication, and the spread of democracy. In open, democratic societies with accessible, instantaneous global communication, information cannot be controlled by governments and governments are not the only source of power.

Entman (2008) notes the literature on public diplomacy lacks a theoretical infrastructure. This is in part because the concept of public diplomacy has been defined differently by different scholars and has been studied using different units of analysis. The role of mass media in public diplomacy has been widely studied, primarily from the point of view of distributing messages from governments (Entman, 2008; Kunczik, 1997; Manheim & Albritton, 1984; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). Entman (2008) developed a theoretical cascading network activation model of “mediated public diplomacy” based on the premise that public diplomacy is the efforts of governments to promote their foreign policy in news media. The success of the model depends on the degree of political-cultural congruency between nations.

The conceptualization of public diplomacy in this study, however, is that it involves more than promoting policy through the media, and governments and media are not the only players in the process. Public diplomacy follows a Many-to-Many Model of Communication, rather than a Government-to-People or One-to-Many Model. A Many-to-Many Model recognizes non-state actors as senders as well as receivers of messages in the diplomatic process, reflecting an open exchange of ideas with less emphasis on propaganda and control of messages by governments only (Roirdan, 2003). Leonard and Alakeson (2000) define public diplomacy as country-to-people communication, which includes business and non-
profit leaders and citizens as both senders and receivers of diplomatic messages. Sources outside government can have influence on policy and diplomatic activities, and receivers of messages do not differentiate whether their perceptions come from official government sources, corporate public relations, or from popular culture. The Many-to-Many Model of diplomatic communication is acknowledged by scholars at the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California who believe public diplomacy includes not only government-sponsored cultural, educational and informational programs, but also citizen exchanges, private media broadcasts, and corporate communications used to promote the national interest of a country by informing and influencing foreign audiences (www.uscpublicdiplomacy.com).

Multi-national corporations hold economic power, media have power over public opinion, and interest groups hold power in policy implementation. Public diplomacy, therefore, is multi-directional.

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOFT POWER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

The role of soft power in public diplomacy is to shape the environment for policy acceptance. The concept of soft power, developed by Joseph Nye, is the ability of a nation-state to influence other political entities through attraction based on the appeal of its culture, values, and institutions, rather than through coercion or payments (Nye, 2004a). Soft power is the opposite of hard power, which refers to military power, and can exist in the absence of military force. Nye contends that attraction is stronger than coercion, noting that the United States did not win the Cold War with military power, but because others saw democracy as attractive. Attraction can turn to repulsion if “we act in an arrogant manner and destroy the real message of our deeper values” (Nye, 2004a, p. X). The increase of anti-Americanism has decreased the soft power of the United States. Furthermore, there is a relative shift in the soft power of the United States from the “rise of the rest” (Zakaria, 2008). European countries have increasing soft power, as do Japan and China.

Soft power emanates from influence that is communicated, intentionally or unintentionally through a variety of sources. Sources of soft power include education systems, media and popular culture, science and technology, and business practices. Examples range from cultural exports like Hollywood movies to popular consumer goods that have become iconic and strongly associated with the United States. Bohas (2006) contends that Nye’s concept of soft power underestimates the powerful influence of popular culture. A fundamental component of soft power may be the early shaping of taste, collective imagery, symbols, and ideas which constitutes a form of cultural molding (Bohas, 2006; De Zoysa & Newman, 2002). According to the *Statistical Yearbook of the European Audiovisual Observatory*, almost 63% of fictional broadcasts on television in Western Europe come from the United States, resulting in a diffusion of the American way of life that is deeply embedded and integrated into everyday life, especially among young people.
Portrayal of American culture in movies and television has become part of the childhood socialization process for people throughout the world. However, studies differ on whether the influence of popular culture is positive or negative. Elasmar (2007) found a positive correlation between consumption of American entertainment media and positive attitudes toward the United States. Fullerton, Hamilton, and Kendrick (2007) reported that while most students in their study in Singapore held slightly negative opinions of Americans, there was a positive correlation between watching American televisions and movies and those opinions; watching American-produced media fostered positive feelings toward Americans. These studies contradict the findings of DeFleur and DeFleur (2003) that images in Hollywood films and programming containing violence, sex, and crime teach young people in other countries to hate Americans.

How communication is received and perceived depends on the cultural worldview of the receiver; communication is a receiver phenomenon. Soft power depends on willing receivers and shared values to attract followers (Nye, 2004a). Messages, whether conveyed by governments or through popular culture, are interpreted with different effects by different receivers in different settings, and the existence of soft power depends on the degree to which countries share the values that are communicated. Entman (2008) contends that political-cultural congruence is perhaps the most important determinant in how messages are framed and perceived. Berman (2004) believes that European anti-Americanism has little to do with policy and reality, and more to do with “topsy-turvy logic of obsessions driven by European fantasies about America,” based on long standing cultural traditions and trapped in a world of imagination” (p. 55). In a broader, many-to-many conceptualization of public diplomacy, audience-centered studies that increase understanding of attitudes and beliefs that affect how images and messages are interpreted through different cultural lenses are increasingly important.

**Method - Qualitative Inquiry**

Much of our knowledge of opinions about the United States comes from surveys, which elicit a cognitive response, force an answer, and produce data without social or political context. The goal of this study was to go beyond poll data to explore the processes and phenomena that influence opinions in a particular age group, and to attempt to understand how those opinions are socially constructed.

Data were collected through 19 open-ended, long interviews. The interview guide (Table 1) was constructed to uncover American sentiments, but not to ask about anti-American sentiments, questions about which would have been leading. Participants for the study were natives of countries that are European Union members or EU candidates, were between 18 and 30 years of age, and were in the United States to attend a large, southeastern research university. Potential participants were identified by the university’s center for international education, then a snowballing technique in which interviewees helped contact
other international students was used (Table 2). Interviews were conducted by graduate students who had taken course work in conducting qualitative interviews and received additional training for this study. Data collection was considered complete when iteration and redundancy were found, consistent with the literature about qualitative research that notes sample size is less important than repetition of among respondents (McCracken, 1993). The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The range in length was affected by the English competency of the interviewees; longer interview times did not necessarily result in longer transcripts. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Phenomenological analysis of the interview data was conducted in accordance with guidelines set forth by Hycner (1985). The goal of the process is to enter the world of the individuals who are interviewed and to allow themes to emerge from the data without a priori assumptions on the part of the researcher. This is done by reading each interview transcript several times to get a sense of the meaning of the whole, then delineating general meaning from the data set by considering all of the transcripts collectively. Inductive analysis was used to uncover themes and patterns through a process that prescribes linking and relating concepts denoting conditions, context, and consequences in categorical groups.
of responses (Hycner, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Conceptual categories were derived through a method of constant comparison and evaluation of the transcripts. The final step in phenomenological analysis is to look for themes apparent throughout conceptual categories to identify core ideas and meaning grounded in the data. For reliability, the primary investigator and two trained graduate students independently carried out the same procedures, compared results, and reconciled differences.

**FINDINGS - HOW EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS VIEW THE UNITED STATES**

The conceptual categories and themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts are discussed below, followed by a section that summarizes the general meaning found in the data set.

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Early Social Construction of the American Dream

Respondents were asked to recall the things that influenced what the thought of the United States when they were growing up. Popular culture greatly affected their beliefs. A positive, idealized image of America was formed at a very early age, primarily from television, but also from movies, music, and school.

“I always had this feeling of kind of a dream place. The American dream is in the mind of everybody.” (2)

“I started wanting to go there [U.S.] pretty early and I don’t know exactly why. It was like the promise land.” (5)

Television was the predominant influence on perceptions of the United States. The interviewees grew up with the television on, and American-produced television programs provided the images they most readily recalled, the majority of which were positive.

“You are exposed to American culture mainly through watching a lot of American TV shows. Even though we are not in the U.S., we have an impression of how it is.” (12)

“I was always watching good TV shows. I had this perception that everyone was wonderful in America.” (16)

Movies, like television, greatly influenced perceptions, and created positive, albeit America-centric, impressions.

“When I was a kid, I was fascinated by a movie about a rich American family. Their child went to camp and had so much fun. This was my dream.” (7)

“My first impressions were really good ones. The movies are really good and big fun, and you can see that all the stars are so beautiful and nice. They make you feel like its heaven and you have this vision in your dreams that is a really good impression.” (8)

“Even in the movies, America is really strong, and the rest of the world is like, America, help us! All the heroes are American and the bad guys are often foreign-born. My dad takes this more seriously. He says about American movies, ‘Can’t you see how all the heroes are born in the USA?’” (14)

Interviewees did not indicate that newspapers or the internet were significant sources of influence on their perceptions about the United States when they were young. The internet was not a big part of their lives until recently. Television news was pervasive in respondents’
homes, but they and their families watched local and regional news programs. Many respondents noted that American news was commonplace in European news reports, but it was not considered to be an early influence on their perceptions about the United States. However, as they got older they sought international news.

“If I want to trust news, I watch the BBC because the BBC is more trustworthy. I watch CNN for information, but if I want to accept the information, I watch BBC.” (7)

Parents and Family. An unexpected finding was the belief among respondents that their parents and family had little influence on their perceptions of the United States. Most respondents did not recall their parents talking about the United States when they were young.

“I didn’t know any Americans and it was not a big issue at home to talk about. My family doesn’t have many views of the United States. They are more close to European culture than American culture.” (15)

However, there was evidence in the responses that the attitudes of their parents did affect their perceptions, generally in a positive direction.

“The United States was not really a big topic when I was younger. The world looked different, and it was basically two sides of a coin: the Soviet Union was bad, and the U.S. was good. Nobody really talked about it much; that’s just the way it was.” (10)

“When I was 15, I made bike trips with my dad in Eastern Europe where you would see a lot left over from communism. I would compare it to where I was from in Western Germany, which was occupied by the U.S., and that helped change my view a lot. I was thinking if the U.S. hadn’t been there, we probably would not have had the wealth and freedom we enjoyed all this time.” (18)

Teachers and School. School was an important influence on attitude formation, and English teachers were mentioned across interviews as being influential on respondents’ views about the United States.

“Everything came initially through the media. And school, of course, because in school I learned English and you have one year where the topic is America.” (13)

“She [teacher] had lived in America and showed us movies and musicals. She only had good things to say about America. She was a big influence; she was crazy about America, showing us the culture.” (6)

“I had some lecturers who were from America and I just adored them a lot. They were really cool people, had a lot of insight on their subject, so I got really interested in
Anti-Americanism Attitudes among Young Europeans

Candace White

the whole American literature thing. That’s the reason I wanted to go.” (13)

American Brands. Many interviewees mentioned McDonalds when asked about early perceptions of the United States. McDonalds and other brands such as Disney had an iconic status for the respondents when they were young, perhaps representing a way to experience a bit of American life. It was not the food that attracted them to McDonalds, but rather the overall experience of being there.

“I remember the first McDonalds, the first time it opened. It was a really, really big party. There was something like a myth of McDonalds that every child wanted to go there and play on their small playground. But we knew it is really unhealthy food.” (6)

“Mickey Mouse, things from Disneyland were special… if you have some things that are American, you are special or that means you are rich.” (1)

View of American Culture and Values

Participants were asked about perceptions of American values and stereotypes. An irony that emerged from the data was the dichotomy between the perception of an idealized American dream and negative perceptions of Americans.

