

**Record: 1**

**Title:** Children's wishful identification and parasocial interaction with favorite television characters.

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**Source:** Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. Summer96, Vol. 40 Issue 3, p389. 14p. 4 Charts.

**Document Type:** Article

**Subject Terms:** \*TELEVISION & children  
\*TELEVISION personalities  
SOCIAL aspects

**Abstract:** Presents a study of children's wishful identification and parasocial interaction with favorite television characters. Sex differences; Perception of character traits; Implications for socialization effects.

**Full Text Word Count:** 6283

**ISSN:** 0883-8151

**Accession Number:** 9610084609

**Database:** Academic Search Complete

## **CHILDREN'S WISHFUL IDENTIFICATION AND PARASOCIAL INTERACTION WITH FAVORITE TELEVISION CHARACTERS**

Children aged 7 to 12 were interviewed about their favorite TV character. Nearly all boys and about half of the girls selected same-sex favorites. Regression analyses used perceived character traits (attractiveness, strength, humor, intelligence, social behavior) to predict wishful identification and parasocial interaction with characters. For male characters, wishful identification was predicted by intelligence and (for girls only) humor; parasocial interaction was predicted by intelligence, attractiveness, and (for boys only) strength. In marked contrast, for female characters (chosen only by girls), attractiveness was the only significant predictor. Although girls rated female characters as more intelligent than male characters, this trait apparently was not an important determinant of attraction. Interpretations of the findings and implications for socialization effects are discussed.

Television plays a significant role in the socialization of American children (see Comstock, 1993). Children typically look to adults, such as parents and teachers, as behavioral models, but television also provides a wide array of attractive models. Consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, much evidence shows that viewers learn from positive and negative televised role models, and acquire norms and standards for conduct.

Much of the research on the impact of televised behaviors has involved short-term exposures to characters with whom viewers are not familiar. There is much evidence, however, that children and adults form affective attachments to recurring television characters and personalities (see Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). Identification with selected characters is one outcome of television viewing that is believed to mediate the socialization process. Identification has been defined in various ways, but commonly refers to

the process by which a viewer shares a character's perspective and vicariously participates in his/her experiences during the program (Maccoby & Wilson, 1957). This process extends to the desire to be like or behave in ways similar to the character, which has been referred to as "wishful identification" (v. Feilitzen & Linne, 1975). In practice, this is the definition of identification used in most research studies. Understanding the factors that contribute to wishful identification can help elucidate the process by which television portrayals shape behaviors, as well as aid in the development of media messages intended to produce attitude and behavior change (for example, see Brown & Cody, 1991 ).

In the 1970s, Reeves and his colleagues (Reeves & Greenberg, 1977; Reeves & Lometti, 1979; Reeves & Miller, 1978) examined character attributes that predict children's wishful identification with TV characters. These researchers used multidimensional scaling to examine the traits used by children to differentiate popular characters (named by researchers), and the extent to which the resulting dimensions predicted children's desire to be like the characters. Physical strength and activity level were the most important determinants of identification for boys, whereas physical attractiveness predicted identification for girls and, to a lesser extent, boys. Some evidence indicated that boys (Reeves & Miller, 1978) and girls (Reeves & Lometti, 1979) identified less with funny characters, who were often portrayed as "buffoons." As Eisenstock (1984, p. 420) noted, however, "since these studies did not separately analyze male and female character identification for children of each sex, it is not possible to determine whether these relationships existed regardless of the sex of the model."

Reeves and his colleagues did not include characters' social behaviors among predictors of identification, but other investigators have obtained evidence on this issue. Several studies (e.g., Albert, 1957; Liss, Reinhardt, & Fredriksen, 1983) found that children imitated and/or wishfully identified with successful characters, even if they disapproved of the characters' behaviors. Fernie (1981) reported that boys cited admired physical and social abilities as reasons they wanted to be like TV characters. Meyer (1973) found that most children regarded favorite characters as behaving in socially desirable ways, but that a certain subgroup (mostly males) identified strongly with violent characters, and saw violence as the right way to solve conflicts.

