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Television Uses and Gratifications: The Interactions of Viewing Patterns and Motivations

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This secondary analysis of television viewing motivations and patterns located two television user types: (1) users of the television medium for time consumption and entertainment; and (2) users of television content for nonescapist, information seeking.

Research inquiries into the reasons why people use the mass media and the gratifications derived from media use date back over 40 years. In exploring the functions of the media and the role of audience members' needs and expectations in mass communication behavior, earlier investigations formulated typologies of radio and newspaper use. For example, Herzog posited four appeals of radio quiz programs – competitive, educational, self-rating and sporting,[1] and three radio serial listener gratifications – emotional release, wishful thinking and advice.[2] Mendelsohn identified several generalized functions of radio listening – companionship, bracketing the day, changing mood, counteracting loneliness or boredom, providing useful news and information, allowing vicarious participation in events, and aiding social interaction.[3] Berelson noted several uses of the newspaper – for information and interpretation of public affairs, as a tool for daily living, for respite, for social prestige and for social contact.[4]

Contemporary studies have examined television viewing motivations and gratifications, producing typologies of television use and exploring the links between these uses and the individual's social condition and television viewing attitudes and behaviors. For example, McQuail, Blumler and Brown proposed

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[1]Herta Herzog, "Professor Quiz: A Gratification Study," in *Radio and the Printed Page,* ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940).

[2]Herta Herzog, "What Do We Really Know About Daytime Serial Listeners?" in *Radio Research 1942-1943,* eds. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944).

[3]Harold Mendelsohn, "Listening to Radio," in *People, Society and Mass Communication,* eds. Lewis A. Dexter and David M. White (New York: Free Press, 1964).

[4]Bernard Berelson, "What 'Missing the Newspaper' Means," in *Communications Research 1948-1949,* eds. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (New York: Harper, 1949).

a four category media-person interaction typology – diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance.[5] Greenberg determined seven child and adolescent television viewing motivations – habit, relaxation, companionship, passing time, learning, arousal and escape.[6] Adopting a similar methodology, Rubin identified six child and adolescent television viewing motivations – learning, passing time/habit, companionship, escape, arousal and relaxation,[7] and Palmgreen and Rayburn observed seven public television viewing gratifications – relaxing, learning about things, communication utility, forgetting, passing time, companionship and entertainment.[8]

Only within the past few years, then, has there been any systematic attempt in uses and gratifications research to conduct modified replications or extensions of studies, to refine methodology, to comparatively analyze the findings of separate investigations, to respond to the criticisms of the perspective, and to treat mass media use as an integrated communication and social phenomenon. Recent studies illustrate several of these points. For example, Eastman analyzed the multivariate interactions among television viewing functions and life-style attributes.[9] Ostman and Jeffers examined the associations among television viewing motivations and the potential for life-style traits and television attitudes to predict viewing motivations.[10] Bantz explored the differences between general-medium and specific-program television viewing motivations, and the comparability of research findings.[11] Rubin considered the questions of viewing motivations scale validity and the comparability of research results in uses and gratifications investigations,[12] as well as the role of functional alternatives and the multivariate interactions among viewing motivations and viewing patterns in the use of a popular television program.[13]

[5]Denis McQuail, Jay G. Blumler, and J. R. Brown, "The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective," in *Sociology of Mass Communications,* ed. Denis McQuail (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972).

[6]Bradley S. Greenberg, "Gratifications of Television Viewing and Their Correlates for British Children," in *The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research,* eds. Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974).

[7]Alan M. Rubin, "Television Usage, Attitudes and Viewing Behaviors of Children and Adolescents," *Journal of Broadcasting* 21:355-369 (Summer 1977); Alan M. Rubin, "Television Use by Children and Adolescents," *Human Communication Research* 5:109-120 (Winter 1979).

[8]Philip Palmgreen and J. D. Rayburn II, "Uses and Gratifications and Exposure to Public Television: A Discrepancy Method," *Communication Research* 6:155-179 (April 1979).

[9]Susan T. Eastman, "Uses of Television Viewing and Consumer Life Styles," *Journal of Broadcasting* 23:491-500 (Fall 1979).

[10]Ronald E. Ostman and Dennis W. Jeffers, "The Relationship of Life Stage to Motives for Using Television and the Perceived Reality of TV" (paper presented at the International Communication Association convention, Acapulco, Mexico, 1980).

[11]Charles R. Bantz, "Exploring Uses and Gratifications: A Comparison of Reported Users of Television and Reported Uses of Favorite Program Type," *Communication Research* 9:352-379 (July 1982).

[12]Alan M. Rubin, "An Examination of Television Viewing Motivations," *Communication Research* 8:141-165 (April 1981).

[13]Alan M. Rubin, "A Multivariate Analysis of '60 Minutes' Viewing Motivations," *Journalism Quarterly* 58:529-534 (Winter 1981).

These latter investigations provide the departure point of the present inquiry. Until quite recently, mass communication uses and gratifications studies followed a path of explaining single variable relationships. In other words, the various uses of television would be initially observed and measured, and then each use or motivation would be independently and separately related to other variables in the investigation. These studies have provided useful, heuristic knowledge concerning the reasons why individuals use a mass medium of communication, sociodemographic and lifestyle descriptors of various types of media users, and media behavior and attitude gratifications resulting from certain media use motivations.

The most recent research endeavors have established the need to explore the relationships among adult television viewing motivations and viewing patterns. There is a need to further the line of heuristic development which recognizes that viewing motivations are not isolated, static traits, but rather, comprise a set of interactive needs and expectations. In brief, an individual can use television for several potentially interconnected television viewing gratifications. Viewing motivations function in concert with one another to produce certain patterns of mass media gratifications. This premise, which has been suggested in a few previous investigations, provides the basis for the research questions of this inquiry:[14] (1) What are the salient patterns of interactions among television viewing motivations, behaviors, and attitudes for adult viewers? (2) What pattern of television use motivations can aid in the explanation of viewing behaviors and attitudes of adult viewers? Aside from the expectation of confirming the interrelatedness of television viewing motivations, one additional supposition that will be assessed in this investigation is that television use motivations can effectively explain or predict television pattern (behavior and attitude) consequences of television use. This supposition is consistent with the process of the uses and gratifications model that flows from audience needs and motivations through functional alternatives and mass media use to certain consequences of those uses.

Methods

The relationships among the viewing motivations and viewing patterns of an adult sample were examined by executing a secondary analysis on a subsample of data. The original data were collected from a sample of 626 respondents in two midwestern communities in November 1978.[15] That sample ranged in age from four to 89 years. The present subsample of 464 adults, ranging in age from 18 to 89 years, was systematically selected from the

[14]Rubin, "An Examination of Television Viewing Motivations," *op. cit.*; Rubin, "A Multivariate Analysis of '60 Minutes' Viewing Motivations," op. cit.

[15]Interviews were conducted with respondents in two local communities by members of a mass media and society class at a midwestern university. See: Rubin, "An Examination of Television Viewing Motivations," *op. cit.*

original sample. The sample selection process followed two distinct steps. First, inasmuch as the concern of the present investigation was with adult television use respondents below 18 years of age were excluded. Second, within certain over-represented age groups in the original sample (i.e., 18 through 24 year olds), several questionnaires were randomly eliminated. The mean age of the subsample was 33.3 years; the subsample was 50 percent male and 50 percent female. Aside from sociodemographic characteristics, the instrument consisted of two sections: television viewing motivations; and television viewing patterns (i.e., behaviors and attitudes).

Television Viewing Motivations

Respondents had indicated their levels of agreement with 30 statements of reasons for watching television across five response options, ranging from "exactly" to "not at all" like their own reasons for viewing television.[16] Inasmuch as the present analysis is an assessment of general television use motivations, three of the original items, reflecting a desire to view certain program content, were omitted from the secondary analysis. Responses were coded so that a "5" reflected a salient motivation, while a "1" indicated a nonsalient motivation. The statements, a priori categories, means and standard deviations are depicted in Table I.

Patterns of viewing motivations were determined by, first, intercorrelating the items in a 27 x 27 matrix, and second, conducting a principal factor analysis with iterations and oblique rotation. Oblique rotation was utilized recognizing that viewing motivations are interrelated. Whereas "orthogonality imposes independency on a structure," oblique analysis "rotates all factors in hyperspace with one another in search of the best hyperplanes describing a construct."[17] The factor solution, which identified six initial factors, explained 54.9 percent of the total variance. Through the application of both a scree test and often-employed (although somewhat liberal) criteria, eigenvalues of at least one and a minimum of three primary loadings of .40 or greater (and no secondary loadings above .30 on any other factors), five of the factors were retained.[18]

Factor 1 (*Pass Time/Habit*) had an eigenvalue of 6.66 and explained 49.7

[16]The viewing motivation scales employed were adapted from items used by: Greenberg, *op. cit.*; Rubin, "Television Usage, Attitudes and Viewing Behaviors of Children and Adolescents," *op. cit.*; Rubin, "Television Use by Children and Adolescents," *op. cit.*

[17]James C. McCroskey and Thomas J. Young, "The Use and Abuse of Factor Analysis in Communication Research," *Human Communication Research* 5:375-382 (Summer 1979).

[18]For purposes of comparison, a principal factor analysis with iterations and varimax rotation was executed. These procedures produced six factors which were identical to the oblique solution, although their positioning was different: habit/pass time (five items); escape (three items); entertainment (three items); information (four items); relaxation (three items); and companionship (three items). The major difference was that the companionship factor would not have met the retention standards in the varimax solution, while the relaxation factor would have been assessed. The relaxation factor was not retained in the present analysis.

Table I
Initial Viewing Motivation Sets

Initial Viewing Motivation Categories and Statements ("I Watch TV . . .")	$\bar{x}$	s.d.
RELAXATION		
1. Because it relaxes me	3.25	1.07
2. Because it allows me to unwind	2.89	1.17
3. Because it's a pleasant rest	2.90	1.04
COMPANIONSHIP		
1. So I won't have to be alone	1.97	1.17
2. When there's no one else to talk to or be with	2.45	1.25
3. Because it makes me feel less lonely	1.88	1.06
HABIT		
1. Just because it's there	2.38	1.25
2. Because I just like to watch	2.68	1.16
3. Because it's a habit, just something I do	2.33	1.27
PASS TIME		
1. When I have nothing better to do	2.89	1.30
2. Because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored	2.72	1.30
3. Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time	2.38	1.21
ENTERTAINMENT		
1. Because it entertains me	3.71	0.96
2. Because it's enjoyable	3.26	0.91
3. Because it amuses me	3.02	0.99
SOCIAL INTERACTION		
1. Because it's something to do when friends come over	1.59	0.87
2. So I can talk with other people about what's on	2.06	1.07
3. So I can be with other members of the family or friends who are watching	2.39	1.14
INFORMATION		
1. Because it helps me learn things about myself and others	2.71	1.16
2. So I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before	2.09	1.08
3. So I could learn about what could happen to me	2.10	1.06
AROUSAL		
1. Because it's thrilling	2.09	0.94
2. Because it's exciting	2.29	1.00
3. Because it peps me up	1.89	0.96
ESCAPE		
1. So I can forget about school or other things	2.41	1.27
2. So I can get away from the rest of the family or others	1.64	0.92
3. So I can get away from what I'm doing	2.22	1.20

Note: Response options ranged from "exactly" (5) to "not at all" (1) like their own reasons for watching television. Category statements were alternately presented to the respondents. In other words, an escape statement followed an arousal statement, which followed an information statement, and so on.

percent of the common variance. Three pass time and two habit items loaded highly on this factor. Factor 2 (*Information/Learning*) had an eigenvalue of 2.17 and accounted for 16.2 percent of the common variance. Three information and one social interaction items loaded highly on this factor. Factor 3 (*Entertainment*) had an eigenvalue of 1.64 and explained 12.2 percent of the common variance. The three entertainment items loaded highly on this factor. Factor 4 (*Companionship*) had an eigenvalue of 1.22 and accounted for 9.1 percent of the common variance. The three companionship items loaded highly on this factor. Factor 5 (*Escape*) had an eigenvalue of 1.13 and explained 8.4 percent of the common variance. The three escape items loaded highly on this factor. Factor scores were computed and employed in subsequent data analyses.[19] The factor solution is summarized in Table II.

Television Viewing Patterns

Two categories of viewing patterns were examined: television viewing behaviors (viewing levels and program preferences) and television attitudes (affinity and realism).