“A stereotype of Americans is they are loud, not that intelligent and they get fat. They don’t even know where some countries in Europe are.” (16)

“Americans are, everything is bigger, the roads, the cars, including the people themselves. Americans are big consumers of whatever energy we have on the planet so it is not always flattering right now.” (5)

“Money and showing off… you want to make as much money as possible. Everyone one wants to have a new car and the most expensive home and things they can’t afford. Americans work for the sake of money. We work to make money to live.” (7)

Skepticism about U.S. Foreign Policy

There was one brief question about foreign policy in the interview guide, but it elicited a plethora of responses, providing many pages of transcript data. Responses indicated a dislike and distrust of current American foreign policy. However, at the same time, responses showed skepticism and some evidence of underlying, positive attitudes.

“You hear the music and you love it, you see the movies and you love it and you realize it is American, but the things that you have negative associations with, politics,
that’s a big thing, a big issue. But it is all George W. Bush. My perception of American politics is not good.” (13)

“You used to tell people, oh, I am going to study in America, and they would be, America—that’s cool. But now it is not that way. People judge American things by politics sometimes.” (10)

It was clear that current American foreign policy has damaged perceptions about the United States that were more positive when respondents were younger, but also apparent that respondents closely associate U.S. foreign policy with George W. Bush, the president at the time of the interviews.

“I think it is a shame for America that George Bush is the president. I feel sorry for them because America is represented by a really stupid guy, and America is not as stupid as this guy. Therefore, it is kind of sad because he is the president and he really shapes the opinion about America.” (3)

U.S. Self Interests. U.S. foreign policy was characterized as individualistic, controlling, and based on American self-interests. However, there was tension between an admiration for the strength of the United States and the belief that the United States uses its strength to impose its ideas, including democracy, on other countries based on its own self interests. One respondent recalled a bumper sticker in her country that says, “Be nice to Americans or we will bring democracy to your country.”

“On the one hand you hear that Americans are fighting for democracy and equal rights for everyone. Then you hear about big companies investing in Communist countries, doing something that is not helping create democracy. They are only thinking of their own self interests.” (8)

“Americans say, oh, we are America and we’re doing things the American way and we’re going to impose the American way across the world. But in a crisis situation, who does the world turn to? America. Everyone says, we’re in trouble; can we get a helping hand from America? America is in this position that it is damned if it does, and damned if it doesn’t do anything.” (16)

“America is playing World Police. While that is good and they do some good stuff, other things are just questionable. Why is America not allowing other countries to have atomic weapons but they have 12,000 atomic warheads and other countries have liked 20?” (11)

American Isolationism and Unilateralism. Respondents showed concern about U.S. isolationism, the potential for American super power domination, and America’s lack of consideration for other nations. The war in Iraq and the failure of the United States to sign
the Kyoto Protocol were often mentioned as reasons behind negative opinions.

“After the war, a lot of perspectives changed. I think a lot of people wanted to know why that happened. The Kyoto Protocol changed a lot of things because the U.S. did not sign it and they are the country that destroys the environment the most.” (4)

“I think the U.S. is conducting its foreign policy based on its own values of being isolated from the rest of the world. It really undermines the position of American as a global leader.” (18)

“The U.S. government that is in charge right now is considered a threat to world peace. America is a country that isolates itself and does not really interact much with Europe or the world community.” (14)

“I have the feeling that American doesn’t want to participate in global institutions. They did not want to sign the Kyoto protocol, and that’s really strange to me. My impression is American wants to have their own control. I wish they would take responsibility for the global environment because every country is part of that.” (3)

U.S. Threat to National and European Identity. There was evidence of general resistance to the threat of American cultural and political imperialism as well as concern for protection of European national identities.

“We are losing our identities. The problem is we are watching American people, American shows, American movies and we are getting the negative factors of America. We’re even getting fatter.” (9)

“In Europe a lot of things are governed on the federal level, and now the EU level, so a lot of people pay attention to that, while in the American way of dealing with things is to work around the individual instead of society as a whole. Europe tries to find the middle ground between capitalism and socialism.” (10)

“Suddenly it becomes very scary to have American stuff everywhere. Suddenly you realize, hmm, but we don’t like their philosophy, but we have so much American stuff.” (8)

Acceptance of Globalization

While there was evidence of resistance to American political and cultural imperialism, there was little resistance to globalization. Globalization was characterized as inevitable, and was not necessarily associated with the United States. For the interviewees, a global business environment is an accepted part of their worldview.
“Globalization is completely normal. Even German businesses spread out. The competition is getting more worldwide so America tries to get its share and they were the ones who kind of started it, but most other countries are following so I think it’s perfectly fine.” (17)

“We had a big Ford plant in our state so lots of people in our village worked there. Now it is to the stage that it’s not seen as something American anymore. They’ve become so acclimated in the culture that they are not even seen as foreign entity anymore.” (19)

“It could be a Japanese business—I don’t care what the business is. I don’t mind them coming. Americanism is good for us, but at some point it’s probably not good. It may slow the development of European brands. But I think if there is any midpoint it is good. I’m glad we have iPods.” (14)

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The data show that attitudes about the United States became more negative as respondents grew older, but positives beliefs about the United States that were inculcated at an early age, mostly from American television and movies but also from parents and teachers, may have mitigated anti-American attitudes. Films and television portrayed an American way of life that was attractive, and cultivated a strong image of the United States. When respondents in the study were younger, they wanted to be part of the American dream. An example is the “the myth of McDonalds.” It was not the food that attracted them, but rather the experience of being there. As respondents got older, their attitudes about the U.S. became more pragmatic and increasingly negative. They recognized that McDonald’s franchises can hurt local restaurants, and associated them with American cultural and economic imperialism. As young adults, respondents expressed a tension between admiration for the United States and criticism about its values and behaviors. There was still appreciation for aspects of the American dream that included opportunity and wealth, but it was conflicted with negative attitudes regarding aspects that suggested materialism and superficiality. They were still consumers of popular culture, but expressed resistance to its pervasiveness and ethnocentricity (where all the good guys in films are American). Overall, there was a negative affective orientation in many of their statements.

Regarding American foreign policy, there was the perception that the United States imposes its political agenda on other nations and that even efforts to promote democracy are based on U.S. self interests. America’s unilateralism and isolation from agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol negatively affected attitudes about the United States. There was concern for European cultural identity, as well as evidence of political ideologies that differ from American political views. The perception of the United States as self-serving and unilateral is incongruent with the global, multi-centric worldview held by young Europeans in this...
The study indicates a political-cultural divide between perceptions of American values and the values held by young European university students who will be members of future elites. While respondents admired aspects of American culture and politics, negative attitudes stemmed from the incongruence between their perceptions of U.S. ideologies and their own values and principles. The findings show that negative attitudes emanated from
more than U.S. actions and foreign policy. Negative sentiments were expressed across different topics, which is concerning because a shift from negative opinions about what America does, to a deeper negative bias about what America is represents growing anti-Americanism.

Politically, interviewees were not only opposed to the war in Iraq, but resented American unilateralism in general, reflecting a political ideology that increasingly sets Europe and the United States apart since the European Union must be collectivist and multilateral by design. Respondents believed the United States acts like the “world police.” Data from the study support earlier findings that indicate Europeans and Americans do not share the same view about how the world should be governed or about the proper balance between use of force and use of diplomacy in international affairs (Kagan, 2003). The study supports the perception held by many Europeans that the United States acts as if it is the only country entitled to promote democracy, and that the American model of democracy is increasingly based on economic interests (Fabbrini, 2004; Wallace, 2001). It supports Elasmar’s (2009) finding that the more people believe the United States ignores their countries’ interests, the less positive is their attitude toward the United States. In addition to the interests of their country, respondents were concerned with supra-national political ideologies. Political policies including unilateralism, imperialism, and disregard for the environment that are associated with the United States are incongruent with their own opinions and had a negative effect on their attitudes. However, there was no evidence of the overlap between anti-Americanism and anti-globalization discussed by Berman (2004) and Fabbrini (2006), suggesting that perhaps the younger generation holds different views about globalization and cannot be characterized by old paradigms.

Culturally, interviewees had a qualified position about their appreciation of American ideals. The study found that U.S. product and brands as well as popular culture contributed to positive beliefs, but also found critical viewpoints about both. Respondents were somewhat resentful of the pervasiveness of American entertainment media, as well as critical of superficial and materialistic values they felt were perpetuated by popular culture and U.S.-led consumerism. In this sense, anti-Americanism could be a backlash against perceived Americanization of Europe.

**CONCLUSION**

The study provides benchmark data collected at a pivotal point in history shortly before the election of Barack Obama as president. Foreign policies of the George W. Bush administration and the invasion of Iraq caused respondents to question other things about American values, supporting Nye’s (2004b) contention that the dynamic nature of soft power is affected by policies and actions. However, Kagan (2003) believes that attitudes about the United States are not the result of one election or one event, and that Americans and Europeans do not share the same view of how the world should be governed, a finding
corroborated by the data in this study. While opposition to specific policies might be temporary, opposition to a pattern of U.S. unilateralism and use of military strength to solve problems could become culturally ingrained, and could result in a long-term bias that represents more radical anti-Americanism. The increasing values gap between the United States and Europe could lead to cultural differences that could solidify over time as anti-American predispositions and beliefs.

International relations are shaped by social identity and by how nations see themselves in relation to other nations (Wendt, 1994). The students in the current study have a perspective of world order that differs from how they perceive world order as imposed by the United States. The question now to follow is whether the negative attitudes about the United States will soften with a new administration and new policies, or whether political-cultural incongruence between the United States and Europe will increase. Is the drop in opinion polls a temporary phenomenon based on reaction to policy and events of the George W. Bush administration, or a turning point that reflects a deeper values gap? The younger generation of Europeans has been exposed to different types of media at formative times in attitude development. They have come of age during a period of unification of European countries as well as worldwide globalization, which includes globalized media and communication technologies. Their collective European identity as an in-group is different from that of older generations, which may affect how they see Americans as an out-group (Melischek & Seethaler, 2008). Resistance to Americanization and increasingly shared anti-American sentiments may become a unifying cultural value that helps to create supranationalism among young people in EU nations.

Entman (2008) purports that political-cultural congruency between the United States and other nations is the most important determinant of how mediated messages are framed by receivers. The diplomatic message that will be congruent with the values of young Europeans is one of global, multilateral cooperation. It must be conveyed through U.S. actions and foreign policies as well as through corporate social responsibility and cultural diplomacy. The concept of “world policy” could replace “foreign policy,” representing a more we-centered outlook that is increasingly congruent to the values of the rest of the world.

Limitations

The interviewees in this study chose to come to the United States and may hold more positive presuppositions than other young people in Europe. The interviews were conducted in English, a second language for most respondents who may not have been able to fully express some concepts. Future in-depth qualitative studies with young Europeans conducted in their home countries and native languages are needed to probe more deeply into the nature and dimensions of anti-American attitudes. The students in the study were under thirty years of age. Developmentally, they are in a period of life when it is normal to question values and
to resist authority. Time-series studies with this age cohort are needed to determine if attitudes among this generation remain consistent over time, or ebb and flow with U.S. foreign policy and public diplomacy.