Sex of the character is also important; viewers identify more readily with characters of the same sex (e.g., Albert, 1957; Miller & Reeves, 1976; Reeves & Miller, 1978; Williams, LaRose, & Frost, 1981 ). Several studies (e.g., Albert, 1957; Reeves & Miller, 1978) found that male characters were chosen as role models by girls more often than female characters were chosen by boys. This finding may be due to the fact that male characters were more plentiful and had more exciting, interesting roles. It is also more socially acceptable for females than for males to behave in ways traditionally associated with the other sex (Huston, 1983).

Several researchers have distinguished between wishful identification and pseudo-friendship or parasocial interaction with a media character (Albert, 1957; Noble, 1975; Williams et al., 1981 ). Noble (1975), for example, contends that identification involves sharing characters' experiences and desiring to be like them, whereas parasocial interaction involves coming to know and imaginatively interacting with characters. Horton and Wohl (1956) coined the term "parasocial interaction" to refer to the sense of an intimate social relationship with a media character or personality. After watching a television series for a period of time, viewers come to feel that they know the characters as well as friends or neighbors. In fact,

the process of developing parasocial relationships has been likened to the process by which people come to know others in real life (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Evidence suggests that parasocial interaction provides social and emotional gratifications for viewers, and motivates continued viewing of programs (Levy, 1979; Perse, 1990; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). In addition, parasocial interaction may increase viewers' willingness to accept information from a media personality. Several studies with adults found that parasocial interaction was related to viewing programs for personally useful information (e.g., Perse, 1990; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin et al., 1985). Despite the important implications of this finding, little is known about the character traits that contribute to parasocial interaction.

### **The Present Study**

Most research on determinants of children's identification with characters was conducted more than 15 years ago. Since that time, TV portrayals of males and females have changed considerably. In addition, although the studies by Reeves and colleagues provided insight into the process of identification, it seemed that several methodological changes could provide additional information.

In the present study, children named their favorite TV character, and answered questions regarding the character[a]s traits and their wishful identification and parasocial interaction with the character. Asking children to name their favorite characters should yield a different type of character sample than the sets of familiar characters chosen by researchers (e.g., Reeves & Greenberg, 1977). Moreover, specific salient characters may have a greater impact on viewers than the overall pattern of TV portrayals (Greenberg, 1988).

Four of the character traits used in this study were included in one or more previous studies: attractiveness, strength, humor, and intelligence. Unlike the complex dimensions produced by multidimensional scaling, each trait was measured with multiple items to yield a unidimensional scale for each trait. Intelligence was considered important because previous research was unable to examine the separate contribution of this trait to character identification (see Reeves & Lometti, 1979). In addition, this study measured perceptions of the character's prosocial and antisocial behaviors. concern about TV portrayals has focused on behaviors of recurring characters, so it is reasonable to ask whether characters' social behaviors contribute to identification or parasocial interaction.

This study also examined predictors of wishful identification and parasocial interaction for male and female characters separately. Only Williams et al. (1981) appear to have followed a similar procedure. In their investigation, boys and girls viewed short scenes of performers auditioning for the PBS series *Freestyle*. children rated several traits for each character, including strength and "good looks," and indicated their identification (desire to "be like" the character) and desired association or friendship (desire to "be with" the character). Good looks was an important predictor of identification for both boys and girls rating female characters, and for girls rating male characters. Strength predicted identification only for boys rating male characters. Good looks predicted desired friendship for all four groups (boys and girls rating male and female characters), but strength was not a predictor for any group. The present study includes additional character traits and focuses on children's responses to their favorite television characters.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

First, consistent with evidence reviewed above (e.g., Reeves & Miller, 1978), it was expected that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Boys will choose same-sex favorite characters more often than girls will.

H<sub>2</sub>: Children will report greater wishful identification with same-sex characters than with opposite-sex characters.

Parasocial interaction involves the sense of a close personal relationship with a character. There is anecdotal evidence that both male and female viewers are drawn to and imagine themselves interacting with opposite-sex characters. Noble (1975) contended that this process was more characteristic of girls. He argued that girls prefer to "play opposite" performers (usually male), whereas boys prefer to share characters' experiences through identification. In contrast, Maccoby, Wilson, and Burton (1958) speculated that male viewers are more inclined to concentrate on opposite-sex characters with whom they would like to interact, whereas females prefer to focus on characters with whom they identify. These ideas suggest that parasocial interaction with same- and opposite-sex characters may differ for boys and girls, and that the relative tendency to wishfully identify and interact parasocially may also differ. Thus, two research questions are proposed:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Will boys (girls) report greater parasocial interaction with same-sex or opposite-sex characters?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Among boys (girls), will wishful identification and parasocial interaction differ for same- and opposite-sex characters?