Viewing levels. These were estimated by averaging responses to two questions requesting previous weekday and usual weekday viewing levels. The use of this measure is supported in previous research and attempts to provide a more reliable estimate of viewing levels by controlling for potential deviations in atypical responses of single-item measures.[20] The two questions had a correlation of .64 and a .78 internal reliability alpha coefficient. The measure, though, reflects only viewing estimates. The average estimate of weekday viewing by all respondents in the subsample was 2.56 hours.

Program preferences. These were located according to respondents' identifications of up to three programs they would attempt to watch whenever those programs were aired. Two independent coders had assigned the programs to one of 10 categories: children's show, comedy, daytime serial, drama-adventure, game show, movie, news, sports, talk-interview and variety-music. Inter-coder agreement was obtained on 97 percent of the placements.[21] Inasmuch as the children's show category contained fewer than one percent of the total mentions, it was omitted from further analysis. The number of program mentions by respondents was summed to formulate nine separate program preference measures.

[19]Factor dimensions were constructed through the use of factor scores calculated from the factor-score coefficient matrix. See: Norman H. Nie, C. Hadlai Hull, Jean G. Jenkins, Karin Steinbrenner and Dale H. Bent, *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences,* 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

[20]Rubin, "Television Usage, Attitudes and Viewing Behaviors of Children and Adolescents," *op. cit.*; Rubin, "Television Use by Children and Adolescents," *op. cit.*

[21]William A. Scott, "Reliability of Content Analysis: The Case of Nominal Scale Coding," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 19:321-325 (Fall 1955).

Table II
Oblique Rotated Factor Matrix of Viewing Motivations

Viewing Motivation Items	Viewing Motivation Factors				
	Pass Time/ Habit	Inform	Entertain	Com-panion	Escape
Pass Time (1)	.69	−.07	.00	.03	−.02
Habit (1)	.66	−.04	−.07	.03	.03
Pass Time (2)	.62	−.13	.06	.24	.07
Pass Time (3)	.62	−.01	.01	.22	.10
Habit (3)	.60	.11	.07	−.01	.02
Information (2)	.04	.80	−.06	−.08	−.01
Information (3)	−.11	.67	−.04	.08	.18
Information (1)	−.11	.66	.07	.05	−.14
Social Interaction (2)	.10	.43	.01	.11	.00
Entertainment (2)	−.01	.06	.71	.00	−.09
Entertainment (1)	.01	−.09	.64	.01	−.06
Entertainment (3)	−.02	.00	.57	.05	.14
Companionship (1)	−.07	−.01	.01	.90	−.07
Companionship (3)	.07	.08	−.01	.79	.03
Companionship (2)	.25	.05	.01	.61	.00
Escape (2)	.06	.07	−.05	.07	.54
Escape (3)	.13	−.01	−.08	.06	.53
Escape (1)	.05	−.08	−.06	.03	.51
Relaxation (1)	−.07	.01	.06	.08	−.05
Relaxation (2)	−.05	−.07	.01	.09	.17
Relaxation (3)	.11	.09	.21	−.05	−.04
Social Interaction (1)	.10	−.02	.11	.00	.37
Social Interaction (3)	.21	.09	−.02	−.01	.19
Habit (2)	.39	.09	.43	.00	−.08
Arousal (1)	−.04	.14	.44	.04	.46
Arousal (2)	.01	.11	.48	.11	.41
Arousal (3)	.06	.31	.08	.00	.40
Eigenvalue	6.66	2.17	1.64	1.22	1.13
Common Variance %	49.7	16.2	12.2	9.1	8.4

Note: The factor solution explained 54.9 percent of the total variance. A sixth factor in the unrotated solution had an eigenvalue of 0.58 and accounted for 4.3 percent of the common variance. Item identifications and numbers in parentheses refer to the initial viewing motivation statements and categories in Table I.

Two summated indexes were utilized to assess the attitudes of respondents toward the television medium and its content. A five-item *affinity* index measured the perceived importance of television in the lives of the respondents: "I would rather watch TV than do anything else;" "I could easily do without television for several days;" "I would feel lost without television to

watch;" "If the TV wasn't working, I would not miss it;" and "Watching TV is one of the most important things I do each day." A five-item *realism* index measured how true-to-life the respondents perceived television portrayals to be: "Television presents things as they really are in life;" "If I see something on TV, I can't be sure it really is that way;" "Television lets me really see how other people live;" "TV does not show life as it really is;" and "Television lets me see what happens in other places as if I were really there." The polarity of the second and fourth affinity and realism statements was subsequently reversed.

The items of the two attitude indexes were coded so that a "5" reflected an extremely positive attitude, while a "1" indicated an extremely negative attitude. Through the application of coefficient alpha in assessing scale reliability, the first affinity item and the second and fifth realism items were omitted from the respective indexes. The four-item affinity index had an inter-item correlation of .44 and a .75 internal reliability alpha coefficient. The three-item realism index had an inter-item correlation of .45 and a .71 internal reliability alpha coefficient. The mean affinity and realism scores for the subsample were 2.06 and 2.27, respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Following from the factor analysis procedures, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to assess the bivariate associations among viewing motivation dimensions. Inasmuch as these product-moment correlations indicated obvious viewing motivation interrelationships, canonical correlation analysis was employed to examine the multivariate associations among and between categories of viewing motivation and viewing pattern variables. Finally, multiple regression techniques were used to assess further the supposition that viewing motivations can effectively predict viewing patterns by determining whether or not viewing motivation factors can aid in the explanation of viewing levels and attitudes. Significance level was set at .001.

Results

Viewing Motivation Interrelationships

The product-moment correlations among the several viewing motiviation dimensions are summarized in Table III. The use of the oblique rotation procedures in the factor analysis recognized the potential interrelatedness of television viewing motivations. This assumption is supported by the data in Table III.

From these data, it is obvious that only information and pass time/habit viewing motivation factors are unrelated; all other viewing motivation factors are interrelated to some degree. Habitual/pass time viewing is associated with

Table III
Viewing Motivation Correlation Matrix

	Pass Time/ Habit	Inform	Entertain	Companion
Pass Time/Habit	–			
Information	.08	–		
Entertainment	.27	.32	–	
Companionship	.57	.32	.24	–
Escape	.49	.32	.31	.32

$r = .10, p < .05; r = .12, p < .01; r = .15, p < .001$ (2-tailed)

using television as a vehicle for companionship, escape and entertainment. Information viewing is related to watching television for entertainment, companionship and escape reasons. For the entertainment viewer, information, escape, pass time/habit and companionship are additional viewing motivations. Companionship viewers are also watching television for pass time/habit, information, escape and entertainment reasons. Escapist viewing might also be associated with using television to pass the time of day, for companionship, to acquire information and to be entertained. The strongest of these viewing motivation correlations are between pass time/habit and both companionship and escape viewing.

Viewing Motivation and Viewing Pattern Interactions

The initial research question concerns the interactions among viewing motivation factors and viewing patterns. The application of canonical correlation analysis was necessitated in order to seek some coherent structure to the myriad of previously identified viewing motivation relationships. Table IV summarizes the two significant roots that were located in this multivariate procedure.[22] Interpretation of canonical roots typically focuses on coefficients of .30 or higher.

The first canonical root ($R_c = .65$) explains 42 percent of the variance. Set 1 depicts a positive relationship between entertainment and pass time/habit viewing motivation factors. Set 2 indicates positive associations among television affinity, viewing levels and television realism. Consistent with the expectation that viewing motivations produce certain patterns of viewing

. [22]Two additional matrices were constructed to assess the consistency of the canonical correlation solution, as well as to ensure that the viewing motivation and viewing pattern relationships were not the result of the influence of sociodemographic variables. Both the product-moment structure matrix computed from the canonical variate loadings and the partial correlation matrix controlling for respondent sociodemographic characteristics of age, sex and occupation, supported the reported canonical correlation findings. See: Mark S. Levine, *Canonical Analysis and Factor Comparison* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977).

Table IV
Viewing Pattern Canonical Correlates of Viewing Motivations

	Root 1	Root 2
Canonical Correlation	.65	.45
Eigenvalue	.42	.21
Bartlett's Chi-Square	414.63	167.58
Degrees of Freedom	60.00	44.00
Significance	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Set 1: Viewing Motivations		
Entertainment	.54	−.10
Pass Time/Habit	.42	−.05
Information	.26	.88
Escape	.00	−.79
Companionship	.22	.09
Redundancy Coefficients	.05	.06
Set 2: Viewing Patterns		
Television Affinity	.49	−.27
Television Realism	.36	.24
Television Viewing Levels	.39	.34
Talk-Interview Program Viewing	−.10	.52
News Program Viewing	−.21	.41
Game Show Viewing	.01	.35
Drama-Adventure Program Viewing	.12	.09
Sports Program Viewing	.10	−.19
Movie Viewing	−.08	−.02
Comedy Program Viewing	.04	−.22
Variety-Music Program Viewing	−.04	.08
Daytime Serial Program Viewing	−.01	.04
Redundancy Coefficients	.02	.02

behaviors and attitudes, redundancy coefficients point to one direction for interpretation across the two sets. Those individuals who are motivated to watch television to seek entertainment or amusement, while viewing out of habit to pass the time of day for boredom relief, reveal substantial affinity with the medium, watch considerable amounts of television and perceive television content as being a rather realistic portrayal of life. Interestingly, this viewing motivation structure is unrelated to any specific types of television programs.

The second canonical root ($R_c = .45$) explains 21 percent of the variance. Set 1 identifies a negative relationship between information and escape viewing motivation factors. Set 2 includes positive associations among talk-interview, news and game show watching as well as television viewing levels.

Redundancy coefficients, once again, support interpretation in one direction across the two sets, explaining from viewing motivations to viewing behaviors and attitudes. Those individuals who use television to seek information, but not to escape from or forget about life's problems, view talk-interview, news and game show programming, and watch fairly high levels of television. Or, escapist, noninformational viewers would watch less television and not select information programs to view. There is also a slight indication that television affinity would be negatively related, while perceived television realism would be positively related to informational, nonescapist viewing.

Viewing Motivations as Viewing Pattern Predictors

In light of the significant associations among viewing motivations and viewing patterns, the second research question concerns what structure of viewing motivations can aid in the explanation of television viewing levels, affinity and realism. This final question further considers the consequences of television use by examining motivational contributors to three important television viewing patterns. The three multiple regression analyses are summarized in Table V.

The three viewing behaviors and attitudes can be significantly explained by the viewing motivation factors. First, viewing levels increase with the salience of entertainment, pass time/habit, companionship and information motivations, and decrease with the salience of the escape motivation. Second,

Table V
Multiple Regression: Viewing Motivations as Predictors of Viewing Levels, Television Affinity and Television Realism

Viewing Motivations	Viewing Levels		Television Affinity		Television Realism	
	b	F	b	F	b	F
Pass Time/Habit	.22***	15.06	.21***	13.91	.09*	2.52
Information	.16***	12.20	.11***	5.44	.29***	34.78
Entertainment	.26***	35.35	.29***	44.80	.20***	17.99
Companionship	.19***	13.07	.14***	6.92	−.01	0.01
Escape	−.22***	19.16	.00	0.00	.01	0.02
	F = 31.12 df = 5/458 R = .50*** R^2 = .25		F = 34.91 df = 5/458 R = .53*** R^2 = .28		F = 20.72 df = 5/458 R = .43*** R^2 = .18	

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001

television affinity also increases with the salience of entertainment, pass time/habit, companionship and information motivations. Third, perceived television realism increases with the salience of information and entertainment motivations, in particular.

Similar to the results of the canonical correlation analysis, the multiple regression analyses apparently support the explanation of viewing patterns (behaviors and attitudes) from the several television use motivation factors. In sum, then, watching television in order to seek amusement or entertainment, as well as to pass the time of day when there's nothing better to do or to relieve boredom, would seem to indicate inflated television viewing levels and considerable felt importance of the role of television in one's life. Watching television in order to acquire information, as well as to seek entertainment or amusement, would seem to indicate a heightened sense of the realism of television portrayals of life. Using television for companionship results in increased viewing levels of a somewhat highly regarded medium. Escapist viewing neither results in augmented affinity or realism perceptions, nor does it contribute to increased levels of television viewing; in fact, it would significantly contribute to decreased amounts of television viewing.

Discussion

The purpose of this secondary analysis was to progress beyond a single, isolated variable descriptive framework of television viewing motivations to a more meaningful and accurate explanation of television uses and gratifications. In contrast to previous investigations, the research questions of this inquiry sought to examine the interrelationships among viewing motivations for the explanation of television viewing behaviors and attitudes. The results of the several analyses support the initial suppositions that television use motivations and viewing patterns are indeed interactive, and that television use motivations can effectively explain or predict viewing pattern consequences. In particular, the canonical correlation analysis described and the multiple regression analyses further explained two television viewer types.