REFERENCES


Coding Cosby: Racial Identity Themes on Television

Brian Carey Sims, Zakiya Toms, Jessica Cannady and Jovan Shumpert

The current study examined Racial Identity Themes (RIT) in The Cosby Show using the Racial Identity Media Extraction Scale, a coding scheme designed to analyze the content of television sitcoms for content relevant to racial identity for African Americans. Every episode from the televised series (n = 194) was analyzed for twenty different Racial Identity Themes. Results indicate the presence of a variety of RIT in the content and structure of the series, as well as relationships between RIT over the course of the series. Findings are discussed in terms of social science implications for the systematic extraction of RIT from popular media.

Keywords: media, African American, racial identity, television, race

By all accounts, most African Americans watch a lot of television. Black homes in America on average have a television on for 11 hours and 10 minutes a day (nearly 80 hours a week); compared to 52 hours a week for the average White home (Jackson, 2005). A great deal has been written about the political, social, and psychological implications of media exposure for African Americans (Davis & Gandy, 1999), with much speculation from critics and commentators about the effects of television, radio, print, and social media on the African American community.

Much of this discussion has centered on the role of media in the development of identity, particularly racial identity. Two general perspectives have emerged with regards to the impact of television media on African Americans. The first perspective highlights the

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historical absence of African Americans on television and emphasizes negative images and iconography associated with Black life. This perspective argues that television programming has traditionally functioned as a weapon against Black folks, by warping, distorting, and bastardizing representations of African American life. Martin (2008) for example, examined television media as a potential negative factor in the racial identity development of African American youth. Bogle (1989) described commonly distorted representations of African Americans including the “Good Negro/ Uncle Tom” character, who was socially acceptable and non-threatening; and the Mammy figure, who was characteristically obese, mean, and up-to-no-good. These are supplemented by “the ‘Coon,” “the Mulatto,” and “the Buck,” “the jezebel,” “sambos” and other modern stereotypic iterations. Generally, this perspective argues that such negative portrayals of Blackness have adverse negative influences on the identity development, self-esteem (Barnes, 1972; Tan & Tan, 1979), and general psychological well-being of African Americans. It has been argued that negative stereotypic television images of African American children (Gist, 1993; Stroman, 1986) are internalized by Black children, leading to negative self-concepts and low self-esteem (Davis & Gandy, 1999). This line of research has also found that high levels of television viewing are associated with low self-esteem for African Americans (Graves, 1980; Tan & Tan, 1979).

A second perspective on the effect of media on African Americans focuses on the positive effects of changes in African American representation on television over the last 20 years. This perspective argues that key changes in the representations of Blacks on television have resulted in political and social gains for African Americans, as well as psychological benefits for generations of viewers from different racial backgrounds. At the center of this perspective is *The Cosby Show*. The series, which featured an affluent African American family living in New York City aired on NBC during primetime for eight consecutive seasons from 1984-1992. According to Gates (1989), *The Cosby Show* was “remarkably successful at introducing most Americans to traditional Black cultural values, customs and norms.” Downing (1988) suggested that *The Cosby Show* “may operate as a reinstatement of Black dignity and culture in a racist society where television culture has generally failed to communicate these realities, and has often flatly negated them.”

Cultural critics, commentators, writers, journalists, media experts, politicians and viewers have explained, debated, and theorized about the racial implications of the series, which is, by all available measures, the most watched television situational comedy focusing on an African American family in the history of television. Social science, however, has thus far brought very little to bear on the myriad debates that exist surrounding the series and its implications. One exception is Jhally and Lewis’ (1992) controversial study focusing on viewers of the famous series. Using an “audience study” approach involving interviews of 52 focus groups, the authors examined interpretations and perceptions of episodes across a cross-section of American Cosby Show viewers, systematically chosen based on race, gender, and socio-economic status. They concluded that images of affluent African-Americans are taken by white audiences as evidence of a lack of discriminatory barriers to
black success, a phenomenon they labeled as ‘enlightened racism’, although this notion has been challenged by subsequent research on appraisals and racialized beliefs (e.g. Bodenhausen, Schwarz, Bless, & Wänke, 1995).

**Racial Identity Themes**

Despite the existence of dozens of articles, essays, and books written focusing on the series, there has never (to our knowledge) been a systematic examination of the actual content and structure of *The Cosby Show*. This may be due to the complexity and varied nature of racialized images on television, and their myriad implications and interpretations.

However, literature on racial identity offers constructs for just such an analysis. According to Davis & Gandy (1999), racial identity on television becomes salient when Black audiences oppose media representations based on ideological differences. They list mass media images of violent, threatening Black males as an example of one such representation that many Blacks oppose. Sims, Cannady, Toms, & Shumpert (2011) define a Racial Identity Theme (RIT) as any television message, object, scenario or context that represents or symbolizes an attitude about racial group membership. Television media is thought to influence viewers’ thoughts, ideas and attitudes about their racial identity by symbolizing ideas about race in the content and structure of the program. These symbols and representations of racial attitudes can be operationalized and coded-for in television programming.

**Content Analysis**

Originally applied to journalism and mass communication inquiries, “content analysis” has been defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952 p.18). Kolbe and Burnett (1991) preferred a slightly broader definition of the term: “an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication. These communications can also be analyzed at many levels (image, word, roles, etc.), thereby creating a realm of research opportunities” (p. 243). The last six decades have seen a proliferation of content analysis studies involving various media, with a significant increase in published studies occurring between 1971-1995 (Riffe and Freitag, 1997). A distinction is often made between the coding of manifest or “on the surface” content and latent content beneath those surface elements (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Braken, 2002). Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) note that for latent-content the coders must provide subjective interpretations based on their own mental schema, which increases the importance of being able to demonstrate that judgments are shared across coders, and ultimately to readers of the research.

**The Current Study**
Thus, the purpose of the current study was to systematically identify and extract RIT in and from *The Cosby Show*. The current study examined three specific research questions relative to the racial identity content of *The Cosby Show*. First, what RIT are contained in the series? Second, do relationships between the themes at the episode level? Finally, did RIT represented in the episodes change over the life of the series?

**METHOD**

**Materials**

The Racial Identify Media Extraction Scale (RIMES; Sims, Cannady, Toms, & Shumpert, 2011) is a coding scheme designed to identify and quantify Racial Identity Themes in television programming. It consists of two categories of ratings scales: the Ideology Scale and the Omission Scale. The Ideology Scale contains five RIT measuring ideology and salience themes. The Omission scale contains fifteen scales measuring themes common to television programming featuring African Americans (e.g. Black hair, Black vernacular, etc). The Ideology Scale RIT were adapted from the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). A Nationalism RIT was defined as “any mention or representation signifying an intentional exclusion or separation from mainstream American values, institutions, or ideals.” An Assimilation RIT was defined as “any mention or representation signifying an intentional molding into mainstream American culture or society.” An Oppressed Minority RIT was defined as “any mention or representation signifying common ground shared by minority individuals or solidarity among oppressed racial groups (i.e. African Americans).” A Humanism RIT was defined as “any mention or representation signifying similarities that all humans share regardless of racial differences.” In addition, a RIT was adapted for the salience dimension of the MMRI. Salience was defined as “any mention or representation signifying the importance or relevance of an individual’s racial group membership at any given time.” Each RIT was rated on a scale of low, medium, and high. A rating of ‘low’ was defined as minimal mentioning and/or actions related to the specific category. A rating of ‘medium’ was defined as moderate mentioning and/or actions related to the specific category. Finally, a rating of ‘high’ was defined as maximum mentioning and/or actions related to the specific category. The Omission Scale contains an additional fifteen RIT commonly found in African American television programs, each plausibly characteristic of the Black Experience, broadly defined. Because RIT may be communicated to viewers both in terms of what is present in an episode and what is omitted (Sims, Cannady, Toms, & Shumpert, 2011), each of these themes was rated on an ‘present’ or ‘omitted’ basis. Table 1 presents descriptions of each RIT included on the RIMES.
Coding Procedure

Two trained research assistants (the 2nd and 3rd authors) viewed each episode independently and made their respective ratings along each of the 20 RIT dimensions. These research assistants were trained by the first author in observational research methods in order to apply the concepts derived from the racial identity literature to episode observation in a standardized manner. Specifically, each episode was viewed in its entirety (without
commercial) before the ratings were made, although the researchers did make notes on the episodes while viewing. A total of 194 episodes were viewed, encompassing all eight seasons of the series. Each research assistant viewed the episodes in the same order (chronological, as indicated on the series DVD).

RESULTS

Analyses

In order to address our first research question, we averaged the ratings of both raters in order to create a composite variable for each RIT. This yielded 20 RIT variables, which were then compared based on central tendency and variability. Table 2 presents descriptive information and inter-rater reliability estimates for the twenty RIT measured by the RIMES.

Ratings for the RIT on the Ideology Scale of the RIMES were as follows: Humanism was the RIT rated highest across all eight seasons of the series (\(m = 2.11, sd = .50\)), followed by Assimilation (\(m = 1.99, sd = .57\)), Oppressed Minority (\(m = 1.11, sd = .26\)), Salience (\(m = 1.10, sd = .24\)), and Nationalism (\(m = 1.03, sd = .15\)). Paired-samples T-Tests indicated significant mean differences at the alpha = .001 level between all of the RITs, with the exception of Nationalism and Salience \(T(179) = 1.33, p = .19\). Also, the two highest rated RIT had considerably higher standard deviations (.50 and .57) than the others, which were all less than .26.

The remaining fifteen RIT comprised the Omission Scale of the RIMES, and were coded on a present/omitted basis. RIT coded as “present” received a “1” whereas RIT coded as “omitted” received a “2.” The ratings for both independent raters were averaged resulting in a three-point continuum (i.e. 1.0, 1.5, 2.0). Thus, those episodes for which a particular averaged Omission Scale rating was 1.0 were agreed upon (by both raters) as containing the RIT; whereas those episodes for which a particular rating was 1.5 were rated differently by each rater. Similarly, those episodes for which a particular rating was 2.0 were agreed upon as omitting the RIT. Table 3 presents the percentages of episodes rated as omitting each of the fifteen RIT on the omission scale.

Eight of the fifteen RIT on the omission scale were rated by both independent raters as ‘omitted’ in at least 80% of the series episodes: Ethnic Activity, Transportation, Black Hair, Dining, Ethnic Food, Politics, Spirituality, and Punishment. Three of the RIT were rated by both independent raters as ‘present’ for a majority of the episodes: Communication, Nonverbal, and Black Love. Finally, four RIT were relatively balanced in their independent ratings agreement: Finance, Black Vernacular, Music, and Black Dress.