As noted above, little is known about character attributes that contribute to wishful identification with male as compared to female characters. Williams et al.'s (1981) findings suggest that some of the differences between boys and girls in previous studies (e.g., Reeves & Greenberg, 1977) may have been due partially to the sex of the characters with whom children identified. There is much evidence that females are still underrepresented on television; when females appear, they tend to be portrayed as more attractive and nurturing than males, but also lower in status, less powerful, less productive at work, and in less diverse roles (Signorielli, 1993; Vanden Berg & Streckfuss, 1992). Because girls identify with female characters more than males do, predictors of girls' identification should be determined partly by how female characters are portrayed. There is also little research on the characteristics of portrayals that contribute to parasocial interaction (Turner, 1993). These are not necessarily the same traits as those that lead to wishful identification. This analysis leads to the following questions:

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Will children's perceptions of male and female characters' traits differ?

RQ<sub>4</sub>: Which perceived character traits will predict wishful identification with male and female characters?

RQ<sub>5</sub>: Which perceived character traits will predict parasocial interaction with male and female characters?

## Method

### Respondents

A total of 155 children in second to sixth grade (aged 7 to 12) participated in the study during the 1991-92 television season. The children attended either a parochial school (n=94) or a university-run elementary school that draws students from surrounding communities (n:61) in Bloomington-Normal, IL. There were

79 males and 76 females, and respondents were distributed nearly equally across the five grade levels. Of the total sample, 87% of the children were White, 7% were Black, 5% were Asian, and 1% were Hispanic. The children were from predominately middle-class families, and 85% lived with both parents. All children received parental permission and gave their consent to participate.

## Procedure

A pilot study with 32 children in first to fifth grade was conducted to make certain children could understand and respond to the questions. Some revisions were made, based on their responses. In the main study, each child was interviewed individually by a female researcher in a room at the child's school. Questions were read aloud and the child responded either orally or by pointing to the chosen response on a visually presented scale (used for all rating scales). Other data are reported elsewhere (Hoffner, 1993).

## Measures and Scale construction

Children were asked to identify their favorite television character, and subsequent questions dealt with that character.

**Wishful Identification.** Three items measured the extent to which children want to be like their favorite character? children indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree a lot, 5 = agree a lot). The scale was constructed by averaging the ratings for the individual items, with higher scores indicating greater wishful identification ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Parasocial Interaction.** Parasocial interaction with the child's favorite character was measured with a scale developed by Rubin and Perse (1987).<sup>2</sup> Responses to the items were made on a 5-point Likert scale, and were averaged to form a single parasocial interaction scale ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .67$ ,  $\alpha = .70$ ). Higher scores indicate greater parasocial interaction.

**Character Traits.** Sixteen items assessed children's perceptions of their favorite character's personal traits in five different areas: attractiveness, strength, humor, intelligence, and social behavior. The items were presented in random order. children indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each item described their favorite character, using a 5-point Likert scale.

The 16 items were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis with oblique (oblimin) rotation. The final analysis yielded five factors with eigen values over 1.00, all factor loadings over .60, and no cross loadings over .20. The factor solution explained 78.5% of the common variance. Ratings for the items that loaded on each factor were averaged after negative items were recoded. Thus, higher scores on each scale indicate more positive trait perceptions. The first factor, Social Behavior, included three prosocial and three antisocial traits: kind, helpful, caring, mean, violent, selfish ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .66$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ). The second factor, Attractiveness, included three items: handsome/pretty, good-looking, somewhat ugly ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ). The third factor, Humor, included two items: funny, says and does funny things ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = .85$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ). The fourth factor, Strength, included two items: physically strong, has more strength than most people ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ). The fifth factor, Intelligence, included three items: smart, good at figuring things out, dumb ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ). Attractiveness, strength, intelligence, and social behavior were positively correlated ( $r$ s between .18 to .62, all  $p < .01$ ), but humor was correlated with none of the other factors.