The first viewer type uses television out of habit and to pass the time — when there's nothing better to do, to occupy idle time, and to relieve boredom — and for entertainment — because television viewing provides amusement and enjoyment. This model of audience use of or dependence on television emphasizes the communication *medium* itself. Avid habitual and entertainment users of television view considerable amounts of a perceived realistic medium with which they feel a particular affinity, regardless of program content. In other words, the consequences of habitual/pass time/entertainment use of a communication medium, that is held in high regard, lie in sizable viewing levels with no obvious program preferences. It would be of interest for future investigations to further observe additional communication

and social consequences of this television use model. For example, what are the pro- and antisocial cultural consequences of watching large quantities of television to gratify habitual, entertainment needs? What role do functional alternatives, such as interpersonal communication, play in producing this viewing pattern, or, for example, how is interpersonal communication in the family or social group affected by this television use pattern? Are there certain personality, situational, or social environment conditions that lead to this pattern of viewing motivations and behaviors?

The multiple regression analyses further establish that habit/pass time and entertainment viewing motivations significantly contribute to substantial amounts of television viewing and to a felt affinity with the medium; the entertainment motivation also strongly contributes to a sense of realism in television content. To the contrary, the regression analyses indicate that escapist viewing – or using the television medium to forget about personal problems and to get away from other people or tasks – results in reduced viewing levels, and does not contribute to a sense of television affinity or realism. This finding would provide a contrast to the univariate methodologies of earlier studies which observed significant positive relationships between an escapist viewing motivation and television affinity and viewing levels.[23]

As a major concept in mass communication research, "escape" has been defined and applied in a variety of ways. Typically, escape is treated as either a characteristic of mass media content or as a motive for mass media use.[24] In some earlier research escape has suggested alienation or isolation. Defined in this manner of personal or social deprivation, escape has been associated with increased exposure to the mass media and their content, perhaps to compensate for ineffective social relations or to maintain effective ones.[25] However, consistent with the present findings, heavy users of television are not necessarily motivated by a desire to escape from reality.[26] Escapist viewing appears to be a quite different motivation for using television than is using the medium as a habitual vehicle of amusement for passing the time of day.

Similar to the treatment of the concept by Rosengren and Windahl, escape is conceived in the present study to be a motive for mass communication behavior that may have various consequences.[27] In the current investigation escapist television use implies watching television to get away from problems, tasks or people; however, it also possesses a somewhat active content-seeking connotation from the arousal items with substantial loadings on the

[23]Greenberg, *op cit.*; Rubin, "Television Use by Children and Adolescents," *op. cit.*; Rubin, "An Examination of Television Viewing Motivations," *op. cit.*

[24]McQuail, Blumler and Brown, *op. cit.*

[25]Elihu Katz and David Foulkes, "On the Use of the Mass Media as 'Escape': Clarification of a Concept," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 26:377-388 (1962).

[26]McQuail, Blumler and Brown, *op. cit.*

[27]Karl E. Rosengren and Sven Windahl, "Mass Media Consumption as a Functional Alternative," in *Sociology of Mass Communications,* ed. Denis McQuail (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972).

escape factor in the factor solution. In other words, in this investigation escape seems to indicate a desire, not only for social isolation, but also for televised excitement. This may be consistent with some views in past research that escapist viewing leads to vicarious participation in the lives of fictional characters,[28] or para-social interaction.[29] In addition, as Katz and Foulkes have argued, "escapist drives" (i.e., deprivation, loneliness or alienation) do not invariably lead to "escapist exposure patterns;" alternate routes of escape, aside from television use, are available in society.[30] In short, other social activities or functional alternatives may be instrumental in gratifying escapist needs or drives.

Escapist viewing seems to provide a direct contrast to information viewing. Multiple regression indicates that using television to seek information provides a heightened sense of perceived realism of a rather heavily watched and somewhat important medium. The canonical correlation analysis also reveals this information-escape dichotomy in the second root.

The second viewer type uses television to seek information or to learn, and not for escape. This motivational pattern of use results in overall higher television viewing levels, and particularly the watching of talk-interview, news and game show programming. This model of audience use of television emphasizes the *content* of a communication medium. It highlights the active seeking of messages to gratify certain needs and provides a contrast to the habitual, entertainment motivational structure that found gratification in increased television watching, but not in specific program content. The informational viewers are obviously not trying to escape from an information environment, but rather, are using television — and specific genres of informational programming — in order to learn about people, places and events and to instrumentally use this information in interpersonal interaction (a social interaction item that loaded highly on the information factor). The social and cultural consequences of this information-seeking and avoidance dichotomy, as well as the complementary nature of mass and interpersonal communication channels for information seeking and gratification need to be further examined in subsequent research.

The analysis, then, provides partial support for the uses and gratifications supposition that individuals seek out media content to gratify their felt needs. Without any specific program content being sought, television use seems to gratify interrelated habitual, time consumption and entertainment needs. Specific aspects of television content, though, are apparently sought to satisfy nonescapist, information needs. A more comprehensive extension of the uses and gratifications paradigm would need to consider the role of other media and interpersonal interaction in this information-needs gratification process, as

[28]Katz and Foulkes, *op. cit.*

[29]Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction," *Psychiatry* 19.215-229 (1956); Rosengren and Windahl, *op. cit.*

[30]Katz and Foulkes, *op. cit.*

well as the constraints of a societal system that would place television at a position of centrality as a vehicle of information. In addition, the broad notion of information needs requires further elaboration in future research. What are these specific information needs, how do these needs vary among different societal groups, and what situational, personality and social conditions play a role in the dependence on television or other communication channels to gratify these informational needs? Future uses and gratifications investigations might benefit from attention to viable aspects of other mass communication perspectives, such as dependency theory, and broaden the conception of the audience-medium relationship by refocusing questions of individual needs and motivations in light of societal structure, media characteristics and audience relations.[31]

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[31]See, for example, Alan M. Rubin and Sven Windahl, "Mass Media Uses and Dependency: A Social Systems Approach to Uses and Gratifications" (paper presented at the International Communication Association convention, Boston, 1982).

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When Good *Friends* Say Goodbye: A Parasocial Breakup Study

Keren Eyal and Jonathan Cohen

This study examines viewers' reactions to parasocial breakup with mediated characters in light of interpersonal and mass communication theories. Following the airing of the last episode of the television show Friends, *279 students completed surveys assessing their viewing habits, their attitudes toward the show and their favorite character, and their loneliness. The intensity of the parasocial relationship with the favorite character is the strongest predictor of breakup distress. Other predictors include commitment and affinity to the show, the character's perceived popularity, and the participant's loneliness. The results shed light on the similarities and differences between parasocial and social relationships.*

Final episodes of long-running and greatly loved television series achieve famously high ratings (Battaglio, 2001). It was hardly surprising, then, that an estimated 51 million viewers tuned in to view the final episode of *Friends,* which aired in the United States on May 6, 2004 (Associated Press, 2004). Although viewers were no doubt aware that they would be able to see their friends from *Friends* over and over again in reruns and DVDs, the last episode seemed to mark a farewell of some import to many millions. The vast majority of viewers know that their relationships with television characters are imaginary (Caughey, 1985), and yet, as the ratings numbers and the general commotion around this and other finale shows suggest, the end of such relationships is emotionally meaningful. What do viewers feel when relationships with television characters come to an end? To what extent are separations from television characters similar to endings of personal relationships? What factors impact the intensity of feelings associated with such breakups? Which viewers experience these feelings more strongly than others? This study attempts to answer these questions with data collected from viewers immediately after the end of *Friends.*

This study is set within the framework of parasocial relationships (PSRs). Initially defined by Horton and Wohl (1956) as a "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" (p. 215), PSRs have been widely studied, both in terms of

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their development and in terms of their influences on viewers' emotional states and reactions to television exposure (e.g., Auter, 1992; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Turner, 1993). PSRs are now understood to be an integral and important part of many people's systems of social relationships and "the distinction between social and parasocial relationships, which Horton and Wohl [1956] assumed was so obvious, is increasingly complex and hard to define" (Cohen, 2004, p. 200). As discussed later, the topic of PSRs is, in fact, now recognized as a potential contact point between mass media and interpersonal theories (Turner, 1993). Researchers are increasingly applying interpersonal, relational, and developmental theories to the study of PSRs (Cohen, 2003; Cole & Leets, 1999; Isotalus, 1995). This study contributes to this literature by applying aspects from theories of relational development to the study of people's parasocial relationships with mediated characters. It extends this literature by examining the application of theoretical premises regarding relational dissolution to the study of the termination of imaginary relationships.

Friends

Friends came on the air in 1994 following NBC's success with *Seinfeld,* and like its predecessor, was created as a sitcom set not in a family home or business, but rather focused on a group of young single adults. In an age of segmented viewing when the viewing unit is no longer composed solely of nuclear families, the time was ripe to experiment with moving the focus of sitcoms away from families. Furthermore, a program about young, urban singles made sense based on the belief that viewers relate and identify with those who are similar to them and the special attractiveness of the 18-to-30 demographic to advertisers. However, unlike *Seinfeld,* famous for being a show about "nothing" (CNN, 1998; TV Tome, 2005), *Friends* was a show about something: It explored the interpersonal relationships of its stars as a basis for its plot and humor. This heightened the potential for viewers to feel like they were a part of this group of friends, a feeling Auter and Palmgreen (2000) showed to be an important part of relationships with the characters. Over 10 years viewers were invited to watch these six friends interact, learn about them in intimate and meaningful ways, and vicariously experience the trials and tribulations of young adulthood. Most of the college students who took part in this study were still in elementary school when the show first aired and grew up watching the show. It is thus not surprising that the show's ending would be an emotional experience for many of them.

Parasocial Relationship

As the significance of PSRs in the process of media influence has become more apparent (Basil, 1996; Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003; Papa et al., 2000), researchers have become interested in exploring such relationships and understanding how they impact viewers. Somewhat to their surprise, researchers have consistently found that

relationships with television characters do not replace relationships with friends, but rather complement social relationships (Kanazawa, 2002; Perse & Rubin, 1990; Tsao, 1996). Feelings toward television characters do not generally serve as a replacement for primary social relationships but rather keep one company (Isotalus, 1995) and like ordinary friendships serve to provide people with social enjoyment and learning.

PSRs are a set of feelings viewers develop toward media characters that allow viewers to think and feel toward characters as if they know and have a special connection with them. These feelings extend beyond the moment of viewing (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and continue from one viewing situation to the next. Such relationships originate from repeated viewing of characters that simulate social interaction, and they develop and strengthen over time (Isotalus, 1995; Perse & Rubin, 1989; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987; but see also Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). As viewers are exposed to characters over a longer period of time and more frequently, they develop more confidence in their attribution of how the character will behave and have less uncertainty in their relationships.

Television characters provide viewers with one-way relationships, and the intimacy they offer is, as Horton and Wohl (1956) argued, only at a distance. Nonetheless, Koenig and Lessan (1985) found that viewers rated favorite television characters as further from themselves than friends but closer than acquaintances. Newton and Buck (1985) concluded their findings by suggesting that television can be seen as a significant other. Thus, television personalities are a significant part of one's social network, although their social and emotional functions seem to be limited compared to close family and friends.

In terms of their effects, Fisherkeller (1997) suggested that at least for some teens, media characters serve as models for how to achieve goals that are related to the development of their identities. Other scholars have shown that imaginary relationships with media characters have real social consequences, such as increasing the persuasive power of public service announcements when they feature celebrities with whom viewers have PSRs (Basil, 1996; Brown et al., 2003). Similarly, Sood and Rogers (2000) linked the effects of education-entertainment programming to the development of PSRs with soap opera characters. Most recently, Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) found that parasocial contact and relationships can change attitudes about homosexuality. The importance of mediated relationships, and their similarity to social relationships, therefore, suggests that the end of a long-standing and popular show like *Friends* should also be significant and that it may be a cause of some distress. It also remains to be seen whether and how the one-way and distant nature of such PSRs leads to differences in the responses to their end.

Parasocial Breakup

The notion of parasocial breakup (PSB; Cohen, 2003) describes a situation where a character with whom a viewer has developed a PSR goes off the air. This may happen

because a show ends, because a character is taken off the show, or because something happens to the actor or actress who plays the character. In turn, a viewer may decide to stop watching the show or become less interested in or less devoted to the character.