In order to address the second research question, zero-order correlations were run for the twenty RIT. Table 4 presents zero-order correlations for the 20 RIT examined in the study, and indicates several relationships between RIT on both scales of the RIMES. The two
highest rated RIT, Assimilation and Humanism were significantly positively related ($r = .17, p = .029$), indicating that episodes rated higher in Assimilation tended to receive higher Humanism ratings. Those episodes rated as high in Assimilation also tended to be rated high in Oppressed Minority ($r = .31, p = .000$). Humanism ($r = .28, p = .000$) and Salience ($r = .43, p = .000$) were also both positively correlated with Oppressed Minority. Several relationships were also observed between the Ideological Scale RIT and Omission Scale RIT. Nationalism was negatively related to Ethnic Activity ($r = -.26, p = .000$). Assimilation was negatively related to Communal Activity ($r = .16, p = .034$) and Punishment ($r = -.20, p = .009$). Humanism was positively related to Finance ($r = .20, p = .000$). Oppressed Minority was negatively related to Ethnic Food ($r = -.15, p = .050$). Salience was negatively related to Politics ($r = -.36, p = .000$).

In order to address the third research question a one factor, between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. Season number (1-8) served as the independent variable in the model and the five Ideological Scale RIT comprised the dependent variables. The Omission Scale RIT were not included in the MANOVA because of the dichotomous nature of those variables and the lack of theoretical linkages between them (for a discussion see Grice & Iwasaki, 2007). Using MANOVA, we were able to examine how the eight seasons differed on a linear combination of the RIT measures. Evaluation of the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and normality assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RIT</th>
<th>$r$</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th>n</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>1.03 (.15)</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>1.99 (.57)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanism</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>2.11 (.50)</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppressed Minority</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.11 (.26)</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>1.10 (.24)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Activity</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>1.91 (.22)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>1.91 (.25)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hair</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>1.95 (.18)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Activity</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>1.39 (.43)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Dining</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>1.77 (.33)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Food</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>1.93 (.23)</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>1.59 (.44)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Vernacular</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>1.51 (.42)</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Verbal</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>1.04 (.16)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>1.87 (.28)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>1.59 (.44)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>1.88 (.28)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Love</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>1.17 (.31)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>1.98 (.12)</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Dress</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>1.59 (.44)</td>
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underlying MANOVA did not reveal any substantial abnormalities, and the \textit{a priori} level of significance was set at .05. The bivariate correlations for the dependent variables across all 194 episodes are presented in Table 4.

Results from the MANOVA were statistically significant according to Wilks’ $\lambda$ (.66) $F(35, 654) = 1.93, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. As can be seen in Figure 1, the eight seasons differed in their RIT patterns. Assimilation $F(7, 159) = 4.95, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$ was the only RIT that reflected significant change (alpha = .05) over the course of the 8 seasons of the program. Bonferroni post-hoc analyses indicated that the Assimilation RIT means for season one ($M = 2.15, SD = .62$), two ($M = 2.26, SD = .48$), and three ($M = 2.23, SD = .57$) were significantly higher than season six ($M = 1.58, SD = .48$). Univariate means, standard deviations and $F$ values are reported in Table 5. Univariate ANOVAS were conducted for the each of the fifteen Omission Scale RIT. Seven of those RIT evidenced significant change over the course of the eight seasons: Ethnic Activity $F(7, 180) = 3.56, p = .001$; Transportation $F(7, 180) = 2.44, p = .020$; Communal Activity $F(7, 180) = 3.00, p = .005$; Ethnic Food $F(7, 180) = 2.36, p = .025$; Finance $F(7, 180) = 2.80, p = .009$; Black Vernacular $F(7, 180) = 5.15, p = .000$; Spirituality $F(7, 180) = 2.15, p = .041$; and Black Love $F(7, 180) = 4.03, p = .000$. (Bonferroni post-hoc analyses indicated multiple different patterns of mean differences across the eight seasons for each of the fifteen Omission Scale RIT, thus these idiosyncratic findings are not reported.) Figure 2 presents the mean rating for each RIT on the Omission Scale by season.

| Table 3. Omission Scale Percentages for Racial Identity Themes |
|------------------------------------------|----|----|----|
| RIT                                      | N  | 1.0 | 1.5 | 2.0 |
| Ethnic Activity                          | 194| 2.1 | 13.1| 84.8|
| Public Transportation                    | 194| 5.8 | 5.8 | 88.5|
| Black Hair                               | 194| 2.1 | 5.2 | 92.7|
| Communal Activity                        | 194| 50.3| 21.5| 28.3|
| Informal Dining                          | 194| 8.9 | 27.2| 63.9|
| Ethnic Food                              | 194| 4.2 | 5.3 | 90.5|
| Finance                                  | 194| 30.9| 20.9| 48.2|
| Black Vernacular                         | 194| 33.2| 31.1| 35.8|
| Nonverbal                                | 194| 93.7| 4.7 | 1.6 |
| Politics                                 | 194| 6.3 | 13.6| 80.1|
| Music                                    | 194| 30.9| 19.4| 49.7|
| Spirituality                             | 194| 6.3 | 11.5| 82.2|
| Black Love                               | 194| 74.3| 17.3| 8.4 |
| Punishment                               | 194| .5  | 3.7 | 95.8|
| Black Dress                              | 194| 31.1| 20.0| 48.9|
**DISCUSSION**

Our first research question was: What Racial Identity Themes (RIT) are present in *The Cosby Show*? Our findings indicate that *Humanism* and *Assimilation* were the highest rated RIT. Nationalism was the lowest rated RIT, indicating that raters consistently found little to no mentioning or representations signifying an intentional exclusion or separation from mainstream American values, institutions, or ideals. With respect to racial identity, *The Cosby Show* message is clear: the assimilation of African Americans into mainstream American society coupled with the acknowledgment of shared elements of humanity without regard for racial difference is a psychological, social, and political priority.

Taken together, these patterns of findings are valuable in the context of discussions about the meaning and implications of *The Cosby Show* for the racial identity of Black viewers. Rather than situate *The Cosby Show* in either of the perspectives outlined in the beginning of this article, the current findings suggest a much more complex and nuanced function of the program under the purview of Black audiences. It seems that *The Cosby Show* functions primarily as a re-definer of Blackness. Whereas previous television programs featuring African Americans made definitive, if arguable, statements about what the Black experience in America is, *The Cosby Show* makes definitive, if arguable statements about what the Black experience should be. This is evidenced by the clear, conspicuous omission of several fundamental elements of the Black experience from everyday portrayals of African American life in *The Cosby Show*. For example, 92.7% of all episodes were rated...
by both raters as making no reference to or representation of hair or hair care. This immediately places a show featuring a family with five Black women (four of them children) in the realm of what Iton (2008) refers to as the Black “fantastic,” a psychological portrait of what Black life should, could, or ought to be; not what it is. In addition, the observed patterns of consistent omissions of Ethnic Activity, Ethnic Food, and Black Spirituality further remove *The Cosby Show* from traditional representations of Black family life in America. The current findings indicate that the Huxtable family managed to rarely engage in activities with cultural value or significance traditionally associated with African American culture (e.g. family reunions), rarely eat foods traditionally associated with African American diets (e.g. soul food), and rarely participate in or endorse a religious or spiritual worldview consistent with the significant, documented influence of the Black Church (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). It is also worth noting that Salience was the second lowest rated RIT, indicating that episodes generally lacked content signifying the importance or relevance of an individual’s racial group membership at any given time.

These findings may be interpreted in the context of Allen and colleagues’ research on media evaluation and orientation (Allen & Bielby, 1979; Allen & Hatchett, 1986; Allen & Thornton, 1992; Jones, 1990), which links racial identity beliefs to television watching variables like preference for Black-oriented programs, in order to understand why audiences choose certain content over other existing options (Davis & Gandy, 1999). One hypothesis is that television viewers seek out information consistent with their own cognitive schemas in order to minimize cognitive dissonance (Zillman & Bryant, 1985). If we assume intentionality on the part of the producers of *The Cosby Show* than we would predict that the RIT contained and expressed in the program would be consistent with views held by a
Our second research question asked whether there were any relationships between the RIT in series episodes. The two highest rated RIT, *Assimilation* and *Humanism* were positively related, indicating that episodes rated higher in assimilation tended to receive higher humanism ratings. The observed positive relationship between *Assimilation* and *Oppressed Minority* is interesting, in that it indicates a coupling of two ideologies generally found to be positively correlated in previous empirical studies measuring these constructs in individuals (e.g. Sellers, Chavous & Cooke, 1998; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997. (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen (2008), however, found a negative relationship between these two constructs in a teenage sample.) *Humanism* and *Salience* were also both positively correlated with *Oppressed Minority* Only *Nationalism* (the lowest rated RIT) was uncorrelated with any of the other ideological dimensions.

One possible explanation for the observed relationships between RIT in *The Cosby*
Show hinges on the documented use of media representations of African Americans (and other racial minorities in the United States) to influence public opinion about political and social issues (Iton, 2008). These “racial projects,” which have been defined as any “effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56) have traditionally used stereotypic images of Blackness (Davis & Gandy, 1999) to actualize macro-level racial-political agendas. Recall that Assimilation and Oppressed Minority were positively correlated. Again, if we assume intentionality on the part of The Cosby Show producers, this pattern may have been intentionally constructed in order to broaden the assimilationist thrust of The Cosby Show not only to African Americans, but also to other oppressed minority groups. The Assimilation RIT could have been intentionally used to buffer Oppressed Minority ideology sentiments. In other words, any potentially subversive “us vs. them” messages communicated by The Cosby Show were effectively mitigated or buffered by representations/symbols of assimilation. This “buffer hypothesis” is based on and consistent with analyses which incorporate media/communication studies, psychological, and political science frameworks to articulate the role of media in the on-going internal colonization of African Americans (Ball, 2010, 2011; Brown, 2010; Ture & Hamilton, 1967; Tabb, 1970).

Our final question was: Did RIT represented in The Cosby Show episodes change over the course of the series? The current findings indicate relative stability in the majority of RIT measured. Because the Ideology Scale RIT are theoretically conceptually related (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997), we employed a MANOVA approach to assessing change over the course of the television series. This approach allowed for examination of ways that RIT can be combined to discriminate among the eight seasons. Although the Ideology Scale model was statistically significant, only one of the five RIT on the Ideology Scale of the RIMES (i.e. Assimilation) evidenced significant change over the life of the program. Similarly, although seven of the fifteen RIT measured on the Omission Scale evidenced at least one significant mean difference between the eight seasons, they did so in peculiar patterns that prevented conceptually meaningful analysis of how these constructs differed over time. Thus, although there was evidence of change in various Omission Scale RIT, this change seemed to be idiosyncratic indicating that the program did little to stray away from its ratings-winning formula for almost an entire decade.