## Results3

### Hypothesis 1

$H_1$  (that boys would name favorite characters of the same sex more often than girls) was supported,  $X^2 (1) = 26.76, p < .001$ . Same-sex characters were chosen by nearly all (91.1 %) of the boys, but by just over half (52.6%) of the girls. A total of 31 male characters and 3 female characters were named by boys, whereas 17 male characters and 16 female characters were named by girls.[ 4]

### Hypothesis 2 and Research Questions 1, 2, and 3

For boys and girls separately, ratings of male and female characters on all variables were compared using t-tests. These results appear in Table 1. comparisons for boys must be considered unreliable because so few boys (7) chose female characters, and all but one of these choices were from the same program, Full House.

$H_2$  predicted that wishful identification would be higher for same-sex than opposite-sex characters. As Table 1 shows, this hypothesis was supported for girls, but not boys.  $RQ_1$  asked whether parasocial interaction would differ for same- and opposite-sex characters. Table 1 shows no difference for boys, but greater parasocial interaction with same-sex characters for girls. As noted above, the findings for boys are inconclusive.

$RQ_2$  asked whether wishful identification and parasocial interaction would differ for same- and opposite-sex characters. To address this question, repeated measures ANOVAs compared wishful identification and parasocial interaction with male and female characters, for boys and girls separately. Among boys there were no significant effects. Among girls there was a significant interaction,  $F(1,74) = 7.25, p < .01$ , but no main effects. Scheffe comparisons showed that parasocial interaction was higher than wishful identification for male characters, but did not differ significantly for female characters.

$RQ_3$  is answered by comparing the trait perceptions of male and female characters. Both boys and girls rated female characters as engaging in more positive social behaviors than male characters. In addition, girls perceived female characters as more attractive and more intelligent than male characters.

### Research Questions 4 and 5

Regression analyses determined the character traits that predict children's wishful identification ( $RQ^4$ ) and parasocial interaction ( $RQ^5$ ) with male and female favorite characters. To account for sex of the subject, separate analyses were conducted for: boys who chose male characters; girls who chose male characters; and girls who chose female characters.[5] Too few boys (7) chose female characters to permit analyses involving this subgroup. In all analyses, the five traits were entered simultaneously into the equation. Table 2 summarizes the results for wishful identification. Wishful identification with male characters was predicted by intelligence for both boys and girls, and by humor for girls only. In contrast, girls' wishful identification with female characters was predicted solely by attractiveness.

Table 3 summarizes the results for parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction with male characters was predicted by the attractiveness and intelligence of the characters for both boys and girls, and by strength for boys only. As with wishful identification, attractiveness was the sole predictor of girls' parasocial interaction with female characters.[6]

### **Additional Analyses Examining characters' Social Behaviors**

To further examine characters' social behaviors, each of the six items on the social behavior scale was correlated with wishful identification and parasocial interaction, controlling for sex of subject and character. Table 4 shows that wishful identification and parasocial interaction were higher for characters regarded as kinder, more helpful, more caring, less mean, and less selfish. However, neither wishful identification nor parasocial interaction were significantly related to the character's perceived violence.

### **Discussion**

Sex differences in choice of favorite characters were consistent with previous research (e.g., Miller & Reeves, 1976). Nearly all boys selected same-sex characters, but only about half of the girls did so. Even today, this finding may reflect the nature of male and female TV portrayals, with males presented more often and in more diverse, less conventional roles than females (Signorielli, 1993). Girls who named male favorites looked on them more as pseudo-friends than as role models, whereas female favorites were regarded as both. This suggests that a substantial subgroup of girls prefer male characters whom they "play opposite" rather than identify with (Noble, 1975). However, overall girls reported more wishful identification and parasocial interaction with same-sex characters. The most interesting findings involve the different pattern of results for male and female characters. For male characters (chosen by boys and girls), intelligence was the one trait that predicted both wishful identification and parasocial interaction, although more attractive males were also more likely to be considered pseudo-friends. It is encouraging that perceived intelligence was an important factor in children's choice of male characters as role models, but unfortunately this pattern did not extend to female characters (chosen only by girls). Attractiveness was the only predictor of wishful identification and parasocial interaction with female favorites. Previous studies found attractiveness to be the sole determinant of identification for girls (Reeves & Greenberg, 1977; Reeves & Lometti, 1979), but the present findings reveal this pattern only for girls who named female favorite characters.