The dissolution of close social relationships has been found to lead to depression and is a common reason for seeking psychological counseling (McCarthy, Lambert, & Brack, 1997). In regard to celebrities, Meyrowitz (1994) described extreme reactions exhibited at the death of celebrities such as Elvis Presley and John Lennon. Based on his analysis of these extreme cases and his discussion of more general patterns of responses to the death of what he called "media friends," he concluded that, "these relationships have features that are very human, very warm, and very caring" (p. 80). Although the myths, rituals, and pilgrimages that have come to surround the death of media megastars do not characterize common responses to the end of most television series, they do point to the emotional potential of imaginary relationships.

Research has found that though the dissolution of parasocial relationships is less stressful than that of close relationships, it follows some similar patterns (Cohen, 2003, 2004). Cohen asked respondents to imagine how they would feel if their favorite television persona would be taken off the air. He found that like in social relationships the stress of (imagined) breakup was strongly related to the intensity of the relationships. However, women, who generally report stronger PSRs (e.g., Tsao, 1996), did not report expecting higher levels of distress if their favorite television personality went off the air (Cohen, 2003). This finding echoes the fact that, although women tend to have stronger interpersonal relationships, they are better able to cope with the end of these relationships (Helgeson, 1994; Simpson, 1987; Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, & Vanni, 1998). Teenagers who are generally seen as more emotional and more involved with media characters than adults were also found to expect stronger emotional responses to PSB than adults (Cohen, 2003).

These studies were able to confirm the idea of PSB by showing that people expected to be sorry when their favorite character went off the air, and to establish a basis for comparing PSB to social breakup. However, the hypothetical nature of the studies leaves several issues open. First, it is possible that although people expect to be distressed when a liked character goes off the air (perhaps because they use heuristics from interpersonal relationships) in reality such separations will leave viewers with little distress. Alternatively, one could imagine that the distress and sadness felt in real time may be much greater than the low levels reported in a hypothetical study. In addition, because previous studies focused on finding similarities between social breakup and PSB, they did not provide a basis for explaining what people feel and why some are more distressed than others.

Based on the similarities between PSRs and social relationships both in relationship development and dissolution it seems logical to turn to the literature on breakup of personal relationships to hypothesize regarding the breakup of relationships with television characters. In considering the applicability of research on the breakup of close relationships to understanding audience reactions to PSRs, several factors must

be considered. First, despite the popularity of some media friends, the reliance of viewers on media characters is relatively small. From a dependence perspective, Drigotas and Rusbult (1992) found that dependence on a relationship for satisfying needs was related to less likelihood of breaking up. It is likely, then, that the less one is dependent on a relationship for need satisfaction the less distress its breakup should cause. Therefore, the levels of distress from PSB are expected to be lower than those found in close relationships. Second, whereas romantic breakups often catch the noninitiating partner unprepared, in today's media-saturated environment the ending of popular shows is preceded by a long period of preparation. This preparation is likely to reduce the distress of the breakup, as is the lack of guilt surrounding the breakup. In sum, it is unlikely that very high levels of distress are experienced following PSB.

Because successful television shows often last several years, relationships with popular characters are likely to be well-established, long-term relationships. Because duration of relationship has been found to be positively associated with distress at breakup (Simpson, 1987), it is likely that long-term viewers will experience stronger distress than viewers who have watched over a short period of time. Similarly, closeness has been found to also positively predict distress (Simpson, 1987), suggesting that commitment to viewing the show—not just viewing duration—may serve a similar function. In other words, it is not just the frequency or amount of viewing that is important, but the quality of viewing and the extent to which people feel that they are dedicated to the show are also meaningful aspects to examine. In addition, the attractiveness of media characters and the public acknowledgment of such attractiveness are likely to increase the desirability of the relationship and the distress at its dissolution. Finally, Simpson found that believing one could not easily find a desirable alternative partner made the breakup more distressing. Applying this to PSB, to the extent that relationships with characters that are perceived to be more popular are seen as more socially desirable, it can be expected that the more popular the character with which one is breaking up, the more distress will be experienced.

Hypotheses

The main goal of this study is to identify the predictors of PSB. However, as assumptions regarding PSB follow closely from those regarding PSRs, it is first important to replicate earlier research to establish the predictors of PSR in the sample reported here. Following this replication analysis, a series of hypotheses are posed regarding the predictors of PSB.

Clearly, the most important factor in explaining and predicting the distress viewers feel when faced with the dissolution of a PSR is how intensely they feel toward the character with whom they engage in the PSR. Therefore:

H_1: The more intense the PSR the more distress viewers will report following PSB.

Because the duration of and commitment to a personal relationship are related to postbreakup distress, the following hypotheses are offered in the context of PSBs:

H_2: The longer a viewer reports watching *Friends* the more distress he or she will report following the end of the show.

H_3: The more committed viewers report themselves to be to watching *Friends* the more distress they will report following the end of the show.

Because PSRs in an ensemble show such as *Friends* are developed within the context of the show as a whole it would be expected that the emotional connection that is lost at the breakup of such relationships would be affected by one's attachment to or affinity to the show as a whole.

H_4: The more a viewer holds positive attitudes toward the show the more distress he or she will report following the end of the show.

In addition to show-related variables, clearly PSB should be associated with factors related to the characters. The extent to which the relationship with the character is valued should increase the distress that its dissolution will cause. Hence, the following hypotheses are offered:

H_5: The more a viewer reports his or her favorite *Friends* character is *perceived as being his or her overall favorite television character* the more distress he or she will report following the end of the show.

H_6: The more a viewer reports finding his or her favorite *Friends* character *attractive* the more distress he or she will report following the end of the show.

Based on research showing that the more the partner is perceived as hard to replace the more distressing is the breakup, it would be expected that:

H_7: The more a viewer considers his or her favorite *Friends* character to be *popular* (among others) the more distress he or she will report after the end of the show.

To test these hypotheses, a survey was circulated among college students over a 2-week period starting about 10 days after the airing of the last episode of *Friends.* Because new episodes were generally aired once a week, on Thursday, viewers should have started missing the show only a week after the last episode. Hence, data collection started on the Monday following the completion of this 1-week period.

Method

Sample

Participants in this study were 298 undergraduate students at a large West Coast university. This sample is similar to that employed in much previous research on

PSRs, which has focused on the same population (Auter, 1992; Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993). Additionally, the focus of this study on one show that has been a top-rated television show for years minimizes concerns about the lack of generalizability of college students' typical viewing habits to other populations.

The students completed a survey voluntarily and received credit for a communication course as compensation for their participation. Nineteen students (6%) reported never having watched even one episode of the show and were excluded from further data analyses, resulting in a sample of 279 participants. Of these participants, 225 (81%) were women and 52 (19%) were men. Two participants did not report their gender. The average age of participants was 19.46 years (SD = 1.36), with a range of 18 to 27 years.

Procedure

One week after the final episode of *Friends* was aired in the United States, pen-and-paper surveys were made available for participants to complete at their convenience. The period of 1 week after the final episode aired was chosen because *Friends* was a weekly sitcom and it was therefore expected that viewers would feel the loss of the show and miss it about a week after the last episode aired, when a new episode did not air in its usual time. To take into consideration the length of time that passed between the last episode being aired and the questionnaire completion, participants were asked to indicate the date on which they completed the survey.[1] The majority of the participants (61%) completed the survey during the first week in which it was made available (i.e., between 1 and 2 weeks after the final episode of the show was aired). About one fourth of the sample (25%) completed the survey between 2 and 3 weeks after the final episode was aired, and only 12% completed the survey between 3 and 4 weeks after the final episode was aired.

Measurement

The survey included questions about participants' PSR and reactions to the breakup of their relationship with their favorite *Friends* character, their viewing of the show *Friends* (both duration of viewing and commitment to the show), their affinity toward the show, their attitudes toward and feelings about their favorite character on the show, as well as questions about participants' loneliness and demographics. The show *Friends* revolved around six main characters: Monica, Rachel, Phoebe, Joey, Chandler, and Ross. Participants were asked to indicate which of the six characters was their favorite and respond to statements about this character.

Parasocial Relationship. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with five statements assessing the intensity of their PSR with their favorite character. Re-

sponse options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The commonly used A. M. Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) measure of parasocial interaction has often been adapted in previous research, for example, to measure related yet more generalized constructs, such as parasociability, a person's likelihood to parasocially interact (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). The measure also has been widely criticized for measuring other types of relationships with and perceptions of characters (e.g., identification, realism; Cohen, 2001). In addition, in this study the authors were concerned with the strength of the relationship with characters rather than measuring the level or quality of interaction that occurs during viewing. Thus, in this study, items were specifically chosen because they are believed to tap most directly the concept of PSRs, and not other related concepts (see the Appendix).

Responses to these items were averaged together to create a measure of PSR, with a Cronbach reliability of $\alpha = .71$. Although this value is lower than most previously published assessments of the scale's reliability (e.g., Perse & Rubin, 1990; A. M. Rubin et al., 1985), it is consistent with other studies (e.g., Hoffner, 1996). Additionally, participants' average scores on the scale in this study ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.67$) are consistent with previous research on the construct, where scores ranged from about 2.70 ($SD = 0.68$; A. M. Rubin et al., 1985) to 3.86 ($SD = 0.67$; Hoffner, 1996).

There was a significant difference between the genders, $t(273) = 2.91$, $p < .01$, with men reporting significantly less PSR with their favorite *Friends* character ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.73$) than women ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.65$). The difference in PSR between the genders found in this study is consistent with past research (Cohen, 2004; Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Also attesting to the validity of this measure is the fact that PSR is positively correlated with both affinity toward the show ($r = .69$, $p < .001$) and the extent to which the character is a favorite one on television overall ($r = .48$, $p < .001$).

Parasocial Breakup. Thirteen items assessed participants' PSB with their favorite *Friends* character after the show went off the air. These items were taken from Cohen (2003), where the concept of PSB was explicated and the scale constructed and validated. Items represent both an emotional dimension (e.g., "Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel more lonely") and a behavioral one (e.g., "Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I tend to think of him or her often"; see Appendix for a complete list of items). Responses to these items ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and scores were averaged to create a measure of PSB, with a Cronbach reliability of $\alpha = .81$. Participants averaged below the midpoint of the scale ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.53$), but slightly higher than previous samples that responded to this scale (Cohen, 2003). There was a significant difference between the genders, $t(271) = 3.29$, $p < .001$, with men reporting significantly less distress following PSB with their favorite *Friends* character ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.49$) than women ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.54$). Similar to Cohen, this study finds a strong and positive correlation between PSB and PSR ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). The consistency in the measure of PSB between this study and Cohen's study, which was conducted in Israel and included samples of different ages (including a

high school student sample and an adult sample), suggests that the measure of PSB is reliable and valid across different ages and cultures.

Viewing of the Show. Participants had followed the show an average of 5.72 years ($SD = 2.96$), longer than half the period of 10 years it was on the air. Participants' level of commitment to the show was assessed by asking about their dedication to viewing episodes of the show during the final season, with response options ranging from 1 (*I used to watch the show but stopped before it came off the air*) to 5 (*I never missed an episode and even taped ones I missed*). Participants were fairly committed to the show as evidenced by their average score of 2.99 ($SD = 0.97$) on the 5-point scale, suggesting that on average they tended to watch episodes of *Friends* whenever they had a chance to do so throughout the past season. The two measures of amount of viewing the show and commitment to the show were moderately and positively correlated with one another ($r = .41$, $p < .001$).

Attitudes Toward the Show. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with 15 statements about the show. These statements assessed attitudes and behaviors toward the show, specifically evaluating the affinity that viewers felt toward the show and how much they liked it. Affinity toward the show reflects a positive disposition toward it and an intention to view it because of an emotional connection to the show, whereas viewing amount merely reflects the frequency of viewing, be it incidental or as a result of others in the household watching it. Affinity toward the show also reflects such positive dispositions before and after the viewing itself, such as searching for information about the show on the Internet, thinking about the show before and after it is aired, and considering the show to be important to one's life. Examples of items include, "I enjoy watching *Friends*," "When *Friends* comes on, I switch the channel" (reverse coded), and "I really get involved in what happens to the characters on *Friends*." The full list of items is included in the Appendix.

Response options to this measure ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses to all 15 statements were averaged to create one measure of affinity toward the show. The Cronbach reliability of this measure was $\alpha = .91$. Participants averaged slightly above the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.71$), with significant differences between the two genders, $t(275) = 6.75$, $p < .001$. Men reported significantly less affinity toward the show ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.71$) than women ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.65$).