Study Limitations

The current findings need to be interpreted with caution, for several reasons. First, although we were able to identify and extract RIT from The Cosby Show, a quantitative approach to examining RIT may have disadvantages. Each episode presented a tremendous amount of material to be rated (e.g. conversations, scenes, facial expressions of the actors, non-verbal communication, props, scenery, etc) and any attempt at quantifying variables for analysis requires data reduction. For example, the RIMES Ideology Scale required raters to
reduce their overall assessment of episodes along each RIT down to a low-medium-high rating. It is likely that a tremendous amount of nuance and subtlety was lost in this process. Such a focus on the quantitative may overshadow potential for qualitative approaches to reveal raters’ actual thoughts, feelings, and emotions about episode content. Secondly, the very nature of television media lends itself to subjective interpretation. Unlike text-based content, television produces a multi-dimensional viewing experience for observers, and introduces the likelihood that attentional differences (either between individuals or between the same individual at different times) will contribute to observational measurement error. For example, a scene involving dialogue between three characters has at least three different dynamic focal points, in addition to what is happening in the background (Sims, Cannady, Toms & Shumpert, 2011). In order to minimize observer subjectivity due to attentional differences, raters were encouraged to view each episode in its entirety, in a quiet setting; where maximum attention could be devoted to viewing the episode. Moreover, the decision to use the episode as the unit of analysis (as opposed to scenes, characters, etc.) was made in order to provide raters with comprehensive views of character behavior in as many different scenes and settings as possible.

**Directions for Future Research**

Taken together, these findings offer a concrete basis for evaluating racial identity-relevant information in *The Cosby Show*. Additionally, they represent an important step in on-going research efforts to use social science theory and methodology to examine and analyze media along socially relevant dimensions & constructs (e.g. race, gender). This line of research is well underway, with recent empirical content analysis studies examining psychological constructs in rap music lyrics (Sims & Foster, 2011); defiance in popular music (Knobloch-Westerwick, Musto, & Shaw, 2008) and verbal aggression in television shows (Banerjee, Greene, Krcmar, & Bagdasarov, 2009). The current findings highlight the need for interdisciplinary approaches to contextualizing empirical psychological findings, which may relate to sociological variables beyond those studied directly. For example, the RIT identified and extracted in the current study may be related to any number of outside factors, such as political events and climate during the series, consumer trends or demands by advertisers, other competing television programs, etc. Additional research is needed in order to objectively move beyond simple descriptions of program content to situated, contextualized understandings of racialized media’s myriad effects on viewers.

**REFERENCES**


MOVING FROM THEORIZING TO APPLICATION:
PREDICTING AUDIENCE ENJOYMENT
OF TV FORMATS

LEO W. JEFFRES, CHERYL CAMPENELLA BRACKEN,
DAVID ATKIN AND KIMBERLY NEUENDORF

Uses and gratifications link media behaviors to people's needs; the effects literature links media exposure patterns to audience behaviors; and other research focuses on message construction in organizations. One of the missing links is content theory—how patterns of media content evolve. This article links audiences to content by exploring a model that predicts audience enjoyment of the relatively recent television format, “reality TV,” and other more established formats. Drawing on the uses and gratifications theory and results of a survey, we found that the collective audience concurred with observers in identifying the major defining characteristics of the format. TV uses and gratifications were joined by two more targeted scales-parasocial uses and gratifications, and experiencing viewing as non-mediation (presence)-in predicting enjoyment of reality programs and 14 other TV formats. Results showed that enjoyment of the reality TV format was positively related to more uses and gratifications dimensions than any of the more established formats, but it is the addition of the more focused, parasocial uses and gratifications that allows us to more accurately gauge our target, enjoyment of reality TV programming.

Keywords: television formats, audience analysis, uses and gratifications

The rapidly evolving media environment is intensifying the pace of experimentation with new TV program formats. After decades of a stable “quiet life” of oligopolistic

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competition—which saw a handful of formats dominate network fare (e.g., Litman, 1994)—programmers began diversifying their program menus after 1990 (Adams, 1993; Grant, 1994; Lin, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Mittell, 2004; Newcomb, 2007). These “changing menus” have been stimulated, in part, by the rapid growth in channels and the volume of time which must be “filled” (e.g., Abelman & Atkin, 2000, 2011). Competition dictates need, but the larger menu also allows for professional creativity.

Communication scholars face theoretical as well as practical considerations when examining the media forms that emerge in this new environment. Where do television formats come from? A sociological answer is found in the “production of culture” literature (e.g., Custen, 1986; Tuchman, 1983), but that tradition often bypasses the role of audiences, which is important for an explanation from a communication perspective. A long history of film scholarship situates the development of genres in a tacit relationship between audience interests and predictable content forms (Gehring, 1988; Grant, 1977; Schatz, 1981). While genre films have been the target of scholarly debate and even prejudice (Braudy, 2002; Derrida, 1980), they invoke past contents that provide a comfort zone for viewers, answering to their past experiences and meeting certain expectations for viewing. When audiences confront “new” forms, they use cues introducing the program to make inferences about the setting, topic and structure, activating inferences based on past experience. As more examples of a new format appear, audiences develop stronger and clearer expectations that direct their viewing and selection (e.g., Lin, 1996). Formats from the past appear new when recast with current popular culture, problems and language (White, 1985). This processing activity by audiences has been linked to the uses and gratifications that are delivered by the viewing and sought in subsequent viewing across time; thus, content and form are linked to the sustaining functions from the format. Beliefs about media are important in expectancy value theory for gratifications research (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985), where gratifications are strongly related to beliefs about media attributes.

One area ripe for this application lies in predicting audience media behaviors, such as their enjoyment of television formats. As a “practical target,” such investigation makes great sense because of its economic ramifications. Although media behaviors can be instrumental as well as expressive, for the most part we can view media behaviors as optional uses of free time that fulfill particular uses and gratifications. And it is this functional theory that offers

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1 The concept of a metaphorical “contract” between media producers and spectators extends beyond film to genres in television (Kaminsky with Mahan, 1985) and other cultural products (Berger, 1992).

2 Creative professionals in communication respond as well to audiences and their peers, copying, changing and evolving formats that solidify a core “definition” or blur the boundaries with other formats. Over time, formats represent successful compromises between creative producers (the collection of encoders — writers, directors, producers) and public expectations. New formats generally represent combinations of older formats, or subtle changes in the elements associated with an existing one (e.g., Wood, 2004).
As the format has grown, it has merged with other formats, generally with the competitive element center stage: talent competitions (e.g., “American Idol”), modeling and fashion (e.g., “Project Runway”), dancing competitions (e.g., “Dancing with the Stars”), and weight loss (e.g., “The Biggest Loser”). The American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences took notice and added several categories to the Emmy competition, giving awards to the “outstanding reality-competition program,” the “outstanding reality program,” and “outstanding host of a reality or reality-competition program.”

Work on social cognition suggests that audiences find content more meaningful if it is relevant to preexisting mental structures that render the information interpretable, whether it be in the form of a TV program (e.g., Liebes & Katz, 1990) or movie (Shively, 1992). The resulting audience schemas are particularly salient for contents that reflect collective preoccupations (or “chronically activated mental structures,” in psychological parlance) (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 263).

The “reality TV” format emerged in one form in the late 1970s, with programs that featured people engaging in individual activities that were novel, or attempts at setting records for the sake of audience enjoyment (Rushdie, 2001). After the appearance of the PBS series, “An American Family,” in 1973, the “reality TV” format reemerged. Although “non-fiction,” the format disappeared and differs from the one that assumed the same label in recent years with the advent of “Survivor,” a program so successful in generating audiences that imitators followed and the evolution of a new format began. Programs to follow kept the ingredients of exotic locales and competition amongst a cast of “real people” (non-actors), e.g., “The Amazing Race,” as well as those that used more mundane locations and created contests in confined quarters, e.g., “Big Brother” (Civitillo, 2001). The rewards grew as contestants sought a job with one of Donald Trump’s companies in “The Apprentice.” As creativity flowed with new wrinkles on the form, competition shifted from solely monetary rewards to personal relationships (“The Bachelor” and “Average Joe”) and actors replaced “real people” in some versions (“Celebrity Mole”). MTV produced its own set of “reality TV” programs (Newcomb, 2007), targeting younger audiences with programs featuring young singles living together (“Real World”) and competing in a survival contest (“Road Rules”), as cable targeted teens with a survivor format (“Endurance”).}

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3As the format has grown, it has merged with other formats, generally with the competitive element center stage: talent competitions (e.g., “American Idol”), modeling and fashion (e.g., “Project Runway”), dancing competitions (e.g., “Dancing with the Stars”), and weight loss (e.g., “The Biggest Loser”). The American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences took notice and added several categories to the Emmy competition, giving awards to the “outstanding reality-competition program,” the “outstanding reality program,” and “outstanding host of a reality or reality-competition program.”
Clearly, the academy has made a distinction based on a competitive dimension. One website devoted to the format lists more than 400 programs — using a liberal definition — and counts seasons as unique (http://www.realityshows.com). Mass communication scholars focusing on content structures have expanded our understanding of the ingredients that make up what is called “reality TV” in the popular press. Drawing on results of a focus group, Hall (2003) found six dimensions on which reality programs were evaluated: plausibility, typicality, factuality, emotional involvement, narrative consistency and perceptual persuasiveness. Nabi et al. (2003) conducted a Q-sort among 38 city residents, finding that they distinguished reality-based TV shows from most other major programming formats. In a second study using a survey, the authors questioned the role of voyeurism as an appeal for watching reality television shows and also found that regular viewers receive different and more varied gratifications from their viewing than do periodic viewers. They recommend investigating dimensions distinguishing different types of reality-based programming. Jones (2003) observed that viewers of “Big Brother” in the United Kingdom have “personalized reality contracts” with the show. Andrejevic (2002) suggests that the same program represents the “democratization of celebrity” status for viewers. Fetveit (1999) suggests that the proliferation of reality TV expresses a longing for a lost touch with reality.4

Despite the extensive scholarly attention paid to the evolution of media forms, Biocca (1991) and others have criticized the dearth of theory in this area. Borrowing from film tradition and its use of “genre” to refer to a predetermined structure (e.g., Hall, 2006), we can identify television formats as following a “form” that has prior significance to audiences. This is significant because it means viewers have expectations guiding their media seeking and selection.

4The list of programs that fit comfortably into the “reality TV” format continues to grow and the ingredients that help audiences to identify the form are becoming clearer. We conducted a focus group composed largely of those in the target audience for reality television programs, age 18-30. Although not all of the participants watched reality TV programs regularly, all were familiar with current programs and had opinions and sufficient information about their content to participate. The following characteristics emerged in a collective definition, several of which are consistent with results of the research cited above: *competition—for participation in a game of attrition, for “end-game” prizes; *unscripted but planned behavior—participants follow rules but their words are not scripted in the sense that “fictional” media are; *participants are non-actors—most participants are drawn from a pool of “real” people considered by producers. In some versions, all participants are youthful, to be consistent with the program’s competitive theme (e.g., “Average Joe”), but an effort to achieve diversity is made on most, allowing for more of the audience to find targets of identification; *limited rather than open-ended time frames—although the length of programs varies, each is a limited run, generally a matter of weeks or months. The format thus entails only a modest time commitment on the part of audiences, allows for non-actors to participate without disrupting their lives inordinately, and it allows for a tempo of competition that sustains novelty in competition and relationships. This also means that “seasons” are self-contained, with subsequent years featuring new locales, new participants, and new activities and rewards (also see Baruh, 2011; Nabi, 2007).
Relatively few studies have looked at audience perceptions of film or TV forms (e.g., Austin & Gordon, 1987; Glass & Waterman, 1988; Hall, 2003, 2006). Jeffres, Neuendorf and Giles (1990) found that a broad range of college students varied in their agreement with critics on what constituted popular film genre and television formats. Their study showed that audiences can articulate their expectations but they do not conform to some uniform critical standard. Although the number and nature of formats varies across studies — and is theoretically unlimited — most academic studies identify between six and twenty categories (Abelman & Atkin, 2011; Lin, 1995a). These formats are not simply a taxonomic device for researchers and practitioners, however, as studies show that audiences can identify distinct attributes associated with a given category (e.g., situation comedy vs. action-adventure). Nabi et al. (2003) also supports this notion with the television reality format, the consumption of which we address in the context of audience viewing motivations.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

Although uses and gratifications theory also figures prominently in effects studies, the functional approach is one of the few focusing on media behaviors as dependent variables, the target of explanation and prediction. Accordingly, people engage in media use for particular uses and gratifications derived. Traditionally, uses and gratifications can be traced to an individual’s need structure, available media and alternative non-media sources of need satisfaction (Dimmick, McCain, & Bolton, 1979; Perse & Rubin, 1990).