The implications of these findings are especially significant given girls' greater wishful identification with female characters. It appears that the message girls are receiving from television is that for people like themselves (females), appearance is of primary importance. Paradoxically, girls rated female characters as more intelligent than male characters. One explanation of this apparent contradiction may lie in the nature of TV portrayals, with different traits emphasized or rewarded for males and females (e.g., Nolan, Galst, & White, 1977; Sternglanz & Serbin, 1974). Feshbach, Dillman, and Jordon (1979) noted that "the model female on television... is valued for her appearance rather than for her capabilities and competencies, personal and professional" (p. 376). Although changes have occurred in portrayals of men and women, much has stayed the same (Signorielli, 1993). Male portrayals may often emphasize the value of intelligence and achievement, whereas female characters who display such traits receive less positive (or even negative) feedback. For example, some female TV characters who are depicted as intelligent and capable (e.g., Murphy Brown, Blossom, Carol Seaver) also seem to have difficulty with interpersonal relationships or are ridiculed for their success or ambition. There is much evidence that viewers' choice of role models depends in part on the rewards obtained by characters (Bandura, 1986). Perhaps girls learn from their TV counterparts that intelligence and achievement often yield unfavorable social outcomes.

The "drench" hypothesis proposed by Greenberg (1988) holds that certain salient characters and



programs may have a more intense and significant influence than long-term exposure to the total pattern of images on television. children choose to view certain shows regularly and develop attachments to frequently viewed characters, which increases the likelihood they will be influenced by these images. This "drench" effect may have positive social consequences if viewers are drawn to characters who display admirable, nonstereotyped traits (Reep & Dambrot, 1989). However, if favorite characters do not represent such ideals (or if viewers' perceptions are distorted), then stereotypes, such as the relative value of attractiveness and competence for females, may actually be increased.

To a certain extent, traits that determine children's attraction to characters may reflect cultural norms and expectations for males and females. It must also be acknowledged that the results of this study may be due partially to differences in the girls themselves. children tend to select favorite characters who possess admired attributes (v. Feilitzen & Linne, 1975). Sex-role typing also affects identification (Eisenstock, 1984). Girls who selected male characters may value competence, achievement, and other traditionally masculine traits to a greater extent than those who selected female characters. This study provides no data to evaluate this possibility.

The role of humor in children's attraction to male characters also deserves comment. Humor was associated with more wishful identification among girls, which differs from previous findings that children identified less with funny characters (e.g., Reeves & Lometti, 1979). This discrepancy probably reflects the fact that children in this study rated favorite characters, whereas the "funny" characters in previous studies were named by researchers and were perceived as buffoons. Thus, humor appears to be a valued trait as long as the character is not perceived as unintelligent.

Some discussion is warranted regarding why characters' social behaviors did not predict wishful identification or parasocial interaction, despite some significant zero-order correlations. First, correlations among traits suggest that good characters are often portrayed as smart and attractive. Thus, it may be difficult to assess the relative importance of social behaviors in a correlational research design. Perhaps more importantly, the data gathered in this study do not reveal the extent to which social behaviors were rewarded or punished within the program context. Good characters are not necessarily popular or successful, and violence is often used successfully or for prosocial ends (Brown & cody, 1991; Liss et al., 1983). In fact, of the three negative social traits (mean, violent, selfish), violence seems most likely to yield rewards, and this is the one social trait that did not correlate with wishful identification or parasocial interaction. Thus, although violence was not especially attractive, it did not reduce a character's appeal as a role model or pseudo-friend. In general, the positive or negative consequences experienced by the characters may be more important than their social behavior per se in wishful identification and parasocial interaction. comstock (1993) notes that "television is a catalogue of modes of behavior; whether they affect what viewers do depends on their being taken as rewarding, acceptable, and applicable (p. 128)." Another factor that may have reduced the importance of social behaviors is the fact that children evaluated their favorite characters. Overall, the characters were judged to be relatively prosocial. It may be that children reject (as favorites) characters whose social behaviors violate certain standards, but are not drawn to characters as a result of their positive social interactions with others.