It should be noted that the measure of affinity to the show was positively correlated with both amount of viewing the show ($r = .49$, $p < .001$) and with commitment to the show ($r = .63$, $p < .001$). These correlations are consistent with the notion that those who watch the show frequently and those who are committed and dedicated viewers will have more positive attitudes toward the show. However, the moderate correlation between amount of viewing and affinity toward the show suggests that the two measures tap different constructs. The higher correlation with commitment to the show is also not surprising considering that commitment to the show likely implies a

positive disposition toward it. However, the two constructs do not fully overlap with one another, as commitment reflects primarily an attitude while viewing whereas affinity toward the show extends beyond the duration of viewing itself.

Attitudes Toward the Favorite Friends *Character.* Participants were asked to what extent their favorite *Friends* character is also their favorite television character overall, with response options ranging from 1 (*My favorite* Friends *character is my LEAST favorite overall TV character*) to 5 (*My favorite* Friends *character is my MOST favorite overall TV character*). For many respondents the favorite *Friends* character was also a favorite character on television overall, evidenced by the average response to this item being slightly above the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.97$).

Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that their favorite *Friends* character is attractive. On a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), participants averaged 3.62 ($SD = 1.04$) on this measure, indicating they found their favorite *Friends* character to be fairly attractive. There were significant differences on this measure, $F(5, 267) = 14.83$, $p < .001$, with Rachel emerging as the most attractive favorite character ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.65$) and as significantly more attractive than all other characters, except Monica. Ross was the least attractive ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.97$).

To assess the perceived popularity of each of the *Friends* characters, participants were asked to rank the six characters in terms of perceived popularity. In other words, participants were asked to rate each character in terms of their perceptions of how popular they were among other viewers. Participants ranked the characters from 1 (*most popular*) to 6 (*least popular*), providing an ordinal-level measure of character popularity. This is in contrast to the PSR and PSB measures that assess the degree to which the participant himself or herself likes the character.

Participant Measures. In addition to asking for participants' gender and age, their level of loneliness was also assessed. Previous research has not found loneliness to be as strong a predictor of PSR intensity as was initially speculated (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985), but whereas this variable may be less meaningful in the creation of imaginary relationships, it may play a central role in the reactions to the dissolution of these relationships. After all, people who have fewer social relationships may experience greater difficulty letting go of any relationship, even an imaginary one. Participants were asked to respond to 12 statements about themselves, including "I often feel in tune with the people around me," and "I have trouble making friends." Most of the items were adapted from the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). Four items were added to tap the more social dimensions of loneliness (e.g., "I have trouble making friends"). The full list of items can be found in the Appendix. Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses were averaged to create an overall loneliness score, with a Cronbach $\alpha = .88$. Participants averaged 2.05 on the scale ($SD = 0.54$), indicating overall low levels of loneliness. There was a significant

difference between the genders, $t(272) = -2.47$, $p < .05$, with men reporting significantly more loneliness ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.58$) than women ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.53$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Of the six *Friends* characters, more participants (31%) chose Rachel as their favorite character. She was followed by Chandler (20%), Joey (20%), Phoebe (14%), and finally Ross (7%) and Monica (5%). The usual pattern of gender choices was found, although in a less pronounced fashion, as the majority (60%) of participants chose favorite *Friends* characters of their own gender. Men were far more likely to choose male characters (76%) as their favorite than female characters (24%). Although to a lesser degree, women were also more likely to choose female characters (59%) than male characters as favorites (41%). The trend of choosing same-sex characters was significantly more pronounced for men than for women, $\chi^2(1, N = 271) = 5.59$, $p < .05$.

Table 1 details the distribution of choices of favorite characters, along with the mean PSR and PSB scores and popularity rank for each *Friends* character. As the table illustrates, Rachel, who was most frequently chosen as favorite, was also the character with whom participants felt the strongest PSR ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.60$) and PSB ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.56$).

Table 1
Choice of Favorite *Friends* Character, PSR, PSB, and Perceived Popularity of Character Relative to All Other *Friends* Characters

		PSR		PSB		Popularity	
Character	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Rachel	87	3.37	0.60	2.31	0.56	1.87	1.60
Chandler	57	3.08	0.67	2.06	0.44	3.67	1.18
Joey	56	3.08	0.61	2.18	0.53	3.27	1.62
Phoebe	39	2.99	0.58	2.08	0.52	4.27	1.62
Ross	19	2.68	0.65	1.90	0.44	4.73	1.79
Monica	15	3.13	0.78	2.09	0.58	3.20	1.01
Total	273						

Note: PSR = parasocial relationship; PSB = parasocial breakup. PSR response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores represent greater PSR with the character. PSB response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Higher scores represent greater PSB with the character. Lower popularity scores represent greater perceived popularity. Popularity was measured on an ordinal (rank order) scale, so that each character's score is dependent on all other characters' scores.

Consistent with past research (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985), participants' loneliness was not significantly associated with any of the other measures in the study, including affinity toward the show and attitudes toward the favorite character. Past research also has shown that loneliness and other social deficiencies are unrelated to parasocial relationships (Tsao, 1996).

As Table 1 indicates, in terms of perceived popularity, Rachel was also perceived to be the most popular *Friends* character, relative to all characters. Characters' popularity was related to attitudes toward the show and the favorite characters (popularity–show: $r = -.15$, $p < .05$; popularity–PSR: $r = -.20$, $p < .01$; popularity–PSB: $r = -.21$, $p < .01$). The more popular the favorite *Friends* character is perceived to be, the more affinity participants have toward the show, the greater the PSR with the character, and the greater the PSB.

Before proceeding to the main analysis, an analysis was conducted to replicate earlier findings by examining the predictors of PSR. Participants' gender and loneliness were entered on the first step. On the second step, program-related variables were entered: length of time participants had viewed the show, their commitment to the show, and their affinity toward the show. On the third step, character-related variables were entered, including the extent to which the *Friends* character chosen as favorite is an overall television favorite character, the perceived popularity of this character relative to all other *Friends* characters, and the character's attractiveness.

The results of the first regression assessing PSR predictors are presented in Table 2. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all independent variables in the regression were tested. None exceeded 2.57, indicating no problem with multicollinearity in this analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The equation explained 51% of the variance in PSR. As can be seen, the remaining significant predictors of PSR in Step 3 are gender ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .001$), affinity toward the show ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < .001$), the extent to which the favorite *Friends* character is an overall favorite television character ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < .05$), and the character's attractiveness ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .001$).

Hypotheses Testing

The second stepwise regression equation examined the predictors of PSB with favorite *Friends* character. The same predictors used to examine PSR were entered into the regression, with two changes. First, PSB was entered as the dependent variable. Second, because of the prediction that PSR leads to PSB, PSR was entered on Step 4 of the regression analysis. Table 3 presents the results of this regression analysis. Again, VIFs for all independent variables in the regression were tested. None exceeded 2.59, indicating no problem with multicollinearity in this analysis. The equation explained 57% of the variance in PSB. As can be seen, the remaining significant predictors of PSB with favorite character were participants' loneliness ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < .05$), commitment to show ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .01$), affinity toward show ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .01$), perceived popularity of the favorite character relative to all other

Table 2
Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Parasocial Relationship With Favorite *Friends* Character

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Gender (females)	0.25	0.11	0.15*
Loneliness	0.00	0.08	0.00
Step 2			
Gender (females)	–0.17	0.08	–0.10*
Loneliness	0.05	0.06	0.04
Years	–0.01	0.01	–0.06
Commitment	–0.02	0.04	–0.04
Affinity toward show	0.74	0.06	0.77***
Step 3			
Gender (females)	–0.29	0.09	–0.17***
Loneliness	0.08	0.06	0.06
Years	–0.01	0.01	–0.06
Commitment	–0.03	0.04	–0.05
Affinity toward show	0.60	0.07	0.63***
Perceived character popularity (reversed)	0.00	0.02	0.01
Favorite character	0.08	0.04	0.12*
Character attractiveness	0.14	0.04	0.22***

Note: $N = 254$. Step 1: $R^2 = .02$, $F(2, 252) = 2.87$, $p < .06$. Step 2: $R^2 = .47$, $\Delta R^2 = .45$, $F(5, 249) = 44.04$, $p < .001$. Step 3: $R^2 = .51$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(8, 246) = 32.21$, $p < .001$.
*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

Friends characters (β = –0.09, $p < .05$), and PSR with the character (β = 0.40, $p < .001$).

Based on the preceding equations, Hypothesis 1 was supported, with PSR being the most significant predictor of PSB. Not surprisingly, the more intense the relationship was, the more distressed viewers were when it ended. The second hypothesis was not supported. After controlling for the intensity of the relationship, duration of viewing did not significantly predict PSB. Hypothesis 3 was supported with commitment to viewing the show significantly and positively predicting PSB. Affinity toward the show was found to significantly predict PSB, supporting Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5 was not supported because once PSR was controlled, the degree to which the favorite *Friends* characters were overall favorites did not significantly predict PSB. Hypothesis 6 was also not supported, as character attractiveness was not found to be a significant predictor of PSB. In support of Hypothesis 7, popularity emerged as a significant predictor of PSB, so that the more popular the character is perceived to be, the greater the PSB reported by participants.

Although the authors did not hypothesize this relationship, participants' loneliness was significantly related to PSB, when PSR was controlled, such that more lonely viewers were more distressed at breakup. This finding is interesting as, like in previous research (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985), loneliness did not predict PSR in this study but it did predict PSB. This finding is consistent with research that has

Table 3
Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Parasocial Breakup With Favorite *Friends* Character

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Gender (females)	0.27	0.09	0.20**
Loneliness	0.06	0.06	0.06
Step 2			
Gender (females)	–0.08	0.07	–0.06
Loneliness	0.09	0.05	0.10*
Years	0.00	0.01	0.01
Commitment	0.09	0.03	0.17**
Affinity toward the show	0.45	0.05	0.58***
Step 3			
Gender (females)	–0.12	0.07	–0.09+
Loneliness	0.11	0.05	0.12*
Years	0.00	0.01	0.00
Commitment	0.08	0.03	0.15*
Attitude toward show	0.37	0.06	0.48***
Perceived character popularity (reversed)	–0.03	0.02	–0.09+
Favorite character	0.06	0.03	0.11*
Character attractiveness	0.05	0.03	0.10+
Step 4			
Gender (females)	–0.03	0.07	–0.02
Loneliness	0.09	0.04	0.09*
Years	0.01	0.01	0.03
Commitment	0.10	0.03	0.18**
Attitude toward show	0.17	0.06	0.21**
Perceived character popularity	–0.03	0.02	–0.09*
Favorite character	0.04	0.03	0.07
Character attractiveness	0.01	0.03	0.01
Parasocial relationship	0.32	0.05	0.40***

Note: Step 1: $R^2 = .04$, $F(2, 249) = 5.23$, $p < .01$. Step 2: $R^2 = .47$, $\Delta R^2 = .43$, $F(5, 246) = 43.18$, $p < .001$. Step 3: $R^2 = .50$, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(8, 243) = 29.86$, $p < .001$. Step 4: $R^2 = .57$, $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $F(9, 242) = 35.74$, $p < .001$.
+$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

found that a person's psychological composition does contribute in some ways to the development of imaginary relationships (Turner, 1993) and seems to suggest that some psychological aspects are more relevant to the breakup of PSRs than to their development. The fact that the predictive value of loneliness remained above and beyond that of PSR intensity indicates that lonely viewers are likely more dependent on their relationships with their favorite characters and hence feel more anxious on relationship dissolution.

Overall, the results of this study show that, beyond PSR, the intensity of PSB is predicted by several other factors, including commitment and affinity to the show, the perceived popularity of the favorite *Friends* character relative to all other *Friends* characters, PSR with the favorite character, and loneliness. The results show that some of the predictions drawn from research on interpersonal relationships held up in mediated relationships, whereas other factors that impact personal breakups did not carry over to mediated relationships.

Discussion

The data in this study shed light on the factors that explain people's reactions to the end of a relationship with a television character. They indicate that viewers' reactions are explained by factors other than the intensity of such relationships. Other factors predicting the reactions to PSB, that remained significant after controlling for PSR, were commitment to the show, affinity to the show, the perceived popularity of the favorite character, and participants' loneliness. Together with PSR these factors explained 57% of the variance in reaction to PSB, suggesting that the use of theory from interpersonal settings to understand this phenomenon is warranted, but that mediated relationships operate somewhat differently than social relationships.