The uses and gratifications literature identifies several dimensions. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) offer a typology of gratifications: diversion (emotional release and escape from the daily routine and problems), personal relationships (including parasocial companionship and social utility, which includes family viewing, viewing to meet the standards of a group and viewing for ideas, topics, things that feed into interpersonal conversations), personal identity (e.g., self evaluation), reality exploration (for ideas about personal concerns), value reinforcement, and surveillance (McDonald & Glynn, 1984). Dobos and Dimmick (1988) provide a thorough summary of the dimensions of gratifications which have emerged from studies: surveillance—to keep in touch with international, national, state and local events; knowledge—to get information about events, issues, the government, things affecting one’s family, to help make decisions; escape/diversion—to fill time, for relief from boredom, to divert attention from personal problems; excitement—for stimulation; interpersonal utility—for things to talk about and material to influence others.

Since we’re focusing on non-instrumental uses of the media, we need to pay attention to alternative sources of satisfaction and leisure-time interests; similar dimensions have been identified as underlying motivations for leisure—self-expression/achievement, education/information, interpersonal companionship, relaxation/diversion, physiological/health, sophistication/intellectual, and beauty/aesthetic (see Beard & Ragheb, 1980; Bishop, 1970; McKechnie, 1974; Pierce, 1980; Witt, 1971). In general, studies have used the full range of
uses and gratifications to predict media behaviors. Following this tradition, we will ask the following research question:

RQ1: What uses and gratifications predict enjoyment of reality TV programs and other formats?

Uses and Gratifications and Media Formats

Particularly popular in the 1970s and 1980s, the substantial literature on TV uses and gratifications drew fewer contributions after 1990 (see Kang & Atkin, 1999; Lin, 1996). With a body of results showing the utility of uses and gratifications, scholars moved on to other important social concerns—e.g., new media uses, or media effects in various domains. Since the same content could fulfill different uses and gratifications for different people and different content could perform the same uses (functional equivalence), inquiry seemed to have no solid anchor within the theory (Lin et al., 2002). Nonetheless, scholars have tried to link uses and gratifications to specific media content or formats. Wicks (1989) found that five dimensions of uses and gratifications explained viewing television news (also see Henningham, 1985; Levy, 1979), Livingstone (1988) linked escapism and other gratifications to watching soap operas, Brown, Campbell and Fischer (1986) found teenagers watching music videos for excitement and mood control, and Duncan and Brummett (1989) linked voyeurism, fetishism and narcissism gratifications to watching sports.

The present analysis incorporates another format—reality television — to the list, one that is evolving but has been around long enough for us to view the “defining process” and link enjoyment of the format to the larger uses and gratifications literature. We argue that one reason that the uses and gratification literature has been insufficient in predicting audience media behavior patterns is the rather stationary level of theorizing. Scholars need to move down from the major uses and gratifications dimensions to more specific functions tied to the format structure. Although Nabi et al. (2003) question the importance of “voyeurism” as an appeal for watching reality programming, other commentators (e.g., Civitillo, 2001; Shugart, 2006) suggest the contrary, that the current “reality” format appeals to the audiences’ voyeuristic interest in seeing how personal relationships endure in competitive situations where drama magnified (Baruh, 2009).

Such competition involves audiences, non-actors that allow for identification with participants, and unscripted behavior that could be vicariously acted out by viewers (e.g. Lundy, Ruth & Park, 2008; Newcomb, 2007). Hall (2006) found that a key audience appeal for reality programs was the perception that a cast member’s behavior was a reflection of their own will and personality which, in turn, have consequences for the show’s outcome. This is naturally linked to a more specific subset of uses and gratifications theory, parasocial communication, which says that people often establish personal relationships with the strangers they encounter on the screen. The illusion by audience members that they are
engaged in a face-to-face relationship with someone in the media (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Houlberg, 1984; Rubin & McHugh, 1987) is more easily linked to viewing reality TV shows than watching programs with actors (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). While people may fantasize that they know celebrities, there is an enormous status gap, but the non-actors in “Survivor” or “Big Brother” are drawn from the audience and are more accessible for relationships. Indeed, the use of the Internet for audiences to pose questions reinforces that opportunity for audience interaction with program personalities. We thus posit that:

H1: Parasocial uses and gratifications will be positively related to enjoyment of reality fare.

Other television formats that share some of the defining ingredients of reality TV also may be linked to parasocial communication, e.g., news (Houlberg, 1984; Levy, 1979; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Thus, we pose the following:

RQ2: What television formats will be positively related to parasocial uses and gratifications?

Hall (2006) found that humor and unpredictability were key appeals of reality fare, which contribute to greater audience suspense and to greater involvement as well as perceived realism. Given that reality programs like “Survivor” have been likened to a form of gladiatorial combat, where audience interest is piqued by the realism of dramatic conflicts (e.g., Rushdie, 2001), then perceptual dimensions may also determine other entertainment gratifications sought.

**Presence**

A relatively new concept in the literature is the notion of presence, which says that audiences in some situations view programming as a non-mediated experience or as an illusion of non-mediation (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Dupagne (1999), for instance, posited a link between a desire for realism (e.g., nature programs) and adoption of video technologies that are rich in presence (i.e., high definition television). This notion was supported by Bracken, Pettyp, Guha and Rubenking (2010), who found that viewers who reported experiencing a higher level of presence were more likely to report desiring larger televisions. Changes in TV pacing interacted with screen size to impact viewers’ experiences of presence with larger screens and slower-paced content, leading to higher levels of presence being reported (Bracken & Botta, 2010). Additionally, levels of presence sensations have been tied to media content (Dillon, Keogh, Freeman, & Davidoff, 2000) and to content preference (Bracken & Atkin, 2004). Those who experience “virtual” relationships with the non-actors in reality programming (i.e., para-social communication) also have the potential to experience viewing as a non-mediated, or “real” experience. Thus, we posit:
H2: Reporting a sensation of presence will be positively related to enjoyment of reality fare.

For various other formats in question, we ask whether audiences who are more likely to engage in such non-mediated viewing are more likely to enjoy watching reality TV; in particular:

RQ3: What other formats will be positively related to presence?

**Building a Path Model**

Efforts to predict enjoyment of a particular form of media content must take into account the larger context (see Figure 1). As noted above, influences on people’s uses and gratification include alternative leisure options and the media available, which we posit will be positively related to social status. These also have been linked to different patterns of needs, which will not be built into the model employed here. One’s media environment is often viewed as merely the size of the menu (access via cable/satellite to a broader selection), but it also includes one’s affinity for the medium in question, television. These attributes will be related to uses and gratifications fulfilled by TV viewing which, in turn, predict the presence experience and specific parasocial gratifications obtained. Parasocial gratifications are worthy of separate consideration because they’ve been extensively linked to enjoyment of reality TV—given its interactive nature — and we expect that to be the case here as well.

**METHOD**

A survey was conducted in a major metropolitan region of the Midwest, using a probability sample of residents and interviews conducted with a CATI (computer-aided telephone interviewing) system. Telephone numbers were selected through random-digit dialing procedures. The I.R.B.-approved survey was presented as a general poll with an emphasis on entertainment. A total of 314 interviews were completed, with a cooperation rate of about 40 percent. Variables were operationalized as follows.

**Defining Reality Television**

Respondents were told: “In the past couple years a TV format called ‘reality shows’ has become popular. Examples include: “Survivor,” “The Amazing Race,” “Big Brother,” “Paradise Hotel,” and “Temptation Island.” “If you had to describe what these programs have in common to someone else, what would you say?” Interviewers probed twice.
Enjoy Watching Reality Television Programs and Other Formats

Respondents were asked to use a 0-10 scale to indicate how much they enjoy watching different types of TV shows, where 0 means one dislikes it very much, 5 is neutral and 10 means one likes it very much. The formats were assessed in the following order: situation comedies, game shows, crime dramas, medical dramas, news magazine shows, reality TV shows, sports programs, movies, science fiction programs, afternoon soaps or serials, talk shows, cartoons, musical programs, regular local news, and national TV news.

Parasocial Uses and Gratifications

After the item asking respondents what the reality shows have in common, they were told the following: “Now I’m going to read a few statements about these types of programs and I’d like you to use a 0-10 scale to tell me how much you agree with each one, where 0 means you completely disagree, 5 is neutral or you don’t know, and 10 means you completely agree.” The statements were: “People who participate in these shows seem like real folks, not actors”; “I can relate to the people in these shows”; “Eventually I feel like I’d know these folks personally if I ran into them somewhere”; “It’s fun watching people cope or compete naturally, without a script”; “I look forward to watching my favorite reality programs and try to figure out who’s going to win.” Responses to all five items were standardized and the scores summed up for a measure of parasocial uses and gratifications.
Moving from Theorizing to Application: Predicting Audience Enjoyment of TV Formats

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derived from watching reality television programs (Parasocial U&G alpha = .85). The items are modeled after those used in a parasocial interaction scale designed to fit news broadcasts (see Rubin, Palmgreen & Sypher, 1994, pp. 273-277).

**Presence Viewing Experience**

Respondents were asked to use the same 0-10 scale to tell how much they agreed with two items tapping the viewing experience as “non-mediated” reality. The items were: “When I watch reality TV shows, I felt like I came back to the “real world” after a journey;” “When I watch reality shows the TV creates a new world for me, and that world suddenly disappears when the broadcast ends.” Respondents were then asked to use a slightly different 0-10 scale for four other items. Respondents were told: “Now, I’d like you to use a 0 to 10 scale to tell how often each of these statements applies to you when you watch reality TV shows, with 0 meaning never and 10 meaning always.” The four items were: “I feel like I’m in the world television has created;” “I feel like my body is in the room but my mind is inside the world created by television;” “The TV-generated world seems more real or present for me than the real world;” “The TV-generated world seems like something I saw rather than somewhere I visited.” Responses to all six items were standardized and the scores summed up for a measure of presence (Presence alpha = .80; see Lombard & Ditton, 2001).