Several suggestions can be made for future research. Viewers' perceptions of the rewards and punishments received by characters should be assessed. In addition, both male and female favorites



should be examined for each research participant. Within-subjects comparisons would eliminate the possibility that different patterns for male and female characters reflect differences in subject groups. Age differences could also be explored by including larger subgroups at different age levels. Predictors of attraction might be expected to change as children enter adolescence, so comparisons between grade school and middle school might prove fruitful. Finally, other characteristics of viewers, such as sex-role typing, should be considered as mediators. The nature of TV portrayals undoubtedly interacts with viewers' traits and prior experiences to determine their perceptions of and attraction to television characters.

## Notes

*1 The wishful identification items were: I'd like to do the kinds of things he/she does on the show; he/she is the sort of person I want to be like myself; I wish I could be more like him/her.*

*2 The wording of the parasocial interaction items was changed only slightly, to reflect the focus on TV characters rather than soap opera characters. The items were: -- makes me feel comfortable, like I'm with a friend; I look forward to watching -- when his/her show is on; If --appeared on another show, I would want to watch it; I see -- as a natural, down-to-earth person; -- seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know; If I saw a story about -- in a newspaper or magazine, I would want to read it; I miss seeing -- when his/her show isn't on for some reason; If I could, I would like to meet -- in person; I feel sorry for -- when he/she makes a mistake. One item (I find -- to be attractive) was dropped because it overlaps conceptually with the trait "attractiveness."*

*3 Data for the two schools were combined. The two samples had nearly the same percentage of boys and girls (52% versus 49% male) and a similar distribution across grade levels. children in the two schools named exactly the same percentage of animated characters (33%), and t-tests showed that the two samples did not differ on wishful identification or parasocial interaction.*

*4 There were 13 TV series whose characters were mentioned more than once, accounting for 83% of the characters mentioned. These shows and the mentions for each character are: Full House: Michelle, 19; DJ, 8; Stephanie, 7, Joey, 2; Danny, 2; Beverly Hills 90210: Dylan, 16; Brandon, 4; Brenda, 2; Kelly, 1; The Simpsons: Bart, 21; Growing Pains: Mike, 7; carol, 1; Garfield: Garfield, 8; The Fresh Prince of Bel Air. Will, 6; Saved by the Bell: Zack, 4; Kelly, 1; The Bugs Bunny & Tweety Show: Bugs Bunny, 2; Road Runner, 2; Droopy, 1; Family Matters: Steve, 4; MacGyver. MacGyver, 3; Darkwing Duck: Darkwing Duck, 3; Ducktales: Uncle Scrooge, 2; Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Leonardo, 1; Rafael, 1.*

Based on children's age estimates (nonhumans judged in "people" years), characters were classified as children (12 and under), younger teens (13-16), older teens (17-20), or adults (21 and over). The character sample included 34% children, 21% younger teens, 26% older teens, and 19% adults. There were 67% live-action humans, 17% animated humans, and 16% animated nonhumans. Programs included 61% situation comedies, 20% cartoons, 17% dramas, and 2% variety shows.

- 5 Subjects in the three groups did not differ in age (boys/male characters,  $M = 10.2$  years; girls/male characters,  $M = 10.0$  years; girls/female characters,  $M = 10.0$  years) or in the length of time they had viewed the character ( $M_s = 2.1, 2.3,$  and  $1.9$  years, respectively). However, they did differ in the type

of character selected. No female characters were animated, whereas 42% of males named by girls and 49% of males named by boys fell in this group.

- 6 Additional regression analyses were run to account for children's age (7 to 12 years) and the realism of the characters. Subject age and character realism (coded 0 = animated nonhuman, 1 = animated human, 2 = live-action human) were entered in the first step, and the five traits were entered in the second step. For female characters, of course, realism was excluded from analyses. Age was not a significant predictor in any analysis, and realism predicted parasocial interaction only: for boys/male characters,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .05$ ; for girls/male characters,  $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .02$ . After controlling for age and realism, the regression results were virtually identical to the analyses reported in Tables 2 and 3, with one exception. For girls' wishful identification with males, intelligence only approached significance ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .09$ ). This outcome is probably due to reduced power associated with including two additional nonsignificant predictors in the analysis.

As an additional precaution, regression analyses were rerun for live-action male characters only. Results were unchanged with the exception that for girls' wishful identification, betas for humor (.43) and intelligence (.48) were large but not significant. This is not surprising given the reduced sample size for these analyses.