The generally low levels of PSB raise a few interesting issues. On the one hand they are consistent with previous research suggesting the reliability of the measure. On the other hand they suggest that although this study shows that reactions to PSB follow similar patterns as breakup in social contexts, they seem to be less stressful than breakup of close friendships or romantic relationships. In contrast, the higher levels of PSR reported in many studies suggest that the relationships themselves are quite enjoyable and meaningful. It may be, then, that the one-way nature of the intimacy involved in PSRs allows for enjoyable relationships that keep one company and entertain but do not facilitate great dependence, which would make the anxiety at the end of the relationship very strong. This finding is in line with Koenig and Lessan (1985), who suggested that television characters are closer to an individual than mere acquaintances, but not quite as close as friends. This suggests that some emotional distress is likely when mediated relationships dissolve but that this distress is likely to be weaker than the distress experienced following social breakups. In addition, the socially shared nature of the end of a series as well as the long lead time viewers have to expect such a breakup may mitigate its negative effects. Also, the fact that one of the

main characters in the show, Joey, was known to be starring in a new spinoff series starting the following fall season also could have contributed to the generally low levels of PSB reported in this sample. Finally, the relatively high frequency of reruns and repeated airing of the show's episodes, as well as the availability of DVD collections of the episodes, also likely alleviated some of the anxiety associated with the show's ending, as viewers knew they could rely on those for continued interactions with the show's characters. Still, one can conceive of reruns and DVDs for shows that no longer run as similar to looking at photos or home videos of a lost friend or partner. They may help, but it is not really the same. What is lost is the participation in the progression of the story.

That the duration of viewing did not predict PSB is surprising. It was expected that, like in other relationships, as relationships last longer their demise is more painful (Simpson, 1987). At the bivariate level the length of relationships was correlated with PSB ($r = .34$, $p < .001$) but this relationship disappeared once other variables were included in the model. This suggests that the effect of length of relationship on PSB operates through variables like commitment and affinity rather than directly.

The importance of commitment to PSB (but not to PSR) is noteworthy. It may be that commitment and intensity operate independently while in a relationship, but once the show goes off the air the disappointment is increased when viewers are committed. Because in this study PSB was measured so that it was related to the end of *Friends* as a whole and not only to removing a specific character, this feeling of disappointment may have spilled over into this measure. On the other hand, the PSR measure was specific to the favorite character and was not affected by these negative feelings. Perhaps a study exploring the removal of a character from an ongoing show would provide a better indication of whether the commitment to the show has an independent contribution to PSB.

Whereas affinity to the show is a predictor of both the intensity of the relationship and reactions to its dissolution, attraction predicts PSR but not PSB and commitment and popularity predict breakup but not the strength of the relationship itself. The fact that the perceived attractiveness predicted PSR but not PSB further suggests that how much one finds a partner attractive is crucial during the relationship but at breakup, perceptions of how others perceive the former partner are more important.

The contribution of popularity seems consistent with the notion that the stress following from the end of a relationship is related to the perception that others will see this as a loss of something valuable (Simpson, 1987). In other words, breaking up with someone who is perceived as a "great catch" and who is more likely to quickly move on is more damaging to one's self-image than a breakup with someone less socially valued. Although this argument makes little sense when applied to PSR it nonetheless seems to be part of the way viewers think about such relationships.

There are some differences between how respondents report feeling about their favorite characters (PSR) and how they believe others feel about the same character (perceived popularity). This demonstrates the individuality of such choices and that they are at least partially independent of perceptions of public celebrity. Specifically,

the data suggest that for those characters who are most liked (i.e., Rachel) and least liked (i.e., Ross), there is consistency in the extent to which they are liked by respondents, are perceived as popular, and the levels of PSR and PSB that participants experience with them. However, for other characters there is less congruence between the measures. It would be interesting for future investigations to examine the source of the discrepancy between individual liking and perceived popularity.

Finally, this study provides an interesting test of various theoretical explanations of gender differences in favorite character selection. It is well documented that when children are asked to select a favorite character, boys overwhelmingly prefer male characters, whereas girls select both male and female characters (Feilitzen & Linné, 1975; Hoffner, 1996; Reeves & Miller, 1978). A similar trend has been documented among college students and adults (Cohen, 1997, 2004). Three explanations are possible for these findings: (a) a psychological explanation argues that women have a greater capacity than men to empathize with those who are dissimilar from them; (b) a more sociological explanation suggests that because of the greater social status men enjoy it is deemed proper for women to admire men but not vice versa; and (c) an explanation based on gender media representation argues that there are more male characters and that they usually get better roles than female characters, making them more appealing to viewers of both genders (Reeves & Miller, 1978). This study of *Friends* provides a test of the third explanation in that there are three male and three female characters who enjoy relatively equal status on the show. The fact that the gender difference in selecting favorite characters appears in this study suggests that even when a show provides equal representation this does not eliminate gender difference in selections of favorite characters.

Additionally, this study extends the examination of gender differences in PSRs by testing the mechanisms through which such relationships occur. Previous studies often simply reported the correlations between gender and PSR at the bivariate level. This study found a strong gender difference on affinity toward the show and a strong correlation between affinity and PSR and PSB. Controlling for affinity, the relationships between gender and PSR and PSB change from positive to negative. It is likely that women's PSRs with television characters operate through their attitudes toward the shows and once such attitudes are statistically controlled, the relationship is reversed.

Some limitations of this study should be noted. First, the authors used a convenience sample of undergraduate students that consisted mostly of women. Future research should attempt to use more balanced samples as males and females differ on some key constructs, including PSRs. Second, this study excluded nonviewers of the show *Friends.* Those participants who reported never having watched at least one episode of the show were asked to answer only a few questions about themselves but were excused from responding to any questions about the show and its characters. Therefore, the authors were unable to compare these nonviewers to the viewers in the sample except to say that there was not a significant difference between them in terms of their loneliness scores, $t(293) = 0.95$, $p = .34$. Although fu-

ture research could benefit from comparing nonviewers with other viewers, especially heavy ones, in this study nonviewers constituted only 6.4% of the sample. Moreover, although nonviewers may exhibit some distress over the ending of the show, this is more likely to be a secondary effect resulting from the distress experienced by other people around them rather than a direct effect, and is not likely to have a profound psychological effect on these nonviewers.

The focus of this study was on PSB in a specific case where both the show and the character are going off the air. Future research should examine the nature of PSB with a character that is leaving an ongoing show. Researchers should also examine other genres. For example, with the growing popularity of reality shows, many of which eliminate characters on a regular basis, it would be interesting to examine how viewers react when their favorite character is "voted off" the show. Another genre is soap operas, which have often been studied with regard to PSRs (Perse & Rubin, 1990; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Several generic differences exist between soap operas and situation comedies such as *Friends* and these may play a role in the levels of PSB exhibited by viewers. For example, the different tone of the show—dramatic in soap operas and humoristic in comedies—may be important. Also, on soap operas characters are frequently eliminated or the actors that portray them change while the show continues. The continuation of the show along with the large cast of characters that typify most soap operas may mean that the departure of one character is felt less strongly than when a show goes off the air altogether.

Another direction for future research is to examine the personality characteristics that viewers bring with them to the screen and how these interact with the experienced PSB. It has been established that there are some similarities between mediated and interpersonal relationships and that there are individual differences in how viewers react to the breakup of mediated relationships. Considering the overall low levels of PSB reported in this study, it may seem that the breakup of a mediated relationship is not a disturbing phenomenon for most people, but it may be a particularly upsetting situation for certain people who are especially attached to the mediated characters or who are prone to extreme effects of relationship dissolution. Research focusing on such extreme cases should include measures appropriate to assess individual differences, such as extreme emotionalism, and state variables such as depression and mental instability.

In sum, these findings oppose the view that developing attachments to characters is no more than an illusory and escapist diversion for lonely viewers and support the notion that mediated relationships are part of one's wider social life (Caughey, 1985). At the same time, it is becoming increasingly clear that scholars of mediated relationships need to start examining the differences, as well as the similarities, between social relationships and PSRs. PSRs seem to carry less emotional intensity than close or romantic relationships, and their one-sidedness seems to have implications for the way they develop, as does the more public nature of the shared knowledge there is about the characters and actors and the shows of which they are part. Solving the riddle of how mediated and social relationships compare with each other involves a

unique blend of perspectives from within the communication discipline. A better understanding of this question touches on questions of media effects, of technology and its effects on emotions and a sense of presence, and a keen understanding of interpersonal relationships. Thus, gaining new insights into mediated relationships promises to produce gains in each of these areas, and, more important, to enhance understanding of how they overlap and interact to provide new insights into the mysteries of human communication.

Appendix

Measure of Parasocial Relationship

1. I like my favorite *Friends* character.
2. I would like to meet my favorite *Friends* character in person.
3. I like to compare my ideas with what my favorite *Friends* character says.
4. My favorite *Friends* character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.
5. I like hearing the voice of my favorite *Friends* character in my home.

Measure of Parasocial Breakup

1. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel more lonely.
2. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel angry.
3. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I plan to watch other programs with the same actor.
4. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I am less excited about watching TV.
5. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I tend to think of him or her often.
6. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I watch reruns or taped episodes of *Friends.*
7. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel sad.
8. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I don't miss him or her as much as I thought I would (reverse).
9. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel like I lost a good friend.
10. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I found a different TV personality to like (reverse).
11. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel a void in my life.
12. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I look for information about him or her in other places (e.g., talk shows, newspaper, Internet).
13. Now that my favorite *Friends* character is off the air, I feel disappointed.

Measure of Affinity Towards the Show *Friends*

1. I often search for information about *Friends* in magazines, online, and in other television shows or films.
2. I think that my life is a lot like that of the characters on *Friends.*
3. I wish I had friends like the characters on *Friends.*
4. I enjoy watching *Friends.*
5. *Friends* is very important to me.
6. I do not relate at all to the characters on *Friends* (reverse).
7. I rarely think about *Friends* before or after I watch the show (reverse).
8. I still hope that *Friends* will return to TV.
9. I often watch reruns of *Friends.*
10. When *Friends* comes on, I switch the channel (reverse).
11. I really get involved in what happens to the characters on *Friends.*
12. Watching *Friends* is a waste of my time (reverse).
13. I really get the characters on *Friends.*
14. I still can't believe *Friends* is off the air.
15. While viewing *Friends* I forget myself and am fully absorbed in the program.

Measure of Participants' Loneliness

1. I often feel in tune with the people around me (reverse).
2. I have many friends (reverse).
3. I often lack companionship.
4. I often feel alone.
5. I am satisfied with my social life (reverse).
6. I often feel there are people I can talk to (reverse).
7. I often feel there are people around me but not with me.
8. I have trouble making friends.
9. I often feel isolated from others.
10. I often feel close to other people (reverse).
11. I generally find that people want to be my friends (reverse).
12. I often feel my relationships with others are not meaningful.

Note

[1]The length of time that passed between the final *Friends* episode being aired and the completion of the survey by participants was significantly and negatively associated with their affinity toward the show ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$), their PSR with their favorite *Friends* character ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$), and their PSB with their favorite *Friends* character ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$). These negative correlations can be interpreted in two ways. It may be that the more time passed after the airing of the last episode, the less positive these attitudes became. Alternatively, it may be that those participants who had less affinity toward the show and the characters to begin with took longer to com-

plete the survey after the show ended. When entering this variable as a predictor in subsequent regression equations, it did not emerge as a significant predictor of either PSR or PSB. Because of this and because of the lack of clarity regarding the direction of causality with these outcomes, the variable of length of time between the show ending and survey completion was not included in data analyses.

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Archie Bunker's Bigotry:
A Study in Selective Perception and Exposure

by Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach

A U.S.-Canadian study finds that* All in the Family *may reinforce rather than reduce racial and ethnic prejudice

The enormously popular CBS television show *All in the Family* centers around Archie Bunker, a conservative, superpatriotic working-class American who browbeats his kind but "dingbat" wife Edith and who is especially adept in the employment of ethnic slurs. His main antagonists are his daughter Gloria and, especially, his son-in-law Mike. Mike and Gloria live with the Bunkers while Mike is finishing college, and the basic theme of the show is the conflict between "lovable bigot" Archie and liberal-minded Mike. Archie rails at Mike for his long hair, Polish ancestry, prolonged state of unemployment, and liberal (if not "Commie") position on sundry issues of the day.