**Uses and gratifications sought for television viewing**

Items used in past studies were selected to tap each of the dimensions identified by scholars that include McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) and Dobos and Dimmick (1988). Scored on a 0-10 scale, the items measuring uses and gratifications can be found in Table 1; responses were standardized and summed for a scale (TV U&G alpha = .85).

**Enjoyment of Leisure Options**

Respondents were asked to use a 0-10 scale to tell “how much you enjoy doing each of a series of leisure-time activities, including watching television, where 0 means you completely dislike doing this, 5 is neutral and 10 means you like doing this very much.” The leisure options included the following: “going out to see movies in a theater”; “going to plays presented on stage at the [City] Playhouse”; “in [downtown theater district] or elsewhere in [City]”; “going to professional sporting events such as the [professional football team]”; “[professional baseball team]”; or “[professional basketball team]”; “going to local festivals or public events such as the air show, rib fest, and the Grand Prix”; “going to concerts and musical events at [the orchestra] Hall”; “[summer orchestra outdoor
Table 1: Relationships between Enjoyment of TV Formats and Uses and Gratifications

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<tr>
<th>Surveillance:</th>
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<th>Game Shows</th>
<th>Crime Dramas</th>
<th>Medical Dramas</th>
<th>Movies</th>
<th>Science Fiction</th>
<th>Soaps/Serials</th>
<th>Cartoons</th>
<th>Musicals</th>
<th>Reality TV Shows</th>
<th>News Magazine Shows</th>
<th>TV Talk Shows</th>
<th>Local TV News</th>
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<td>.15**</td>
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Note: #=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001
Moving from Theorizing to Application: Predicting Audience Enjoyment of TV Formats

Leo W. Jeffres et al.

entertainment venue]; “[downtown theater district]”; “in the [downtown entertainment district] or at local clubs”; “visiting local museums; going out to dinner or having drinks with family or friends; getting together and socializing with friends”; “reading books and magazines; listening to music on the radio, records, CDs or tapes”; “relaxing while watching television; actively playing sports with other people, such as golf, basketball, baseball”; “other sports such as fishing, swimming, hiking, jogging, walking or exercising for leisure”; “playing games on the Internet or Xbox, Nintendo, or Playstation; surfing the Internet for leisure”; “going to local theme parks; shopping on a weekend afternoon for leisure”; “traveling outside the area.” The item for watching television was separated out as a measure of affinity for television as a leisure-time activity and the standardized score used as a variable (Affinity for TV). Responses to the other leisure options were standardized and summed up for a measure of enjoyment of other leisure options (Other Leisure alpha = .80).

Social Categories

Conventional measures were used to measure age, education, household income, gender, marital status and ethnicity.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

An open-ended question asked respondents to describe what reality shows have in common. Responses showed that the collective audience identified three of the four key ingredients of the format: competition, unscripted but planned behavior, and the use of non-actors. They failed to mention limited rather than open-ended time frames as a characteristic, perhaps because subsequent “seasons” of “Survivor” or “Big Brother” and frequent reruns of programs such as “Road Rules” obscured this factor. In some instances, the number of original installments of reality shows comes close to those of other formats.

Responses included substantial numbers who said they had not watched the programs and didn’t know (13 percent of the sample), while a fourth of the sample merely stated their dislike of the format using various terms. And 12 percent used the format’s defining term for a reverse characterization—saying the programs were unrealistic. These findings speak to the dimensions of plausibility, typicality and factuality that Hall’s (2003) focus group used to evaluate such fare.

Of the remaining 155 respondents who offered features, 34 percent mentioned competition of one sort or another, many citing money, challenges, survival contests, and
One respondent said people acted “like gladiators” while another noted that features portrayed were generally just “everyday life.” One respondent took note of the locales, saying that the shows placed “real people in unreal situations,” perhaps a nod to the “Fear Factor” or the “Amazing Race,” which have contests in exotic or what appear to be dangerous situations.

The sample also saw other features as common to reality television programs. Some five percent or more mentioned an emphasis on relationships and friendships, including fighting and strategizing. An equal number cited an emphasis on sex, love and vulgarity, with several references to low morals. Smaller numbers cited the following: the programs are dramatic, suspenseful; the programs are funny; the programs are mean spirited, exploitative and degrading to participants; the programs try to shock, act crazy; the programs are inexpensive to produce; the programs become predictable, with repetitive patterns of behavior.

The first research question asked what uses and gratifications predict enjoyment of reality TV programs and other television formats. As Table 1 shows, the uses and

---

1One respondent said people acted “like gladiators” while another noted that features portrayed were generally just “everyday life.”

2One respondent took note of the locales, saying that the shows placed “real people in unreal situations,” perhaps a nod to the “Fear Factor” or the “Amazing Race,” which have contests in exotic or what appear to be dangerous situations.
Moving from Theorizing to Application: Predicting Audience Enjoyment of TV Formats
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gratifications sustaining enjoyment of particular formats are consistent with the literature (see Jeffres, 1994; Rubin et al., 1994), with surveillance, knowledge and interpersonal utility uses being fulfilled by “actuality” programming—news magazines, talk shows, local and national TV news. Formats representing “fiction” are enjoyed for escape and diversion, excitement and personal identity. There are some deviations from these patterns: musicals attract audiences for surveillance, knowledge and interpersonal utility but not escape, excitement or personal identity, and sports programming serve all functions except surveillance and knowledge. And the format that is the focus of this project provided the strongest pattern of correlations between enjoyment and uses and gratifications, suggesting that reality TV cuts across all gratifying dimension and uses.

A factor analysis of the television uses and gratifications7 yielded two factors that roughly correspond to an affective dimension (stimulation, escape from personal problems, relief from boredom, to socialize with others, to fill time, to change my mood and to cope with stress) and a cognitive dimension (to keep in touch with what’s going on, for facts and opinions interesting others, to find out what’s going on in world, to help make a decision or learn something, and to challenge me or make me think; see Table 1). Interestingly, watching television for things to talk about—the interpersonal-mass communication linking use—loaded on both dimensions. When people’s factor scores were used as variables to reduce the data, we find additional confirmation of the patterns, with the “affective” uses and gratifications dimension correlating with enjoyment of sitcoms, crime dramas, sports programs, movies, science fiction, afternoon serials, and cartoons. The “cognitive” uses dimension correlated with enjoyment of news magazines, local news, national news and musical programs. And both dimensions correlated with enjoyment of four formats—reality

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7Principal components analysis, with Varimax rotation, suggested that the affective dimensions: (1) accounted for 29.9% of the variance explained, as compared to 22.3% for the cognitive dimension factor (2). The factors can be summarized as follow (with full information available from the authors):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rotated Component Matrix (*)</th>
<th>Component 1</th>
<th>Component 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to keep in touch w/what’s going on</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for stimulation, excitement</td>
<td>.651</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to escape from personal problems</td>
<td>.747</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for relief from boredom</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td>-.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for facts, opinions that interest others</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to socialize, spend time w/people also watching</td>
<td>.525</td>
<td>.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to find out what’s going on in world</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to help make a decision or learn something</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to fill time</td>
<td>.690</td>
<td>-.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for things to talk about</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.468</td>
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<tr>
<td>to change my mood</td>
<td>.712</td>
<td>.218</td>
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<td>to challenge me, make me think</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>.658</td>
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<tr>
<td>to cope with stress</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>.209</td>
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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax, Kaiser Normalization.

*: Rotation converged in 3 iterations.
TV shows, talk shows, medical dramas and game shows.

The first hypothesis predicted that parasocial uses and gratifications would be positively related to enjoyment of reality television programs. The hypothesis was strongly supported, as the correlation between enjoyment of reality TV and the parasocial scale was .68 (p<.001). The second research question asked whether enjoyment of other television formats would be correlated with parasocial uses and gratifications. As Table 2 shows, the parasocial uses and gratifications scale is positively related to enjoyment of all but three of the television formats: talk shows, local news, national news, sitcoms, game shows, crime dramas, medical dramas, movies, science fiction programs, afternoon soaps/serials, and musicals.

The second hypothesis predicted that presence viewing would be positively related to enjoyment of reality television programs. This too is confirmed (r=.41, p<.001). The third research question asked whether other television formats would be positively related to presence. As Table 2 shows, the pattern of correlations is similar to that for parasocial uses and gratifications, except that presence is unrelated to viewing news, sitcoms, sports programs, cartoons and musicals. Thus, those who experience TV viewing as a “non-mediated” phenomenon are more likely to enjoy watching reality TV programs, talk shows, game shows, movies, crime and medical dramas, science fiction and afternoon serials.

Moving beyond simple bivariate correlations, it’s useful to assess the extent to which we can predict enjoyment of viewing reality TV programs and other formats. That is, we need to move beyond finding statistically-significant correlations to accounting for levels of variance in our dependent measures that have practical consequences in applied situations. Thus, we considered regression models to see to what extent we could “predict” enjoyment of reality television programs and other formats. Since social categories are an alternative source of variance in media behavior decisions, those relationships were examined first. Except for gender, there is a pattern of negative relationships between social categories and enjoyment of reality TV, parasocial uses and gratifications and the scale tapping presence. Thus, younger, less educated, less wealthy, unmarried and non-whites are more likely to enjoy watching reality TV programs, are more likely to seek out parasocial uses and gratifications in their viewing, and are more likely to experience a sense of nonmediation while viewing.

Our analysis used hierarchical regression to predict enjoyment of reality TV programs, with social categories entered first (age, education, household income, gender, marital status, ethnicity), then the set of 13 uses and gratifications items for viewing, and then the two scales tapping parasocial uses and gratifications and the presence experience. As Table 3 shows, social categories account for 17.5 percent of the variance in enjoyment of reality TV programs, with TV uses and gratifications explaining an additional 8 percent — and the two parasocial and presence scales another 17.5 percent — for a total of 43 percent of the variance. When the same model is employed but including only the parasocial scale alone in the third step, parasocial uses and gratifications still account for 16.6 percent of the
additional variance (R = .65; R Square = .424; F=8.9, p<.001). And when the social
categories are excluded in a subsequent regression model, the 13 TV uses and gratifications
items and the two parasocial and presence scales still account for 38.3 percent of the variance
(R = .62; R Square = .383; F=10.9, p<.001); in this analysis, the two parasocial and presence
scales account for 24.7 percent of the variance beyond the 13.7 percent already accounted
for by the 13 TV uses and gratifications.

The analyses to this point suggest a fairly successful application of the uses and
gratifications literature — the general dimensions and the more specific parasocial and
presence measures — in predicting enjoyment of a novel format. We proceeded to employ
the same models to see whether the same pattern would be found in predicting more
established TV formats. As Table 4 shows, in only two instances does the amount of
variance explained exceed 30 percent, and those are for enjoyment of the two news
programs. Most models explain between a fifth and a fourth of the variance in enjoyment of
the established formats. A closer examination shows that the set of 13 TV uses and
gratifications are as successful or more so in explaining enjoyment of the established formats
as they were in accounting for the 8.3 percent of variance in enjoyment of reality TV
programs. In a couple instances, particularly the “actuality” formats centering around news,
the general uses and gratifications dimensions are more successful, accounting for a fifth of
the variance in enjoyment.