Table 1

Mean comparisons Between Male and Female Favorite characters on all Variables for Boys and Girls Separately

Legend For Chart:

- A - Boys: Male Characters
- B - Boys: Female Characters
- C - Boys: t score
- D - Girls: Male Characters
- E - Girls: Female Characters
- F - Girls: t score

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Wishful Identification	3.36	3.95	1.28	2.96	4.02	4.54[c]
Parasocial Interaction	3.78	3.77	.01	3.75	4.25	3.96[c]
Attractiveness	2.87	3.67	1.59	3.62	4.49	3.59[c]

Strength

	3.12	2.89	1.71	3.06	3.0	8.01
Humor	4.62	4.79	.57	4.29	4.4	5.75
Intelligence	3.25	3.81	1.07	3.62	4.18	2.35[a]
Social Behavior	3.30	4.38	2.16[a]	3.76	4.49	3.94[c]
N	72	7	--	36	40	--

a p < .05; c p < .001.

Note. Scores on each scale could range from 1 to 5. Higher scores indicate more positive trait perceptions.

Table 2

Predicting Wishful Identification: Zero-Order correlations and Standardized Regression coefficients

Legend For Chart:

- A - Boys Male Characters: r
- B - Boys Male Characters: beta
- C - Girls Male Characters: r
- D - Girls Male Characters: beta
- E - Girls Female Characters: r
- F - Girls Female Characters: beta

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Attractiveness	.41[c]	.23	.36[a]	.28	.62[c]	.65[c]
Strength	.21[a]	.06	.31[a]	.05	.35[a]	.15
Humor	.04	.04	.37[a]	.35[a]	.09	.19
Intelligence	.49c	.38[b]	.42[b]	.40[a]	-.01	-.17

## Social behavior

.34[c]      -.01      .33[b]      -.06      .19      -.02

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>

.23

.30

.39

F(5,66) = 5.30[c]

F(5,30) = 3.95[b]

F(5,34) = 5.96c

a p &lt; .05; b p &lt; .01; c p &lt; .001.

## Table 3

## Predicting Parasocial Interaction: Zero-Order correlations and Standardized Regression coefficients

## Legend For Chart:

A - Boys Male Characters: r

B - Boys Male Characters: beta

C - Girls Male Characters: r

D - Girls Male Characters: beta

E - Girls Female Characters: r

F - Girls Female Characters: beta

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Attractiveness						
	.53[c]	.27[b]	.61[c]	.58[b]	.35[aa]	.40[a]
Strength						
	.38c	.22[a]	.48[b]	.07	.41[b]	.27
Humor						
	.09	.12	.21	.17	.23	.24
Intelligence						
	.58c	.37[b]	.40[b]	.40[a]	.06	-.06
Social behavior						
	.44[c]	.05	.38[b]	-.15	-.10	-.23
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>						
	.44		.44		.23	
	F(5,66) = 11.96[c]		F(5,30) = 6.57[c]		F(5,34) = 3.28[a]	

a p &lt; .05; b p &lt; .01; c p &lt; .001.

Table 4

Partial correlations Between the Items on the "Social Behavior" Scale and Wishful Identification and Parasocial Interaction

Legend For Chart:

A - Percent of Characters Who Possess Trait

B - Partial correlations With: Wishful Identification

C - Partial correlations With: Parasocial Interaction

	A	B	C
Kind	69.7%	.32[c]	.35[c]
Helpful	63.9	.33[c]	.42[c]
Caring	66.5	.27[c]	.37[c]
Mean	18.1	-.19[a]	-.24[b]
Violent	40.0	-.10	-.08
Selfish	23.9	-.23[b]	-.23[b]

a  $p < .05$ ; b  $p < .01$ ; c  $p < .001$ .

Note. The character was classified as possessing a trait if the subject agreed "a little" or "a lot" that the trait described the character. Partial correlations control for sex of subject and sex of character. The N is 155 for all correlations in the table.

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School, all in Bloomington-Normal, IL. Thanks are also extended to Martha Buchanan, for her ideas and assistance in collecting and compiling the data, and to the editor and anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. A previous draft of this paper was presented at the 1994 Speech communication Association annual conference in New Orleans, LA. This manuscript was accepted for publication in February 1996.

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