All in the Family, first aired in January 1971, broke rather drastically with the U.S. television traditions of skirting racial and ethnic issues; it also broke all TV viewing records. Writing nine months later in the *New York Times,* novelist Laura Z. Hobson charged that portraying Archie as a lovable bigot actually condones and even encourages bigotry. (5) *All in the Family* producer Norman Lear countered by agreeing with the *New York Times* television critic John J. O'Connor, who had lauded the show on the ground that humor can be a remarkably effective weapon against prejudice. Moreover, Lear said, Mike provides an effective rebuttal to Archie because Mike is "always the one who is making sense" while Archie is always seen by the television audience as the one whose logic is at best a kind of "convoluted logic"; since the program brings bigotry "out in the open and has people talking about it," children "will ask questions about the bigotry . . . and parents will have to answer." (8)

Lear's line of argument thus appears to be twofold: (a) mixing humor with bigotry releases tension, and this catharsis reduces prejudice; (b) poking fun at bigotry and bringing it out in the open gives the viewer insight into his own prejudices, thus helping to reduce them even further. The former argument is, of course, similar to the contention that the portrayal of violence on TV is cathartic and thus reduces aggressive behavior. (6, 11).

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Following the Hobson-Lear exchange, others have entered the fray with sharply contrasting opinions. (12, 17) Sanders, for example, charged that the show appeals to racism and may be teaching impressionable children racial slurs, as evidenced by the fact that fan mail applauds Archie for his prejudice. (14) In sharp contrast, critic Arnold Hano contended that "fifty million Americans are being told, week after week, that it does you no good to be a bigot" and that criticism of the program comes from the "ethnic professionals" and the "so-called intellectual leaders of the community." (3) Actor Carroll O'Connor, who portrays Archie, asserted in a *Playboy* interview that "a lot of people write that we're making them understand their own feelings and their own prejudices." (13) And the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP, in apparent agreement with the views expressed by Lear, Hano, and O'Connor, presented its 1972 Image Award to *All in the Family* for its contribution to race relations.

For whatever reason, social scientists have thus far not brought their theories and methods to bear on the controversy about the beneficial or harmful effects of *All in the Family*. To date the arguments and counterarguments that have been made about the show have come from persons in the realms of literature and entertainment rather than in social science. The only exception is an opinion survey conceived and financed by the CBS organization itself, which was conducted during the early weeks following the program's debut. (7) In that study a sample of viewers were interviewed by telephone about their reactions to the program. The results showed that the majority of respondents, including minority group members, enjoyed the program and reported that they were not offended by it. Although CBS was careful to point out that conclusions about attitude change could not be drawn from a single or "one-shot" survey, the report nonetheless implied that most viewers perceived *All in the Family*'s satirical intent—and therefore that its impact would, if anything, be to reduce prejudice.

Some viewers applaud Archie for his racist viewpoint, while others applaud the show for making fun of bigotry

There is, however, an alternative hypothesis which might explain why the program was enjoyed by the great majority of viewers. Perhaps prejudiced and unprejudiced persons ascribe different meanings to the intent and outcomes of *All in the Family* episodes: nonprejudiced viewers and minority group viewers may perceive and enjoy the show as satire, whereas prejudiced viewers may perceive and enjoy the show as episodes "telling it like it is." Such an hypothesis seems to be supported by the fact that some viewers write letters (to newspaper editors, to CBS officials, and to people associated with the program) which applaud Archie for his racist viewpoint, while others applaud the show for effectively making fun of bigotry. (12)

Our purpose was to provide an empirical basis for determining the relative merits of the opposing contentions about the positive or negative effects

of *All in the Family*. The study addressed itself to two hypotheses, which can be identified as the selective perception hypothesis and the selective exposure hypothesis.

The selective perception hypothesis would suggest that viewers differing in degree of prejudice or racism would have different reasons for finding *All in the Family* entertaining, would identify with different characters, and would interpret the outcomes of the weekly episodes differently. A number of studies (1, 4, 9) have shown that a person's attitudes and values will affect that person's perception or interpretation of social stimuli. Cooper and Jahoda, for example, presented subjects with cartoons that made fun of a prejudiced character named Mr. Biggott. They found that whereas non-prejudiced persons perceived and appreciated the humor in the cartoons, prejudiced subjects distorted their meaning to avoid ridiculing or deprecating Mr. Biggott. (1) Selective perception can similarly come into play with *All in the Family*. To the unprejudiced viewer Archie may be seen as a dumb, bigoted "hard-hat," while to a prejudiced person Archie's chief ideological adversary, son-in-law Mike, may be seen as a long-haired, lazy "meathead Polack" who spouts liberal slogans. More succinctly, the selective perception hypothesis would lead us to expect that low prejudiced viewers would be more likely to perceive and enjoy *All in the Family* as a satire on bigotry, while high prejudiced viewers would be more likely to perceive and enjoy *All in the Family* for "telling it like it is." Thus, it can be predicted that high and low prejudiced viewers would enjoy the program to an approximately equal extent but for different reasons: high prejudiced persons would be more likely to enjoy it because they admire Archie, because they see Archie as making better sense than Mike, and because they see Archie as winning in the end. In addition, high prejudiced persons should be less offended by Archie's ethnic slurs and be less likely to see Archie as the person who is being ridiculed.

The selective exposure hypothesis leads us to yet another prediction: low prejudiced and high prejudiced persons will not necessarily watch *All in the Family* to the same extent. A substantial body of literature has indicated that, at least in natural field settings, there is a tendency for persons to expose themselves to social stimuli and situations which are congruent with their prior attitudinal dispositions. (2, 10) The CBS survey report, working on the assumption that *All in the Family* is widely viewed as satire, has speculated that it would be low prejudiced persons who would expose themselves to the program more frequently than high prejudiced persons. (7) Thus, Klapper stated that

> *people who view this program presumably feel differently about the topics involved than those who do not. . . . I would venture to guess, for example, that voluntary viewers would be likely to be somewhat more involved in other anti-prejudice activities, even if only in their other media choices.* (7, p. 19)

But what if most *All in the Family* viewers do not see it as satire and in fact

identify with Archie? In such an event the selective exposure hypothesis would predict that high prejudiced rather than low prejudiced persons would be the more likely to watch the program, because the main character has personal qualities and attitudes which appeal to their own self-image and world outlook.

It is not possible to say in advance which of these competing selective exposure hypotheses is the more tenable, because we cannot say in advance how many viewers will and will not perceive *All in the Family* as satire. But they can be put to an empirical test. Working on the assumption that most viewers will indeed perceive the program as satire, we could predict that *All in the Family* viewers will more likely be persons low in prejudice, identify with Mike over Archie, and disapprove of Archie's use of ethnic and racial slurs. Conversely, working on the assumption that the selective perception hypothesis is correct and therefore that many viewers see Archie as "telling it like it is," we could predict that frequent viewers will more likely be persons high in prejudice, identify with Archie over Mike, and approve (or at least condone) Archie's use of ethnic and racial slurs.

Two groups of respondents were employed—American adolescents and Canadian adults from an area where the program is seen weekly. Both groups were asked about their reactions to *All in the Family* and were, in addition, presented with attitude questions designed to measure their ethnocentrism or prejudice.[1]

The U.S. adolescent sample consisted of 237 students, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years. They attended a senior community high school in a small town in the midwestern United States. Volunteers were solicited during study hours, and virtually all of those solicited agreed to participate. Two-thirds of this group were male, and all were white. The survey was administered as an anonymous written questionnaire.

The initial Canadian sample consisted of 168 adults who were randomly selected from voting lists in London, Ontario. Seventy-seven percent of this sample, 130, agreed to be interviewed; 65 percent were female and 35 percent were male. Half of these respondents were contacted through face-to-face interviews and the other half by telephone. Statistical analyses of differences between the telephone and face-to-face groups showed no differences regarding refusal rate, basic attitudes toward *All in the Family,* or amount of prejudice. Accordingly, we ignored this variable in all further analyses of the Canadian sample.

The survey was basically the same for both the U.S. and Canadian samples, although the ethnocentrism questions were tailored for each culture. Eleven items designed to elicit reactions to *All in the Family* are

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Table 1: Percent responses to **All in the Family** item alternatives

	U.S. adolescents (N = 237)	Canadian adults (N = 133)
1. How often do you watch "All in the Family"?		
every week	13%	24%
almost every week	35	29
only occasionally	32	36
almost never	14	10
never	6	1
2. Is there any reason you don't watch it more often?		
It is offensive	13%	10%
3. Which of the following statements best describes your feelings about the program?		
very enyoyable	53%	38%
enjoyable	34	55
not enjoyable	8	5
very unenjoyable	5	2
4. How funny is the show?		
extremely funny	24%	15%
very funny	39	44
somewhat funny	24	28
only mildly funny	7	9
not funny	6	4
5. Which of the two main characters (Archie or Mike) do you like or admire more?		
admire Archie	62%	66%
6. Archie and Mike often disagree with one another about various issues. In your opinion which of these two men usually makes better sense?		
Archie makes better sense	13%	11%
7. Generally speaking, at the end of program does Archie win or lose?		
Archie wins	42%	40%
8. Which of the main characters in the show is most often made fun of?		
Archie	10%	32%
Mike	46	10
Edith	36	58
Gloria	2	0
Lionel	6	—
9. Archie often refers to members of various minority groups as "coloreds, coons, Chinks," etc. Do you see anything wrong in using these names for minority groups?		
nothing wrong	35%	43%
wrong	33	33
very wrong	32	24
10. In 20 years will your attitudes and values be most similar to Archie (or to one of the other main characters)?		
similar to Archie	23%	—
11. Has watching the show made you aware that you had prejudices you didn't know about?		
Yes	—	20%

shown in Table 1. A few additional questions, including a question about frequency of television viewing in general, were also asked.

The measure of ethnocentrism or prejudice for the U.S. adolescents consisted of six questions, each of which had two alternative responses: (1) Do you think white students and Negro students should go to the same schools or to separate schools? (2) In your opinion, which is more to blame if a person is poor: lack of effort on his own part, or circumstances beyond his control? (3) Do you think Negroes are as intelligent as white people—that is, can they learn things as well if they are given the same education and training? (4) Do you feel there should be strong laws against homosexuals, or do you feel that if two adults want to be homosexuals that is their own business? (5) Which factor do you believe most accounts for the failure of minority groups like Negroes, Indians, and Spanish Americans to achieve equality with white people, restrictions imposed by white society, or lack of initiative and hard work? (6) Which of the following statements best describes your feeling toward hippies: they should be forced to get a bath, a haircut, and a job; or they should be allowed to live their lives as they choose? For the Canadian group questions 1 and 5 were replaced with more culturally relevant items, as follows: (1) In your opinion do you think Canadian Indians are so unreliable that they can never be trusted to take care of themselves, or that they are perfectly capable of managing their own affairs? (5) In your opinion, do you think the French Candians in Quebec should forget about their French culture and learn English, or that they have a right to a French culture, including speaking the French language? The responses to the six items in each sample were summed to form a single index, and a median split was used to categorize respondents as high or low in prejudice or ethnocentrism.

Table 1 shows the percentage of persons in each sample who responded to the various item alternatives designed to elicit reactions to *All in the Family*. The two samples were on the whole quite similar in their responses. Almost everyone had seen the program; most of them enjoyed it (Item 3) and found it funny (Item 4), and only a small percentage found it offensive (Item 2). Table 1 also shows that over 60 percent of the television viewers in both samples liked or admired Archie more than Mike (Item 5) and that 40 percent or more thought it was Archie who usually won at the end of the program (Item 7). A rather small percentage, between 11 and 13 percent, thought Archie made better sense than Mike (Item 6).

Which one of the main characters in the show was most often made fun of (Item 8)? If the show is generally viewed as a satire on bigotry, then Archie should be the person seen most often as the butt of the show's humor. Table 1 indicates, however, that only 10 percent of the U.S. adolescents named Archie as the person most often made fun of; 46 percent of the Americans named Mike and 36 percent named Edith.[2] Similarly,

[2] It is worth noting that post-survey remarks by respondents indicated they did not remember who Lionel was or did not consider him to be a main character in the program.

only 32 percent of the Canadian viewers named Archie as the character most often made fun of, while a majority (58 percent) thought Edith was the most ridiculed. Finally, 35 percent of the American sample and 43 percent of the Canadian sample saw nothing wrong in Archie's use of ethnic and racial slurs (Item 9).