Since television viewing is generally an expressive behavior that competes with
alternative leisure options, we proceeded to consider a path model that incorporates leisure
options as well as an individual’s affinity for television as a leisure-time activity (see Fig.
1). In the overall model, social categories influence affinity for television as a leisure option
as well as enjoyment of other leisure options, but there is no direct path to enjoyment of
reality television from the demographic factors. Enjoyment of TV is correlated with the other
leisure options (beta = .19, p<.01) and both of these have positive paths to the mean

| Table 3: Predicting Enjoyment of Reality TV Programs |
|-----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|
| Social categories | R = .42 | R Sq. | F Change | Standardized |
|                  | Change |         |       | Betas          |
|                  | .175   | 8.8    | p<.001 | Age (-.27***)
|                  |        |        |        | Ethnicity (-.16**) |
| TV Uses & Gratifications | .51   | .083   | 2.0   | p<.018 | Age (-.27***)
|                  |        |        |        | Ethnicity (-.12#)
|                  |        |        |        | Find out what’s going on (.15#)
|                  |        |        |        | For things to talk about (.20**) |
| Parasocial/Presence | .66    | .175   | 36.4  | p<.001 | Age (-.18**)
|                  |        |        |        | For opinions, facts (.14*)
|                  |        |        |        | To find out what’s going on (.13#)
|                  |        |        |        | Parasocial (.42***)
|                  |        |        |        | Presence (.12*) |

R=.66, R Sq. =.43, F= 8.56 p<.001
Table 4: Predicting Enjoyment of Other TV Formats

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Sq. Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation Comedies</strong></td>
<td>R=.52; R Square=.267</td>
<td>F=4.08, p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>Social categories</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>7.00 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2.76 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>.52</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.71 n.s.</td>
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<td><strong>Game Shows</strong></td>
<td>R=.48; R Square=.233</td>
<td>F=3.40, p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>Social categories</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>2.84 p&lt;.002</td>
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<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
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<td>.12</td>
<td>2.64 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>7.80 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td><strong>Crime Dramas</strong></td>
<td>R=.46; R Square=.203</td>
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<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
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<td>.80 n.s.</td>
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<td><strong>Medical Dramas</strong></td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>3.46 p&lt;.003</td>
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<td>.13</td>
<td>3.97 p&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
<td>.46</td>
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<td>1.14 n.s.</td>
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<td>6.45 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>1.79 p&lt;.05</td>
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<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.52 n.s.</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>7.67 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.25 n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Afternoon Soaps/Serials</strong></td>
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<td>Social categories</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>7.04 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>2.55 p&lt;.003</td>
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<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>2.35 p&lt;.10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Musicals</strong></td>
<td>R=.41; R Square=.168</td>
<td>F=2.26, p&lt;.002</td>
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<td>2.75 p&lt;.07</td>
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<td><strong>Cartoons</strong></td>
<td>R=.50; R Square=.25</td>
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<td>9.03 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>1.59 p&lt;.089</td>
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<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>1.40 n.s.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Sports Programs</strong></td>
<td>R=.54; R Square=.295</td>
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<td>Social categories</td>
<td>.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<td>2.98 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<td>1.09 n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>News Magazine Programs</strong></td>
<td>R=.49; R Square=.238</td>
<td>F=3.49, p&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social categories</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.65 n.s.</td>
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<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>4.70 p&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parasocial/Presence</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>38 n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Talk Shows</strong></td>
<td>R=.52; R Square=.269</td>
<td>F=4.11, p&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social categories</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>4.02 p&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Uses &amp; Gratifications</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>3.52 p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>5.29 p&lt;.006</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National TV News</strong></td>
<td>R=.61; R Square=.367</td>
<td>F=6.50, p&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social categories</td>
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<td>.15</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>38 n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local TV News</strong></td>
<td>R=.60; R Square=.367</td>
<td>F=6.43, p&lt;.001</td>
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<td>.16</td>
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uses and gratifications derived from viewing television (betas = .23 and .30, p<.001).

Those who like watching TV are more likely to rate higher on the parasocial scale (beta = .11, p<.05). The TV uses and gratifications scale — tapping the extent to which TV gratifies viewers across all 13 dimensions — has direct paths to both the parasocial (beta = .21, p<.001) and presence scales (beta = .15, p<.001). Those who enjoy other leisure options are less likely to experience TV viewing as nonmediated (beta = -.20, p<.001). Only three direct paths lead to enjoyment of the reality television format: enjoyment of other leisure options (beta = .11, p<.05), parasocial uses and gratifications (beta = .54, p<.001) and the overall TV uses and gratifications scale (beta = .34, p<.001). The path from affinity for television as a leisure activity to enjoyment of reality television programs approaches statistical significance (beta = .10, p<.10). Clearly, this places reality television as an expressive behavior in a leisure context where it’s quite compatible with enjoyment of other options.

**DISCUSSION**

In the emergent multi-channel environment, the networks have been among the most content-diversified programmers, owing to their strategy of casting a wide net by offering many forms of common denominator programming (Abelman & Atkin, 2011; Grant, 1994; Litman et al., 1994). And with the emergence of new networks like Fox, we’ve seen the development of new formats like reality TV, the patronage dimensions of which were established by the present study. On balance, study results demonstrate the utility of applying new and traditional uses and gratifications measures, alongside presence, to explain audience enjoyment of reality fare.

The dimensions of audience appeal for newer formats uncovered here helps update and expand work on audience uses and gratifications for television, as the relative explanatory power of our models compares favorably with past work. Seeking a more efficient ratings yield for the programming dollar, the networks have embraced the relatively inexpensive reality programs, with program decisions increasingly dictated by financial considerations (e.g., Newcomb, 2007). The utility of the models used here suggests that programmers could draw from the academic literature in mass communication to understand what uses and gratifications and other factors sustain viewing patterns of novel formats.

In particular, this study demonstrates that we can contribute to this understanding if we move beyond the general uses and gratifications dimensions toward more targeted uses (e.g., Lin, 1994). Here, we found that enjoyment of the reality TV format was positively related to more uses and gratifications dimensions than were any of the more established formats. However, it is the addition of the more focused, parasocial uses and gratifications that allows us to more accurately gauge our target, enjoyment of reality television programming. The difference in the overall models is the added explanation provided by the
more specialized parasocial and presence scales, confirming our argument that we need to move beyond the general dimensions represented in the literature to uses and gratifications that more closely target the format and the experiences derived from viewing (e.g., Hall, 2003). As new sub-formats have emerged, each has tended to provide more footage of off-stage behaviors of participants, as well as profiles that are shot to give audiences more opportunities for identifying with contestants.

Although our focus is on a rather new and variegated format, the results offer some suggestions for how to approach enjoyment of other formats as well. One of the most competitive arenas in television is the local evening news. And, while stations compete with “entertainment” graphics and pacing that glosses over facts and details, our models suggest that an opposite approach might be more successful. Enjoyment of local TV news is related to knowledge and surveillance functions, as well as interpersonal utility and personal identity/self evaluation, but not to stimulation, excitement or boredom gratifications. Neither of the parasocial or presence scales explained additional variance, but this should be expected. These scales thus fail to enhance our targeting ability in applying the relevant uses and gratifications dimensions, at least as operationalized in this study. We still might employ the parasocial notion in measuring relationships with on-air news personalities, since it has been established in earlier work (e.g., Rubin & McHugh, 1987). However, it’s also useful to conceptualize applied uses and gratifications sub-dimensions of surveillance, knowledge, interpersonal utility and personal identity that might lead broadcast journalists to consider “non-entertainment” elements of news.

The symbiotic goals of our study can be served by a fuller consideration of implications for format development, which has been accelerated by the fractionalization of audience accompanying new cable, satellite and broadcast programmers. As commentators (e.g., Abelman & Atkin, 2011, p. 206) note, “network programming in the last few decades has been characterized by soaring program costs, lower program cancellation thresholds and rising program realignment rates that should have increased network program diversity.” Litman et al. (1994) further suggest that, rather than emulating cable with a fragmentation in format offerings, the networks have instead responded to new competition by providing general interest formats. Since the networks have neither the desire nor the ability to match the depth of formatting offered on a specialized cable service, they focus instead on general, common denominator programming that embraces less costly formats (e.g., game shows, reality programming), hoping to realize a greater ratings bang for their programming buck. And given that enjoyment of the reality TV format is sustained by the widest array of uses and gratifications, relative to other formats, this choice turned out to be a sound one for the networks. One of the distinguishing features of this relatively new format involves the blurring of boundaries between audiences and “actors”/participants in the reality programs themselves.

Bearing these distinctive format attributes in mind, this study focused on people’s enjoyment of reality television and other formats while employing uses and gratifications,
parasocial and presence literatures. But there's a larger lesson suggested. Much of our literature focuses on pieces of the mass communication puzzle. Uses and gratifications links media behavior patterns to people's needs. The effects literature links media exposure patterns to audience behaviors. Separate literatures focus on media organizations and how messages are constructed. One of the missing links is content theory—how patterns of media content evolve and through what process — which can show how changes in media content patterns, changes in audience exposure patterns, and message construction patterns are linked. If uses and gratifications can provide the match between content perceptions and message construction, we are a step closer to mapping the complex set of relationships that make up a mass communication system. The emergence of novel forms provides an opportunity for such research because audience perceptions are forming.

The same might also apply in creative processes. Producers of a situation comedy know what's expected, what ingredients are necessary and likely to be successful. When the "first" reality television program received high ratings, producers could not be certain of what audiences were reacting to, and experimentation followed. This study does not document how creative people in the industry take into account audience reactions (e.g., the ratings) in their work, and that is a missing piece of the puzzle. As for the presence dimension, most studies measure it directly after the media experience. Perhaps this more general inquiry about audience feelings about programming lessened the level of presence reported.

With broadcasters now offering up to five digital channels per station under the government-mandated conversion to digital formats—including a move to higher definition formats commanding greater audience presence (e.g., Lombard & Ditton, 1997) — it will be important to repeat this work over time. The predictive role played by presence variables in our models establishes the utility of this concept in the larger context of audience uses and gratifications. Later work should investigate the relative audience utility for reality shows as reruns, where industry wisdom suggests that reality shows seldom perform well in syndication, long a realm dominated by situation comedies (Flint, 2004).

More generally, uses and gratifications theory suggests that audiences seek out media for particular uses and gratifications that also could be fulfilled with non-media options. In the case of parasocial uses, people use media to develop personal relationships, which also could be fulfilled with face-to-face interactions that occur during other leisure activities. Reality programs present an option for people with more limited social skills and unattractive non-media leisure options in their environment. Others may watch reality shows with groups of friends, using the TV programs as an opportunity to reinforce personal relationships. In addition to other leisure interests, other competitors for fulfilling people's uses and gratifications might include interpersonal communication and mediated point-to-point communication, e.g., seeking interaction through Facebook and social networking sites, chat-rooms, or going to coffee shops (e.g., Atkin et al., 2005). By focusing more precisely and targeting behaviors, we move away from such grand theory building in the
short run but enhance the utility of our work, providing support for Einstein’s oft-cited aphorism: “There’s nothing so practical as a good theory.”

REFERENCES