All too many viewers saw nothing wrong with Archie's use of racial and ethnic slurs

Some of these findings are, of course, quite consistent with the findings obtained by the CBS survey: most viewers enjoyed the program and found it funny, and only a small percentage found it offensive. Other findings, however, indicate a wide range of affective reactions to the show's characters, their behavior, and the outcomes. Considered all together, they suggest, contrary to the CBS report, that all too many viewers did not see the program as a satire on bigotry, had identified with Archie rather than Mike, saw Archie as winning, did not perceive Archie as the character who was the most ridiculed, and, perhaps most disturbing, saw nothing wrong with Archie's use of racial and ethnic slurs.

The *selective perception* hypothesis proposes that the prior attitudes of the viewers would be related to or would predict reactions to the characters and outcomes of *All in the Family* episodes. To test this hypothesis, we split the distribution of attitudinal scores at the median so viewers could be categorized as high or low in prejudice. Then, we compared differences in the reactions of the high and low prejudiced viewers to *All in the Family* by means of the chi-square statistic. Table 2 shows that the high and low prejudiced viewers did not differ in the extent to which they regarded *All in the Family* as enjoyable or funny (Items 3 and 4). They did, however, differ in their other reactions to the program. High prejudiced persons in both the U.S. and Canadian samples were significantly more likely than low prejudiced persons to admire Archie over Mike (Item 5) and to perceive Archie as winning in the end (Item 7). While most respondents did indicate that they saw Mike as making better sense than Archie, we must also note that the high prejudiced American adolescents were significantly more likely than low prejudiced adolescents to perceive Archie as making better sense (Item 6). Findings were in the same direction for the Canadian adult sample, although these fall short of the usually accepted level of statistical significance. Moreover, high prejudiced U.S. adolescents indicated significantly more often than low prejudiced adolescents that their values would be similar to Archie Bunker's 20 years hence (Item 10).[3] Table 2 also indicates that high prejudiced Canadian adults condoned Archie's slurs significantly more often (Item 9), and the U.S. data showed a trend in the same direction. Finally, high prejudiced Canadian viewers saw the show as poking fun at Archie significantly less often than did low prejudiced viewers (Item 8).

[3] This question was not asked in the Canadian sample.

Generally, then, the quantitative data shown in Table 2 tend to support the selective perception hypothesis—namely, that prejudiced persons identify more with Archie, perceive Archie as making better sense than Mike, perceive Archie as winning. We also asked the respondents what they particularly liked or disliked about Archie or Mike. High prejudiced persons spontaneously indicated that they disliked things about Mike significantly more often than about Archie; low prejudiced persons spontaneously indicated that they disliked things about Archie significantly more often than about Mike. But even more interesting are their explanations of why they liked or disliked these characters. People who disliked Archie indicated that he is a bigot, domineering, rigid, loud, and that he mistreats his wife. Persons who liked Archie reported he is down-to-

Table 2: Differences between high and low prejudice viewers in their reactions to **All in the Family**

Variable	U.S. adolescents High prej.	Low prej.	p	Canadian adults High prej.	Low prej.	p
3. How enjoyable is it?						
very enjoyable	27%	26%		18%	20%	
enjoyable	19	15	n.s.	29	26	n.s.
not enjoyable	5	3		1	4	
very unenjoyable	4	1		2	0	
4. How funny is it?						
extremely funny	12%	12%		8%	7%	
very funny	17	22		22	22	
somewhat funny	12	12	n.s.	14	14	n.s.
mildly funny	2	5		4	5	
not funny	2	4		2	2	
5. Who do you like or admire?						
Archie	38%	24%		40%	26%	
Mike	18	20	.05	13	21	.05
6. Who makes better sense?						
Archie	10%	3%		8%	3%	
Mike	44	43	.01	43	46	.10
7. Does Archie win?						
Wins	29%	13%		26%	14%	
Loses	25	33	.01	26	34	.05
8. Who is made fun of?						
Archie	4%	6%		11%	21%	
Others	50	40	n.s.	40	28	.05
9. Ethnic slurs?						
not wrong	22%	13%		29%	14%	
wrong	18	15	.10	14	19	.01
very wrong	15	17		7	17	
10. Whose values will be similar?						
Archie	16%	7%		—	—	
Others	39%	38	.05	—	—	—

earth, honest, hard-working, predictable, and kind enough to allow his son-in-law and daughter to live with him. Persons who liked Mike reported he is tolerant and stands up for his beliefs; those who disliked him reported he is stupid, narrow-minded, prejudiced against the older generation, rebellious, lazy, and a "banner waver."

Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses supported the selective perception hypothesis. Reactions to the program were varied, and these reactions were related to or a function of prior attitudes. This conclusion is clearly at variance with those who have assumed and have argued that television viewers of *All in the Family* uniformly perceive the program's satirical intent.

The second hypothesis, the *selective exposure* hypothesis, goes further to propose that underlying attitudinal predispositions will cause viewers to watch *All in the Family* to different extents. The CBS report, assuming as it did that the program was more or less uniformly perceived as a satire on bigotry, proceeded to speculate that the more frequent viewers would be low prejudiced persons. However, if we assume that many viewers do not see it as a satire, it is reasonable to predict just the opposite—namely, that regular viewers of *All in the Family* are more likely to (a) be high prejudiced persons, (b) identify with or admire Archie more than Mike, and (c) condone Archie's use of ethnic and racial slurs. To test these hypotheses, we categorized those viewers who indicated they watched the program every week or almost every week as "frequent viewers" and those who watched it only occasionally, almost never, or never as "infrequent viewers" (see Table 1, item 1 for item alternatives). We then compared these two groups of viewers for ethnocentrism or prejudice, identification with Archie or Mike, and condonement of ethnic and racial slurs.

Although the predicted relationship concerning prejudice was not found for Canadian adults, it was found for the American adolescents: frequent adolescent viewers of *All in the Family* were significantly more likely to be high prejudiced rather than low prejudiced (Table 3). Skeptics

Table 3: Frequency of viewing **All in the Family** and differences in prejudice, and program reactions

Variable	U.S. adolescents Freq. view	Infreq. view	p	Canadian adults Freq. view	Infreq. view	p
A. Prejudice						
High	26%	19%		26%	25%	
Low	24	31	.05	25	24	n.s.
5. Who do you like or admire?						
Archie	39%	23%		36%	30%	
Mike	11	27	.01	14	20	n.s.
9. Ethnic slurs?						
not wrong	21%	14%		29%	14%	
wrong	17	16	.05	17	16	.01
very wrong	11	21		6	18	

might argue that high prejudiced persons watch television generally more often than low prejudiced persons, and are therefore more likely than low prejudiced persons to watch *All in the Family* also. In such an event the significant relationship between prejudice and frequency of watching *All in the Family* would be spurious. To find out, we asked subjects to estimate how many hours of television they watched each day and on the basis of these responses classified them as "frequent" or "infrequent" viewers of television in general. We found no significant relationship between frequency of watching television in general and prejudice ($x^2 = 0.89$, df = 1). We thus seem justified in concluding that high prejudiced adolescents are more prone than less prejudiced adolescents to watch *All in the Family* in particular.

Table 3 also shows that frequent *All in the Family* viewers admired Archie more often than Mike (Item 5)—significantly more often in the U.S. sample and more often, but not significantly so, in the Canadian sample. It further shows that frequent watchers in both samples condoned Archie's ethnic slurs significantly more often than infrequent viewers (Item 9). Thus, the data support the selective exposure hypothesis in a direction that seems opposite to that suggested by the CBS report: *All in the Family* seems to be appealing more to the racially and ethnically prejudiced members of society than to the less prejudiced members.

We have attempted to bring social psychological theory and empirical methods to bear on the *All in the Family* controversy. In general, the data seem to support those who have argued that the program is not uniformly seen as satire and those who have argued that it exploits or appeals to bigotry. There are, however, some methodological aspects of the data that need to be discussed.

First, what about the generalizability of the results? The two studies included 370 respondents in the U.S. and Canada; is it valid to generalize from findings thus obtained to over 50 million *All in the Family* viewers? Ideally, of course, more extensive and representative samples would have been desirable. But the basic findings reported here have been replicated with two very different samples, differing in age (adolescents versus adults), nationality (Americans versus Canadians), and method of interviewing (anonymous written questionnaire versus face-to-face and telephone interviews). The fact that the findings were on the whole similar despite such differences increases confidence in our findings.

Second, it should be noted that our study, like the earlier CBS survey, is also a single survey and thus not designed to draw conclusions about the effects of *All in the Family* on attitude change. As Klapper (7) has pointed out, the only true test for attitude change would be an experimental design which has (a) a matched control sample of nonviewers who can be compared to the "experimental" or viewing group and (b) attitude measurements before and after viewing a series of the programs. Despite the fact that the present study is not an experimental study, the findings

surely argue against the contention that *All in the Family* has positive effects, as has been claimed by its supporters and admirers. We found that many persons did not see the program as a satire on bigotry and that these persons were more likely to be viewers who scored high on measures of prejudice. Even more important is the finding that high prejudiced persons were likely to watch *All in the Family* more often than low prejudiced persons, to identify more often with Archie Bunker, and to see him winning in the end.[4] All such findings seem to suggest that the program is more likely reinforcing prejudice and racism than combating it.[5]

The present findings also seem to cast doubt on Norman Lear's and

[4] There is tentative evidence that similar psychological dynamics may come into play regarding other television programs as well. *Sanford and Son,* a situation comedy modeled after *All in the Family,* is about a black junk dealer who is prejudiced against whites. On the basis of findings from the present research we speculated that while Sanford is a likable character in many ways, he also exhibits behavior consistent with the common stereotype of Negroes: he is lazy, lives in a junkyard, and throws his beer cans out the front door. On the other hand, his son Lamont is ambitious and hard working. In an exploratory study 97 Canadian adults were asked the following question: Sanford and his son Lamont have different attitudes and life styles; in your opinion which one of these two men is more typical, that is, similar to Negroes in general? Fifty-six percent of the respondents named Sanford, 26 percent named Lamont, and the remaining 18 percent refused to answer on the grounds that it was unfair to stereotype or that they didn't know enough about Negroes. As expected, high prejudiced persons were significantly more likely ($p < .01$) than low prejudiced persons to name Sanford than to name Lamont or refuse to answer. More detailed research is obviously needed, but the finding is intriguing.

[5] Given these findings, a question arises about O'Connor's observation that "a lot of people" have written that the show gives them insight into their own prejudices. Who are these persons and how many are they? The Canadian survey asked a question which hints at a possible answer. Note from Table 1 that in response to a direct probe (Item 1), 20 percent of the interviewees indicated that the show had made them aware of some of their own prejudices. Such a response of course does not mean that they really gained insight or that they all wrote letters communicating that insight, but for the sake of speculation treat the answer at face value. The next question that can be asked is whether these persons were high or low in prejudice and whether they were frequent or infrequent viewers of the program. Of those 27 viewers (20 percent of the sample) reporting insight, 55 percent were low prejudiced viewers and 80 percent were infrequent watchers of the program. The relationship between prejudice and insight was not significant ($x^2 = 0.64$, $df = 1$), but the data between frequency of viewing and insight were ($x^2 = 8.4$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$); that is, the less frequent the viewing the more the reported insight. Thus, in both samples the data are in a direction opposite to that suggested by O'Connor: the majority of persons reporting insight were low in prejudice and were infrequent watchers of the program. There are three possible interpretations of the finding: (a) the more frequently persons watch the program, the less insightful they become about prejudice, (b) the infrequent, low prejudiced viewers were formerly high prejudiced persons who became less prejudiced as a result of watching *All in the Family,* or (c) infrequent and low prejudiced viewers are more likely to be persons who look for and/or report self-insights into prejudice. The last interpretation seems the most plausible. Because of the very small number of respondents involved in this analysis, one must, however, be cautious in drawing conclusions. Nonetheless, it can be suggested that persons who have written that *All in the Family* gave them insight into their own prejudices were on the whole low in racism or prejudice at the outset.

John O'Connor's contention that by mixing humor with bigotry the show leads to a cathartic reduction of bigotry. If high prejudiced persons do not perceive the program as a satire on bigotry, they will not experience a cathartic reduction in prejudice.

On balance the study seems to support more the critics who have argued that *All in the Family* has harmful effects. Some serious questions have been raised by those critics. Both Hobson (5) and Slawson (16) have asserted that by making Archie a "lovable bigot" the program encourages bigots to excuse and rationalize their own prejudices. Sanders (14) has charged that "already there is evidence that impressionable white children have picked up, and are using, many of the old racial slurs which Archie has resurrected, popularized and made 'acceptable' all over again." Our empirical research suggests that at the very least those charges have a valid psychological base.

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